THE COLLECTION, ORGANISATION AND USE OF INFORMATION BY VOLUNTARY INFORMATION PROVIDERS

by

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SUMMARY

The collection, organisation and use of information by voluntary information providers

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This is the first study undertaken into the way in which voluntary workers, untrained in information skills and working in community information services, collect, organise and use the information they provide to assist clients needing it for their day-to-day survival.

The study is placed in perspective through a survey of the literature relating to community information services. This is supplemented by a study of documents relating to the Pretoria Citizens' Advice Bureau. Data was collected by means of participant observation at the Pretoria Citizens' Advice Bureau and interviews with voluntary workers in the Bureau. Analysis of the data was carried out according to the grounded theory approach.
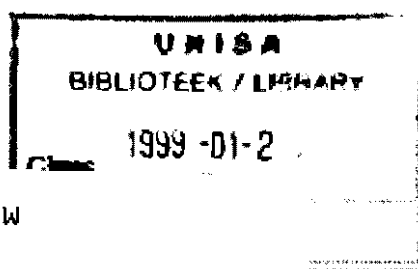
It was found that untrained volunteers creating information storage and retrieval tools for use by their fellow volunteers, work without a knowledge of information storage and retrieval theory. They tend to make *ad hoc* decisions and create tools that are not as user-friendly as they could be with some background in the theory of information science. On the other hand, volunteers searching for information make the same kind of demands of the information storage and retrieval system they use as do professional and scientific information users, in that they want direct access to as much relevant information as possible in one place. They want the information repackaged in a manner to suit their purpose. When under pressure, they are

reluctant to consult multiple information storage and retrieval tools not within easy reach.

The study culminates in a number of recommendations for the improvement of the service of the Pretoria Citizens' Advice Bureau in particular. Recommendations are also put forward for a centralised computerised database providing processed information to community information services in South Africa. Some suggestions are made concerning education and training of volunteers and professional information workers with a view to providing a better understanding of community information services.

Key terms

Citizens' Advice Bureaux; Community information services; Information storage and retrieval; Naive information workers; Survival information; Untrained information workers; Voluntary workers; Volunteering;

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED IN THE THESIS

AACR	Anglo American Cataloging Rules
CAB	Citizens' Advice Bureau
CABx	Citizens' Advice Bureaux (United Kingdom and South Africa)
CABs	Citizens' Advice Bureaus (Australia)
CIS	Community Information Services
FIRA	Federatie Instituten Raadslieden (of the Netherlands)
GPMC	Greater Pretoria Metropolitan Council
I & R	Information and Referral
ID	Identity document
ISAR	Information storage and retrieval
LEAP	Legal Education Action Project (University of Cape Town)
LRC	Legal Resources Centre
NACAB	National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux (of the UK)
NCS	No Case Sheet (in PCAB procedure)
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations
NIC	Neighborhood Information Centres (United States of America)
PCAB	Pretoria Citizens' Advice Bureau
PCL	Pretoria Community Library
PIC	Public Information Center (Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore)
TIP	The Information Place (Detroit Public Library)
TocH	A service organisation, similar to Rotary
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
Vacab	Victoria Association of CABs
Vacic	Victorian Association of Community Information Centres

C O N T E N T S

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND

For many ordinary people, particularly those in disadvantaged situations, voluntary information providers, in organisations such as Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Centres of Concern, and the Black Sash, form the last vital link in the chain of information between the originator or creator of information and themselves. Voluntary information providers supply information and assistance to people to help them cope with problems that arise in their daily lives. In this respect voluntary organisations act as an interface between the information produced by government departments, service agencies, professional bodies, and so on, and the lay public who need to use that information, especially the poorly educated.

Voluntary information providers collect the information they use in making their services available in a relatively unstructured manner. They react to known needs, and collect sources of information that come easily and cheaply to hand. To be accessible when needed, the collected information has to be organised and stored for future retrieval. Most of this work is done by lay volunteers: laypersons in terms of information handling and retrieval techniques.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The central problem to be examined, is the way in which voluntary information providers, lacking training in the collection, analysis, storage and retrieval of information, collect, organise and use the information they handle. The following aspects of the problem will be addressed:

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1   How untrained voluntary workers carry out the activities of collecting, organising and retrieving information for users;

2   How the procedures and activities differ from those used by trained information workers;

3   What knowledge from their general background these workers use in designing and operating information handling systems and activities;

4   What assumptions are reflected by these systems and activities;

5   Which information handling skills the untrained voluntary information workers exhibit, and which skills they lack;

6   What the strengths and weaknesses are of running an operation with voluntary information workers.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

South Africa is experiencing a strong influx of people from the rural areas to the cities. Many of the newcomers to urban areas are illiterate, or not functionally literate in the languages most commonly used in the urban areas. These people are often confused by the new situation in which they find themselves. They hesitate to ask, or do not think of asking for explanations from people in authority who hand them documents or instruct them to do something, or may simply be bewildered by instructions received from those in authority, and need a sympathetic agency to clarify such matters for them. They need information on accommodation, health services, educational facilities for their children, laws and regulations governing their employment, and many other matters in connection with their daily lives.

A number of organisations have come into existence to help such people in need of assistance to cope with the problems they encounter. Some of the organisations were initiated by welfare associations, others by political associations, others by churches. The aid organisations are often staffed by volunteers, who take turns in helping clients as a community service. Some of the volunteers are married women who are not in the paid workforce, and others are retired persons who are willing to give of their time and capabilities in aid of less fortunate people.

Volunteers are usually given some training when they start doing the work and further training on the job. However, the training is mainly given by more experienced volunteers, seldom by people trained in information skills.

Information is often the commodity required by clients of these aid organisations. The manner in which information is collected, organised and processed for transfer to the clients of voluntary information providers is of interest to those concerned with getting relevant information to the right user at the right moment.

As far as could be determined, this will be the first study of information handling by voluntary workers carried out in South Africa. It has three aims:

1   to gain insight into the distinctive manner in which laypersons organise information;

2   to develop proposals on how information should be handled in information providing agencies staffed by volunteers; and

3   to formulate recommendations on ways in which such information may be made more immediately accessible and useful to users at grassroots level.

1.4 DELIMITATION OF STUDY

As indicated in the title, this study is confined to information handling by voluntary workers who provide an information service. In particular the service studied is that provided to clients of the Pretoria Citizens' Advice Bureau (PCAB). Internal information in the PCAB, such as the client files, is excluded, as is the use by the clients of the information provided to them. Analysis of these aspects would demand different approaches from the one followed in the present study.

The original intention was also to interview people employed in its advice offices by the Black Sash, a politically orientated organisation which provides advice to disadvantaged black people. When it was discovered that the counsellors they employed were remunerated for the work, that is, they were not voluntary workers, the idea was dropped.

Performance evaluation of the information storage and retrieval tools in the PCAB in terms of professional methods of evaluation was not considered. The empirical work was not designed to test precision, recall and novelty as defined in the literature and mentioned in section 6.4.

1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Terms needing clarification in this thesis will be defined or explained in the chapters where they are introduced or receive greatest emphasis. This chapter includes clarification of terms used in the title.

The term *voluntary information providers* was chosen to refer to voluntary workers who provide social services, in the course of which they impart information to clients to enable them to solve problems relating to their daily survival. By *voluntary workers* are meant people who perform duties without any remuneration. After this

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term was chosen, the literature survey showed that in Missouri a programme with the title "Volunteer Information Providers" was developed to support people caring for aged relatives by providing relevant information to the care-givers (Halpert 1988; Newhouse 1988). This is the proper name of a specific service, which should not preclude the use of the term as a generic name as intended in this study.

Information handling is defined in *Harrod's librarians glossary'* (1985:378) as "the storing, processing and retrieval of information from acquisition to user." This provides a concept that incorporates the activities of voluntary information providers mentioned in the title of this thesis, namely, "collection, organisation and use of information", if "use" is interpreted as incorporating the retrieval and application of the information. Behrens (1992:25) offers the following definition:

> *Information (handling) skills*: Information skills are those abilities which enable a person to handle information effectively. They include the following: recognizing when a problem could be solved with relevant information and being motivated to solve it; identifying what information is needed for a solution; moulding a strategy to find the information and knowing where to find it; carrying through the search strategy to locate the information; selecting the required information; analyzing, interpreting and synthesizing it; organizing the synthesized information; utilizing it in order to solve the problem; assessing the effectiveness of the strategy in solving the problem; storing the synthesized information for future use; and communicating the solution of the problem to others if necessary.

This is a very wide-ranging definition, which covers all aspects of information handling by voluntary information providers to be examined in this study.

The term *information skills* was defined in an educational context in various writings (for instance Brake (1980) and *Information skills* (1981)) as encompassing study skills and library user education. Behrens (1992:33) shows that this term originated in the United Kingdom and that its equivalent in the United States is *information literacy*. While writing about information skills, Behrens often uses "information handling skills" interchangeably with "information skills".

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In this thesis "information skills" and "information handling skills" will be used synonymously.

In section 1.5.4 and elsewhere in the thesis the term *naive information workers* is used in relation to the voluntary workers of the PCAB interviewed by the researcher. This denotes workers who have not had formal training in the techniques of information handling, such as the selection, indexing and abstracting of information bearing entities. Justification for the use of "naive" in this sense was found in a paper by Holland *et al* (1991), who refer to engineers as "information naive" in the context of their study. Hansen (1986) refers to "naive (end-user) searchers" and Burgess and Swigger (1986) write of "naive users" in the context of database searching.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODS USED

Several methods were applied in this study to collect background information and data, and to analyse the collected data.

To find out how untrained voluntary workers carry out the activities of collecting, organising and presenting information, what knowledge from their general background they use in designing and operating information handling systems, what assumptions are reflected by these systems and activities, and which information skills the untrained voluntary information workers exhibit or lack, it was necessary to collect data by observing the information handling activities of the volunteers and talking to them. Because this is a study of the qualities, rather than quantitatively measurable aspects, of human behaviour, qualitative research methods were regarded to be more appropriate than a quantitative study would be (cf. Mouton 1988:1). The undermentioned methods were therefore considered to be appropriate.

1.6.1 Literature survey

A literature survey was conducted to trace the origins of information provision by
the type of organisation that provides information using voluntary workers, to
attempt to establish the nature of the information required, and to trace possible
comments on information handling skills of volunteers. It was found that, with the
exception of Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CABx) in the United Kingdom and
Information and Referral (I & R) services in the USA, little has been published
about services providing information to the general community using a largely
volunteer workforce. This is probably not surprising, as it can be assumed that the
volunteers involved in what is essentially a caregiving activity, are likely to devote
their time and energy to delivering the needed service and publicising requirements
in terms of funds and volunteers, rather than describing it for publication in the
scientific literature. The relevant information found in the published literature is
summarised and discussed in Chapter 2.

1.6.2 Document study

A document study was carried out of minutes of early meetings of the founders and
voluntary workers, the texts of a few talks given for publicity purposes, and all the
annual reports of the PCAB, to search for information on the founding and
development of the PCAB and its information system. These papers were also used
to study the growth of the service of the PCAB and the subject areas where the
information needs of clients were manifested. Annual reports of the CABx in Cape
Town, Johannesburg and Durban were further scrutinised. While the material thus
collected is interwoven with the entire thesis, it is reflected mainly in Chapter 3,
where the history of the PCAB is recounted.

1.6.3 Participant observation

Over a period of six years the researcher worked as participant observer in the

PCAB. This took the form of working shifts as interviewing volunteer and participating in the meetings of voluntary workers. The researcher was trained for these duties in the manner in which other interviewing volunteers are trained (described in section 5.4).

Participant observation was chosen because it is a recognised method "ideally suited to the discovery of how people live their lives and give them meaning" (Cornwell 1986:40). Participant observers act "as an instrument of data collection ... required to share in the lives and activities of those whom they study and to take roles which are effective in the setting in which their informations [sic] live" (Burgess 1986:48). According to Eyles (1986:14)

> [t]he participant observer has to be both inside and outside the group, institution or community under investigation. He/she must be immersed but remain a critical commentator able to see a complete pattern or process with daily or routine interactions and events.

Depending on the degree to which a participant observer fits into and is accepted by the community to be investigated, the role fulfilled by such a person will be located somewhere on a continuum between that of complete observer to that of observer-as-participant, to participant-as-observer, to complete participant (Van der Burgh 1988:69). It is likely that the nature of the researcher's role will vary along that continuum at various stages of the research project, that is, at times the role may, for instance, be that of observer-as-participant and at times that of complete participant (Van der Burgh 1988:71).

The researcher was introduced to the PCAB by a colleague, who had been invited to advise the Bureau's Executive Committee on the use of a computer in its work. This colleague had been intrigued by what he was shown of the information storage and retrieval system of the PCAB and saw it as a phenomenon worth study. He suggested it to the researcher as a possible project to undertake during a forthcoming sabbatical. When the researcher discussed the possibility of undertaking such a study

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with the Administrative Secretary of the PCAB, she suggested that the researcher join the team of voluntary workers. This suggestion was accepted, as the researcher was free to undertake shifts as information volunteer during the sabbatical year, and since it is acceptable practice for a researcher proposing to carry out participant observation to gain access to an organisation to be studied by undertaking to work in it (Hammersley 1984:11-13).

The researcher met the current team of voluntary workers at their monthly meeting and was given an opportunity to outline to the meeting what she proposed to do. While some of the voluntary workers expressed doubts as to the contribution they could make in interviews, the researcher found that she was very soon accepted as a fellow-volunteer. Although some of the voluntary workers had come to South Africa from various foreign countries, by the time this study was undertaken they formed a fairly homogeneous group, all being white people in comfortable financial circumstances, with a high school education, some with a tertiary education. Some volunteers were retired, while others were married women not active in the paid labour force. Only a few volunteers were in full-time or part-time paid employment. Since the researcher belongs to the same stratum of Pretoria society, she was readily accepted as a member of the group.

The researcher observed information collection, analysis, storage and retrieval by the voluntary workers in the PCAB. When taking a shift as volunteer interviewing clients in partnership with other volunteers, her role was that of participant. At times she consciously observed what was happening, and at other times she assumed a role somewhere between those two poles. Apart from the occasions when she conducted interviews with the voluntary workers, the researcher at no time got the impression that other voluntary workers were conscious of her status as participant observer in their midst.

The researcher was not experienced in doing field research and noticed resultant shortcomings in the notes of her observations when she analysed the data. More

detailed field notes should have been kept. Too much reliance was placed on memory.

1.6.4 Interviews

Participant observation was supplemented by what Schurink (1988:141) calls open-ended interviews. The researcher conducted interviews with voluntary information workers connected to the PCAB using an informal questionnaire.

Questionnaires and interviews are commonly used to collect data for research projects. Structured, self-administered questionnaires are favoured as a method of collecting data from a large population or sample, particularly if the population is dispersed over a large area. A well-designed questionnaire can elicit a great deal of information and is very useful for the collection of quantitative data. The anonymity of questionnaires is regarded as a favourable characteristic, as it is said that respondents are less likely to be inhibited in their replies than they may be when confronted by an interviewer (Burton 1990:62).

In this study interviewing was chosen rather than mailed questionnaires, because the study is "concerned with understanding (verstehen) rather than explanation; with naturalistic observation rather than controlled measurement" (Schurink 1988:137). The researcher felt that useful information could be elicited by allowing respondents to talk relatively freely. Open-ended interviews were chosen as this method allows data to be obtained in a relatively systematic manner and facilitates comparison of the data. These interviews are based on an interview guide consisting of open questions, which are put to all the respondents in a fairly similar sequence (Schurink 1988:141). It was surmised that the respondents, being naive information workers, would need to have some terms used in a questionnaire by the researcher, a professional information worker, explained to them (Burton 1990:64). During interviews the researcher could explain terms when it became evident that respondents had misunderstood them. It was also thought necessary to collect

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information about the feelings and opinions of respondents on certain aspects of the work in the PCAB. Ackroyd and Hughes (1981:69) mention this as a major reason for choosing interviews as research method. The number of people in the population was relatively small and within easy reach, so that it was feasible for the researcher to interview everyone.

Since the number of voluntary workers is small, everyone active in interviewing clients at the PCAB in 1992 to 1994 was interviewed (17 individuals). There was no need to draw a sample. Interviews were carried out with one voluntary worker involved in information input at the PCAB and one former volunteer, who it was thought could provide useful information about the development of the information storage and retrieval system of the PCAB. All these interviews were conducted in the respective homes of the respondents. The only person approached who flatly refused to be interviewed, was a volunteer involved in information input, who was phasing herself out of the activities of the PCAB. To obtain further background information, the researcher also interviewed the persons in charge of the CABx in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban (these persons have different titles). As recommended by Schurink (1988:148), respondents were assured of the confidentiality of interviews and that their responses would remain anonymous. The interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed by the researcher. While a few voluntary workers demurred mildly about the use of a tape recorder during the interviews, it did not seem to inhibit their responses.

The interviews with the interviewing volunteers, that is those who interviewed clients and assisted them with information and advice, were conducted using an informal questionnaire designed to collect information on each volunteer's educational and career background and on each person's experience of using the information retrieval tools in the PCAB (Appendix A). A few additional questions were framed to be put to the information volunteers, that is those who worked on putting information into the system (Appendix B). A different questionnaire was designed for use in conducting interviews with the persons in command of the four

CABx (Appendix C). Once the questionnaires had been drawn up, they were scrutinised by the researcher's promotor and amended as suggested. No pilot interviews were conducted.

As was the case with participant observation, the researcher had relatively little experience of conducting interviews. Some resultant shortcomings became evident when the interview transcripts were analysed, such as a tendency to attempt to explain aspects of the information storage and retrieval system to reassure respondents who expressed problems or doubts about their own performance.

1.6.5 Grounded theory approach

Analysis of the data collected was carried out in accordance with the grounded theory style of qualitative research. This style was chosen because

> ... the grounded theory approach is likely to be of maximum use when it is
> dealing with qualitative data of the kind gathered from participant
> observation, from the observation of face-to-face interaction, from semi-
> structured or unstructured interviews (Turner 1981:227).

When applying the grounded theory approach, a researcher does not begin with a theory, which then has to be proved. The researcher rather selects an area of study and allows what is relevant to that area to emerge. This aspect of the grounded theory approach makes it particularly suitable for application in the present study.

A systematic set of procedures is used to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin 1990:23-24). These procedures are described in detail, with many examples, by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Miles and Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Characteristic of data analysis when using the grounded theory approach, is the iterative reading of field notes and interview transcripts, as new ideas occur to the researcher, to look for applicable observations or comments. Kellehear (1993:41) likens the repeated rereading of

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research data in its analysis to the process of analysing poetry, in which the reader searches for patterns of style, metaphors and hidden meanings. Glaser and Strauss, who developed the grounded theory approach, explain that "in discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept" (Glaser & Strauss 1967:23). Chunks of data are labelled by means of codes derived from the collected data to help the researcher analyse the data by putting together similar sections of the field notes and transcripts and to make such sections easily retrievable (Miles & Huberman 1994:56).

Strauss and Corbin (1990:23) define a grounded theory as "one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents." They state further that "the purpose of grounded theory method is ... to build theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study" (Strauss & Corbin 1990:24). Glaser and Strauss (1967:32) stress that grounded theory is a process, rather than something codified and axiomatic. They see it as "an ever-developing entity which can be extended and modified, as against the idea that theories are perfected products whose purpose is served merely by being confirmed or negated" (Layder 1993:45).

A computer software package, the Ethnograph, has been developed for use in the analysis of data in the application of the grounded theory approach (Kellehear 1993:40; Miles & Huberman 1994:65,312). The researcher became aware of the existence of this package when she had already collected most of the data for the present study. Discussion with colleagues who had used the package, convinced her that it was not suitable for application in this study, because most of the data had already been collected without prior preparation for their analysis using the Ethnograph, and because a relatively small number of individuals had been interviewed. Analysis of the data in this study was therefore carried out manually.

As the researcher wrote various chapters of the thesis and dealt with different aspects of the study, she found it necessary from time to time to reread the

transcripts of the interviews and field notes. The codes allocated during analysis related mostly to the information retrieval tools in the PCAB. In certain cases a word processor was used to extract related parts of the interview transcripts to juxtapose the words of different respondents. This was done to enable the researcher to study the expressions and opinions of the respondents. The manipulation of the text of transcripts, while it led to insights, is not reflected physically in the thesis, but contributed to the development of ideas towards the grounded theory. The most important reflection of the repeated reading appears in Chapter 7, where the opinions of respondents about the information storage and retrieval tools in the PCAB are used to illustrate the researcher's comments.

1.7 GENDER IN THIS THESIS

Since the researcher does not agree with the unnatural use of the plural in English to achieve a gender neutral text, the gender of persons involved in this study will be expressed as follows: Where reference is made to a specific individual, however unidentified, the pronouns will reflect the gender of that individual; volunteers in the PCAB will be regarded as female, as most volunteers are female; clients of the PCAB will be regarded as male, because most of them are male.

1.8 OUTLINE OF FURTHER CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 contains the background of this study, based on a review of the subject literature. It outlines the emergence of prototype volunteer community information services, namely the Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CABx) of the United Kingdom and a few other countries, and Information and Referral (I & R) services in the United States of America.

In Chapter 3 the history of the Pretoria Citizens' Advice Bureau (PCAB) is outlined,

as gleaned from the minutes of meetings, annual reports and interviews with voluntary workers.

In Chapter 4 the information resources collected and created by the voluntary workers for use in providing the service of the PCAB are described. Where information about their development could be found, it is included.

In Chapter 5 three aspects of the PCAB are described: work during a shift as interviewing volunteer as experienced by the researcher in the role of participant observer; the use of information resources by interviewing volunteers while helping clients; and the training of voluntary workers. The chapter concludes with comments on some personal dimensions of the service to clients.

Chapter 6 is an overview of information storage and retrieval as practised in professional organisations such as libraries. This is provided as a basis of comparison for the information storage and retrieval tools used in the PCAB.

In Chapter 7 the procedure practised and tools used at the PCAB are compared with the professional approach. Comments from interviews with voluntary workers and observations by the researcher are used to illustrate the discussion.

In Chapter 8 a discussion of the comparison of the information storage and retrieval tools is offered. Then the implications for the PCAB and the broader environment are presented. There is a discussion of the theoretical significance of the study and some recommendations for further action are made.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The literature survey carried out for this study is discussed mainly in this chapter.

To place the provision of survival information by voluntary information providers into perspective, it is necessary to outline the history of its development. Various names have been used to refer to this kind of service, amongst others "community information services" (e.g. Bunch 1982), "information and referral services" (e.g. Childers 1983) and "neighborhood information centers" (e.g. *Neighborhood* 1966). "Community information service" is often used as a generic term to include all services aimed at providing information to the population in general.

Community information services can be defined as

> services which assist individuals and groups with daily problem-solving and with participation in the democratic process. The services concentrate on the needs of those who do not have ready access to other sources of assistance and on the most important problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs and their rights. (*Community informaton* 1980:12)

In a thesis dealing with community information services for a South African suburb, Legoabe (1997:11) offers the following definition:

> CIS is a service that provides information to members of the community in their community (area) about resources found in that community, and also about information on issues that are of relevance and importance to them in their community

The latter definition is of a service that is more specifically focused than the former,

but they are not mutually exclusive.

The service described most fully in the literature is that of the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) of the United Kingdom (compare section 2.2). This service has been emulated to greater or lesser extent in countries of the British Commonwealth and elsewhere. It was studied by Kahn *et al* (*Neighborhood* 1966) with a view to the possible implementation of similar services in the USA. Kahn and his fellow researchers recommended that "neighborhood information centers" (NIC) be developed on a local basis to fulfil a function similar to that carried out by the CABx in Britain (*Neighborhood* 1966:110).

In the USA "information and referral" (I & R) is the name used most frequently. It will be shown in section 2.4 that I & R probably denotes a level of service that does not go as far as the service normally provided by the CABx.

2.2 CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAUX IN THE UK

CABx were first established in Great Britain at the outbreak of World War II. At the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of these bureaux, two books were published to celebrate the occasion and document the development of the service (Citron 1989; Richards 1989). Pamphlets detailing various aspects of the service are also readily available.

According to Richards (1989:1), planning for the service began in 1938 on the initiative of the National Council of Social Service. Initially CABx were meant to help citizens cope with the confusion caused by the war. Persons of all social classes were assisted in dealing with the problems of rationing, separation of families, housing and many more. By 1st January 1940, more than a thousand bureaux were operating, run by either social casework agencies or councils of voluntary service, or in some cases set up by service organisations such as Rotary

Clubs or branches of TocH.

The national and regional offices were funded by the central government, who also provided funds for the setting up of individual bureaux. The remaining funding had to be canvassed from local government and other sources.

The work of the CABx was gradually extended beyond coping with emergencies, to everyday personal and domestic problems (Bunch 1982:45).

With time, it was realised that the knowledge the service had gained could be fed back to influence the formation of the government's social policy (*Citizens'* 1984:2). This has become an important aspect of the work of the central co-ordinating body, the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux (NACAB), which was established in 1972 (Citron 1989:4).

Central government funding stopped after the war, but in 1945 local government was encouraged to support CABx. The Local Government Act of 1948 gave local authorities powers to provide funds for CABx. However, such provision was not always regarded favourably, so that the number of CAB service outlets decreased over the years after the war.

The CAB movement was given a boost in 1960, when the Ministry of Housing and Local Government reintroduced financial support of the national office. This was supplemented in 1963 by grants from the Board of Trade to assist consumer protection activities, and this funding was augmented in 1979.

The CAB service continued to expand until Bunch (1982:45) reported that every town of 30 000 inhabitants and more, as well as many smaller towns, had an office. By 1982 CABx handled more than 3 million enquiries per annum on family, housing, employment, social security, health, immigration, legal and consumer matters, to mention but a few.

The following quotation typifies the service:

> The service is offered on a one to one basis and is aimed 'to alleviate
> personal distress and confusion by providing free, confidential, impartial and
> independent advice or information on any subject to anyone who asks. It will
> if necessary approach organizations on behalf of an enquirer and mediate
> between them' (Bunch 1982:45, citing a NACAB publication).

In the Annual Report for 1989/90 trends detected in the demands for service were
summarised as follows:

> Enquiries are growing more complicated, requiring longer interviews with
> clients and extended casework. These lengthening demands on advisers' time
> are not reflected in the crude enquiry statistics. Nor are people with simple
> requests who are unable to wait in lengthy queues. There is great concern
> within the Service about the effects long waiting times and constantly
> engaged telephones are having on clients and potential clients. (National
> Association 1991:7).

For the year 1995/96 NACAB reported that the service which it co-ordinates
comprised 1781 service outlets: 727 main bureaux and 1054 other outlets (National
Association 1996:inside front cover). Ninety percent of the workers and members of
management committees were volunteers and the remainder had paid positions. Just
under 6.5 million enquiries were handled.

Besides criticism of the information system (Richards 1989:120-129) and mention of
the Classification Research Project begun in 1981 in an attempt to develop a
standard classification for use by all CABx (Richards 1989:129-130), the books by
Citron and Richards contain little information on the details of collection,
organisation and use of information in the CABx.

2.3 CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAUX ELSEWHERE

From the subject literature surveyed and a few other sources, it has become apparent

that CABx have been established in various other countries, mostly part or formerly part of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Very little has been published about CABx outside the UK. Only a few articles describing specific CABx have been traced in the subject literature of library and information science (Murray 1989; Ramsden 1988). The present author added a few more (Louw 1993, 1994, 1996). It is probably unreasonable to expect many periodical articles or books on the subject of a service generally organised by welfare organisations and run by volunteers. The energies of the workers go into providing and publicising the services, not into writing about them.

2.3.1 Australia

Two articles dealing with the work of CABx in Australia were found in the course of the literature survey. Ramsden (1988) wrote about the Lillydale CAB in particular and CABx in the state of Victoria in general. It is interesting to note that Ramsden came to volunteering in this Australian CAB after working in libraries in the United Kingdom. She mentions the creation of an information system and a thesaurus for community information services by Barry McIntyre of the Department of Librarianship, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Both these works were published and the third edition appeared in 1984. They were adopted for use by the Victoria Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaus (Vacab) (Ramsden 1988:155-156). A thumbnail history and description of the service of the Brisbane (Queensland) CAB is given by Murray (1989). Both authors mention that CABx in Australia often prefer the name "Community Information Centre".

More recently the researcher made contact by e-mail with Ken Young, the Manager of the central organisation providing information to community information centres and CABx in the state Victoria, namely the Victorian Association of Community Information Centres Inc. (Vacic). According to its Annual Report for 1996-1997, Vacic "provide[s] community information services to organisations who resource their communities ... to empower people with information that will enhance their

lives and their communities" (Victorian Association 1997:3). Some of the units that collaborate with Vacic are still called Citizens' Advice Bureaux and Vacic has taken over publication of *Infocab*, the monthly community information bulletin formerly published by Vacab.

According to Young (1998) Victoria is the most highly organised state for CABs. Other states have only a few CABs or the CABs are associated with other umbrella bodies. While a central organisation, Community Information Network Australia, has been formed, it does not yet have its own funding.

2.3.2 New Zealand

While this study was being carried out one of the volunteers at the PCAB visited New Zealand and there made contact with a CAB. He brought back a copy of their *Yearbook* for 1995, from which it appears that the New Zealand Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux is a very active organisation. In the year under review its 90 bureaux dealt with almost 500 000 enquiries (New Zealand 1995:7). It is funded mainly by the Central Government, through the Community Funding Agency (New Zealand 1995:35).

2.3.3 Mauritius

In July 1992 Droopnath Naga of the Mauritius CAB wrote to the Administrative Secretary of the PCAB with a view to organising possible exchanges of CAB workers between Mauritius and South Africa. He enclosed an unpublished report on the CAB service in Mauritius, which indicates that the CABx in Mauritius were founded in 1988 by the government. All staff are paid by the government from public funds. The aims of the service are broadly the same as those of CABx elsewhere (Overview 1992). However, in a letter to the researcher, Naga wrote "Through the CABx in Mauritius the Government can feel the pulse of the population and infrastructure and other amenities are provided to the population"

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(Naga 1994). This indicates a somewhat different function from those fulfilled by CABx elsewhere.

2.3.4 The Netherlands

An article describing the computerised provision of information to social counsellors by the organisation Federatie Instituten Raadslieden (FIRA) (Mazeland 1989) was referred to in *Library literature* as dealing with the "Dutch Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux". From the article the services provided appear to be similar to those of NACAB in the UK. The bibliography with this article only mentions writings of the same author and no further literature about this organisation could be found. However, the article provides sound guidelines for the development of an electronic information storage and retrieval system for an organisation such as a CAB.

2.3.5 South Africa

As far as can be established, the first CAB to be opened in South Africa, was started in Cape Town in 1961 on the initiative of the service organisation TocH. It was modelled on the CABx existing in the UK (Nel 1992). Subsequently a bureau was opened in Johannesburg (1966), followed by Pretoria (1967) and Durban (1980). At one time there was also a CAB in Benoni, but this seems to have closed again, as it does not exist at the time of writing. The other four CABx were functioning well, as they all issued annual reports in 1996, although a newspaper report in 1995 said the Johannesburg CAB faced closure because of lack of funds (Mkhuma 1995). The CABx in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg received relatively substantial grants-in-aid and other assistance from their respective municipalities, but in the main the South African CABx get the money to finance their services from donations by churches, companies and individuals. As foreseen in 1995, the Johannesburg CAB was forced to close in 1997 because of lack of funds.

Each of the existing CABx in South Africa operates independently and creates its own information resource. A relatively superficial analysis of the case loads of the four CABx showed that the needs of clients differ considerably from one bureau to the next (Louw 1996).

The development of the Pretoria CAB and its services will be described and discussed in chapter 3.

2.4 INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICES IN THE USA

In the United States of America the provision of community information is known as "information and referral" (I & R) services. In what he calls an "impressionistic backdrop," Childers (1983:2) states that I & R services were offered by a variety of agencies in the USA even before 1900. A spurt in the development of such services occurred as a result of the rapid urbanisation of the population after World War II. Many people left a farming existence to begin life in a city. They often lacked marketable skills, they did not know how to survive in the city, and many of them were poor.

> At the same time, the very foundations of the traditional information network crumbled in these neighborhoods as local stores and churches closed and as low revenues combined with high costs made elevator operators, doormen and other neighborhood artisans obsolete (Yin 1974, as quoted by Bunch 1982:6).

I & R services increased to assist people in finding their way through the complexities of life in the city that was strange to them. According to Childers (1983:2) I & R services sometimes started almost accidentally, for instance when an employment agency referred clients, who came to it by mistake, to the correct agency. While some I & R agencies came into existence with the aim of providing community information, most agencies tended to specialise in a particular sphere of activity, such as ageing or drug related problems. These services were small and

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usually fragmented and not well known to the general public. Childers (1983:3) speculates that part of the reason for the relative obscurity of I & R services may be the fact that the services are often aimed at deprived persons, or people in trouble, so that a stigma attaches to them, making "average" people reluctant to consult I & R services.

In 1966 Kahn *et al* published the report of an investigation into the British Citizens' Advice Bureaux, undertaken to see whether that service could be adapted to the USA (*Neighborhood* 1966:8). Although libraries were not mentioned as possible locations for the neighbourhood information centres (NICs) proposed by the team, the report prompted some librarians to start looking at the library's possible role in this connection. The public library was presented as an appropriate agency for the provision of neighbourhood information services because it is usually open long hours, it has branches in accessible locations, it is relatively neutral politically, and it is known as a place where information may be found (Childers 1983:4; Speer-Brisjford 1989:58).

Fouché *et al* (*Samelewingsinligting* 1987:22) summarised these thoughts as follows:

> Die konsep van die NIC was versoenbaar met die basiese bibliotekale paradigma van bemiddeling tussen bronne en gebruikers van inligting. Daarbenewens het openbare biblioteke deur hulle tradisionele bibliografiese verwysingsdienste reeds op beperkte skaal samelewingsinligting voorsien. Openbare biblioteke, as die mees gedesentraliseerde gemeenskapsdiens behalwe openbare skole, het ook reeds oor die nodige infrastruktuur van takbiblioteke en personeel beskik.

The first I & R service in a library was instituted experimentally in 1970 by the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore under the name Public Information Center (PIC). Because of several mistakes made in its initiation and operation, the PIC was not successful and was closed down after four years. Frank analysis and reporting of its shortcomings proved very valuable to further development of I & R services in libraries (Childers 1983:4).

Detroit Public Library followed suit in 1971 with its I & R service called The Information Place (TIP). This library avoided most of the pitfalls that brought down Baltimore's PIC project. It was also assisted by an intensive publicity campaign donated by a professional advertising agency. As a result TIP soon "became the prototype of public library I & R service" (Childers 1983:5).

Beside the possibility of public libraries offering I & R services, interest in and the perception of the need for such services in the USA in the early seventies led to the publication by United Way of America of its *National standards for information and referral services* (1973). In the preface to the standards, the rationale for the establishment of I & R services is stated as follows:

> Information and Referral services have developed in this country and abroad in response to the inability of people in need of help to find the most appropriate agency or service to assist them with their problems. As services in the government and voluntary sectors proliferate in quantity and complexity, the need for a viable Information and Referral service becomes more evident (*National standards* 1973:i).

In the standards, the functions of I & R are outlined as being:

1. Linking people in need with the appropriate agency or service designed to eliminate or alleviate that need

2. Assisting the long-range community planning processes by discovering gaps, overlaps and duplications in services (*National standards* 1973:1).

This indicates less immediate involvement with individual clients than in the PCAB, for instance, as will be shown in Chapter 3.

By 1983 I & R services in public libraries appeared to be flourishing, judging from the subject literature. A nationwide survey was therefore undertaken for the Office of Education to "increase our knowledge of public library I & R, and thereby assist decision making at the local, state, regional and national levels" (Childers 1983:6).

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The survey concluded that where I & R services existed in public libraries, they ranged from a low profile service, consisting of the transfer of simple and complex information, to a high-profile service, where advice, advocacy and follow-up formed part of the service in addition to the information transfer (Childers 1983:56-60). In most cases the service provided information and not referral. The service offered by public libraries did not differ substantially from I & R offered by other agencies (Childers 1983:212).

The survey found that clients most often approach the I & R service by telephone (Childers 1983:217). In this connection the following comment by Bunch is noteworthy:

> Another feature of the American community information scene worthy of comment is the predominance of telephone enquiries over personal visits ... Maybe the reason for this phenomena [sic] lies in the greater incidence, familiarity and confidence in the use of phones in the United States plus greater distances to travel to I & R centres ... Such reliance on the telephone inevitably affects the kind of service that can be offered, since it is undesirable to transfer lengthy and/or complicated information to an enquirer over the telephone. Consequently, unless the query has a fairly brief and simple answer, the tendency will be to favour referral to an outside agency who can spend the time on dealing with the client (Bunch 1982:39).

The results of the survey caused Childers (1983:21) to wonder "to what extent is I & R in libraries a substantial innovation, rather than a minor revision of existing practice", that is, the traditional library reference service.

This was taken up by Tifft in a later review of developments, when she expressed the opinion that

> I & R benefits are positive both to patrons and libraries and spring from *basic* human needs. These are often survival needs requiring immediate attention. These are also information needs that require humane consideration and handling. I & R continues to interest libraries who seek *alternative* ways of providing information to persons previously unable to access that information (Tifft 1998:253).

However, she mentioned that "research shows that librarians do not find it easy to adapt [to] Referral/Advocacy aspects of I & R service" (Tifft 1988:254), pointing to the conclusion that librarians are more comfortable with the services that are similar to the traditional reference service and that call for less personal contact with clients.

Some of the I & R services described in the subject literature make use of volunteers as an adjunct to library staff. Such a service is "Senior Connections," a service operated by older volunteers, together with interns from a school of Library Science and a school of Social Work. The service is aimed specifically at fulfilling the information needs of older members of the community (Levinson 1988:121).

2.5 SUMMARY

The subject literature on the services provided by voluntary information providers is relatively sparse. Moreover, the literature surveyed deals mainly with the rationale for providing such services and organisational matters. It devotes little attention to the collection, organisation and use of information by voluntary information providers, which is the aspect examined in this study.

With a view to studying this phenomenon, a closer look is taken in Chapter 3 at the development of the services of the Pretoria Citizens' Advice Bureau.

CHAPTER 3

THE PRETORIA CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU

3.1 INTRODUCTION

To understand the information retrieval tools used by the voluntary workers of the
PCAB, it is necessary to outline the history of the establishment and development of
the Bureau.

3.2 HISTORY

Early in 1967 three Pretoria ministers, Anglican Dean Mark Nye, Presbyterian
minister Bob Orr and Catholic priest Peter Stein, discovered that they had a problem
in common: they received many requests for advice or assistance where they either
did not have enough time to deal with the requests, or did not really have the know-
how to help the people involved (Savage 1992). The ministers discussed this
problem with parishioners and formed a committee to open an advice office to help
deal with this problem. In a talk referring to the initial meetings, Bryant (1969)
stated that "[a]lthough some form of distress centre existed in the other major cities
of the Republic, there was nothing like this in Pretoria until the C.A.B. opened its
doors."

3.2.1 Beginnings

The first meeting of the steering committee was held in May 1967. No minutes of
this meeting have been found, but a note exists stating who were present and
summarising what was said and decided. Quarters to house the bureau were offered
by the Anglican cathedral and the Presbyterian church, both in the centre of the city.
A decision was made to use the office in the cathedral. The Dean undertook to

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organise a telephone extension. The meeting decided that at least 10 volunteers were needed before the office could open for two hours a day over five days per week. The meeting therefore listed people who could be approached to undertake the duties. It was stressed that advisers should be "chosen with great care and discretion" (First meeting 1967).

A second meeting was held on 6th June 1967. On this occasion it was decided that the office would be named "Citizens' Advice Bureau." From the available documentation it is not clear where the decision about the name originated. By 1967 the bureaux in Cape Town and Johannesburg had been established, so that the name may have come from one of those. It is also possible that one or more of the committee members may have known of the British CABx, as some of them had spent the war years in the United Kingdom.

At the meeting of 6th June the names of six people were mentioned as possible workers. It was also noted that one person employed by the Roman Catholic cathedral, and another employed by the Anglican cathedral, could be called upon as interpreters of African languages. Dean Nye reported that a telephone extension had been installed and provided the number. It was decided to defer the opening of the office until more workers had been identified (Second preparatory 1967).

A meeting held on 5th July 1967 is recorded in more formal minutes. In addition to the members of the original steering committee, several people who had been approached to act as advisers attended the meeting. The minutes contained a statement of the scope envisaged for the Bureau:

> The Bureau will be required to deal with all kinds of people, in all kinds of difficulties, European and non-European. The idea will be to listen to the various difficulties, and to endeavour to put the visitors in touch with the right people to handle their particular kind of trouble. - Financial aid will not be given (Citizens' Advice 1967a).

The minutes included some information collected about problems with which it was

expected that the Bureau would have to assist clients. Once again it was decided that the office could not open until the help of more advisers had been enlisted.

The minutes of a meeting held on 2nd August, 1967 consist mainly of information collected for possible future use. However, "the briefing of helpers by experts was discussed at length, and it was decided that Mrs Duncan of 'Life Line' Johannesburg be requested to address the committee at 10-a.m. on the 22nd August" (Citizens' Advice 1967b). The need for training the advisers was therefore realised even before the office opened.

3.2.2 Opening

The new service was started in one room in the precinct of the Anglican St Alban's Cathedral, in October 1967. In the beginning a small group of people was involved and the service was provided by one volunteer at a time, on weekdays from 10:00 to 12:00. The voluntary workers were referred to as "counsellors" (Bryant 1969). Initially the clients were people sent by the three ministers, when they were unable to deal with the problems of those people (Savage 1992).

An undated note headed "Random jottings re meeting of Advice Bureau" and probably related to a meeting held during September 1967, contains the following:

> Notices to be put in Pretoria News and Golden City Post.
> P. News starting Sept 29th. G City Post starting Sunday Oct 1st. 'HELP. If you are in trouble or need advice contact Citizens' Advice Bureau 237 Schoeman St. Mondays to Fridays 10.0 am-12.0 am Tel 30718'.

Advertisements appeared in the *Pretoria News* every day (Citizens' Advice 1968). As a result requests for a variety of odd bits of general information were soon being received by the counsellors. The CAB did not only deal with cases of distress (Bryant 1969). An oft quoted example of the information clients asked for in those early days, is the man who wanted to know how to wash his drip-dry shirt. (Lorentz 1992). However, the major share of the enquiries were very serious cries for help in

connection with, for instance, employment, accommodation, finance, transport and baby-sitting. From the beginning, employment was the category on which the largest number of enquiries was received.

The information base was built up gradually, resulting from queries received and the information discovered to answer them. Counsellors met "once a month to discuss the work of the Bureau and usually to listen to a speaker from one of the Welfare Agencies" (Bryant 1969). Other knowledgeable people were also invited to address the counsellors, and they attended lectures and courses that were perceived to be possibly useful to their work for the CAB. One of the longest serving volunteers remembers with gratitude a training series on counselling by one of the church ministers, in which he stressed the importance of attentive listening (Lorentz 1992).

To begin with, the information tools were two files, one for recording information collected, and the other for recording case histories. When the file format was found to be clumsy to use, an index on 5 inch x 3 inch (125 cm x 75 cm) cards was started (Savage 1992). Pamphlets, news cuttings and other forms of published information were collected for reference purposes. A handwritten note, headed "Meeting 7/11/67," includes the information: "Mrs Douglas has offered to organise our filing system - we feel this is essential for cross reference." A handwritten document headed "Information for CAB meeting 6/2/68," and starting off: "Meeting of counsellors of Citizens' Advice Bureau held in the Servers' Room St Alban's Cathedral on Tuesday 5th Dec. 1967, at 9 a.m.," contains the following: "It was decided Mrs Douglas should continue to help with the filing system for a few more months. It was agreed that the new filing system was clear to all counsellors."

At the same meeting it was also decided that application should be made for a separate telephone line to serve the CAB. Using the extension on the telephone of the Diocesan Office had presumably proved to be unsatisfactory.

From an early stage a panel of helpers was formed, consisting of lawyers, doctors

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and other professional people with specialist knowledge, who were willing to advise the CAB's volunteers on problems they could not handle. Other helpers were volunteers who did not take turns interviewing clients, but who were willing to help in other ways, such as befriending lonely people or providing transport for people requiring such service, for instance aged people who needed to visit relatives in hospital (Bryant 1969).

A meeting of counsellors held on 12th June 1968, discussed the fact that many African job-seekers were appealing to the CAB for assistance. While it was felt that such cases should be referred to the Labour Bureau, some counsellors were of the opinion that they should be shown personal interest. It was minuted that "[c]ounsellors will take the Pretoria News 'smalls' pages from the night before to the office so that they are available to clients" who were seeking employment (Minutes 1968a).

The minutes of the meeting of 25th August 1968 contain statistics of cases handled from October 1967 to August 1968. A total of 191 cases had been handled during the first 11 months. The largest number in one category, 34 cases, had been related to employment. The need was expressed for supervision of the handling of and reporting on cases. A system of "checkers" was devised, whereby three volunteers would examine the files from time to time and comment on ways in which the work could have been carried further or the reports improved. Counsellors agreed to accept the criticism of checkers in good part in the interest of the efficient running of the Bureau. Mention was made of plans by Lions International to institute a 24-hour distress telephone service. Counsellors had been given copies of a book by Alan Walker, *Life-line*, and the concept was discussed. The prospect of such a service was given a very positive reception (Minutes 1968b).

The minutes of the next meeting contained the first report of the checkers. Most of the comments dealt with matters of procedure, as was only to be expected at this early stage of development (Minutes 1968c). The meeting was addressed by a

representative of the service organisation Lions International, who tried to interest the Pretoria CAB in expanding its service to provide a 24-hour distress centre, such as Life-Line, for Pretoria. A committee member who was a Past-President of the National Council of Women, told the meeting of efforts by that organisation to form a branch of Suicides Anonymous in Pretoria.

Interest in the work of the CAB and a readiness to co-operate with it, was manifested by a request from the Marriage Guidance Council that a member of the CAB should serve on its executive committee (Minutes 1968d).

A visit by counsellors to the Johannesburg CAB was discussed at the meeting of December 5, 1968. The differences in approach between the two bureaux were pointed out, with emphasis on the Christian approach of the Pretoria bureau. Mention was made of the support the Johannesburg CAB received from the Johannesburg Municipality, and the fact that a salaried Director could be afforded. The Pretoria committee decided that it was loth to change from its Christian orientation and possibly run the risk of sacrificing its independence. A visitor connected to a CAB in the UK, mentioned that the bureaux in England do more in-depth work on cases than did the Johannesburg CAB (Minutes 1968d). At a later meeting it was also mentioned that the Johannesburg Bureau acts as a referral agency, rather than a counselling one (Minutes 1968e).

In May 1969 a meeting was arranged at the St Andrew's Presbyterian Church to raise awareness of the CAB among parishes and churches other than the ones thus far involved, in an effort to get stronger support for the Bureau. This meeting was addressed by Dr Bruckner de Villiers, one of the prime movers behind the establishment of Life-Line in Johannesburg. He told the meeting that Life-Line had experienced difficulty in becoming registered as a welfare organisation, as it had to prove that its work was of a charitable nature, and did not overlap with other welfare organisations. Moreover, the authorities would not allow a welfare organisation to be multiracial (Citizens' Advice Bureau 1969).

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3.2.3 Consolidation

The first formal annual report of the Pretoria CAB covers the calendar year 1969 (Pretoria Citizens' 1970). A properly audited financial statement forms part of the report. Expenditure for the year was R215.96. The number of cases dealt with during that year was 714. This may not seem like many, but indicates that a definite need for the service existed.

During 1970 the office hours were extended. The CAB was now open from 10:00 to 14:00, Monday to Friday. In March a qualified social worker volunteered to act as part-time Director, enabling the bureau to improve the standard of service provided (Pretoria Citizens' 1971).

A Constitution for the Pretoria CAB was adopted on 21 March 1972. This enabled the Executive Committee to apply to the Department of Social Welfare for registration as a welfare organisation (Pretoria Citizens' 1973).

In 1973 the hours of opening were changed to run from 09:30 to 13:00 (Pretoria Citizens' 1974), in essence the hours still in force in 1998.

In the annual report for 1975 mention was made of the launching of Life Line in Pretoria and the opening of an Office of Information for Black People. The CAB workers expected that these institutions would take away some of the CAB's case load, but the number of cases handled still increased (Pretoria Citizens' 1976:1).

The report for 1980-81 covers 15 months, to bridge a change in the report period, from a calendar year to the 12 months from April 1 to March 31 of the next year. The report contains the news that the Bureau had been registered as a Fund Raising Organisation, enabling it legitimately to collect funds to finance its running expenses. The hours of opening were extended to 15:30 on Thursdays, to make the Bureau more accessible to domestic workers, who traditionally have Thursday

afternoons free in Pretoria (Pretoria Citizens' 1981).

During 1981-82 the CAB initiated a think-tank on the problems surrounding the employment of domestic workers, in which nine organisations and some individuals in the legal and other professions participated. This resulted in the publication of a contract, to be signed by the employer and the employee, that may be used when one engages a domestic worker. A memorandum on this issue was also sent to the Minister of Manpower Utilization (Pretoria Citizens' 1982). A quantity of copies of the contract was printed with sponsorship from the retail chain Pick 'n Pay.

In the 1984-85 report period the CAB formed a sub-committee to compile a booklet listing amenities for the aged in Pretoria in collaboration with the Council for Care of the Aged and the Pilkington Group Pension Fund. A meeting was also held of representatives of the CABx in Benoni, Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria to discuss the possibility of forming a national co-ordinating body. It was decided that the time was not yet ripe, but that the various bureaux should maintain contact with one another (Pretoria Citizens' 1985).

A donation from the Anglo American & De Beers Chairman's Fund enabled the Pretoria CAB to appoint a paid, part-time Administrative Secretary in January 1986. This provided greater continuity in the work, as she took over the checking of cases and supervised the work of the volunteers. During 1985-86 members of the Bureau participated in meetings on the drafting of a memorandum on the marriage laws for black women (Pretoria Citizens' 1986).

The booklet listing concessions and amenities for the aged initiated in 1984, was launched on September 25th, 1986. Printing of the booklet was sponsored by the retail chain Checkers.

During the 1986-87 report period a memorandum on "The role of the Courts in the protection of group and human rights" was submitted to the Law Commission.

(Pretoria Citizens' 1987).

The worsening economic situation in the country was reflected in comments in the annual report for 1987-88:

> Breadwinners, deprived of the necessity of work, are reduced to following up every possible source of money. Insurance and Assurance policies, pension funds, UIF benefits, disability pensions, bonuses, "service" money, "notice" money, compensation, damages, Provident funds, are all avenues minutely investigated in quest of relief. Imprudent buying on credit and unrealistic expectations on retirement, are often sources of subsequent suffering. Many African households are completely dependent on the salaries of domestic workers ... (Pretoria Citizens' 1988)

The case load in that year reached an all-time high of 4783 cases (Pretoria Citizens' 1988), which was only exceeded by those for 1992 to 1995 (Appendix D).

During the report period 1989-90 a donation by the Australian Embassy enabled the Pretoria CAB to purchase a computer with a view to putting its information base into electronic form (Pretoria Citizens' 1990). The Q & A programme package was selected, and a beginning was made to put the information in the card index onto the computer. The hesitancy of most interviewing volunteers about using a computer and the sporadic supply of information volunteers who were able to put the collected information into the system combined to cause the failure of this attempt.

3.2.4 The service in the nineties

By the time it entered the nineties, the Pretoria CAB was an established feature of the Pretoria welfare scene. Training of new voluntary workers was undertaken by one of the longest serving volunteers, who compiled a procedure document for voluntary workers. The following quotation from this procedure illustrates the philosophy behind the present-day service:

> The Citizens' Advice Bureau is a centre of care and concern for any person

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with any problem or query. People asking for help, whether they come into the office or whether they phone in, need to know that they are really being heard; that you accept them for what they are and that you are willing to help them find a solution to their problem (Pretoria Citizens' 1992).

Besides listening to the complaints of clients, voluntary workers inform them of their rights and responsibilities, try to explain various alternative actions they may take to solve their problems, and make telephone calls about the cases. Because many clients are illiterate or insufficiently literate to do such things for themselves, the voluntary workers fill in forms and write letters for and on behalf of the clients. If there are alternative avenues to be followed, a client is not told what he should do, he is informed of the alternatives and allowed to make up his own mind.

Because problems are frequently experienced with pension funds and other similar organisations, who claim not to have received items posted by clients or the PCAB, the PCAB insists that clients must return items like certified copies of application forms to the Bureau for posting. Photocopies are then kept on the clients' files and the interviewing volunteers make quite sure that all the required documents are in order and mailed correctly. While this may seem like a very paternalistic *modus operandi*, it has been brought about by circumstances which caused tremendous delays and frustrations for interviewing volunteers and clients alike.

In addition to in-house training, voluntary workers have monthly meetings to discuss the work and problems related to it. The meetings are often addressed by representatives of government departments and other agencies to which clients may have to be referred. Thus the voluntary workers get a good idea of the services available and the limitations of the various agencies. The Annual General Meeting in 1992, for instance, was addressed by a guidance psychologist on the topical subject of retrenchment, and the human problems related to it.

Since the Pretoria CAB is operated mainly by voluntary workers, each of whom usually works a half-day shift once a week, a detailed system of documentation

provides the communication links between voluntary workers from one day to the next and between the volunteers, the Administrative Secretary and the co-ordinator.

In the annual report for 1990-91, both the Chairman of the Executive Committee and the Administrative Secretary expressed the feeling of the CAB workers that the work of the Bureau had been eased considerably by the changed attitudes resulting from the political events of February 1990, when Nelson Mandela was released from prison and various political organisations were unbanned. There was no longer the feeling that the Bureau's workers were struggling against the stream of public opinion (Citizens Advice 1991). However, the persistent poor economic conditions, reflected in the quotation from the annual report for 1987-88, meant that the case load still increased. A summary of the enquiry statistics for 1991-92 shows that of the total of 4786 enquiries, 3510 dealt with problems related to employment. A daily average of 21 cases were handled by the volunteers (Citizens Advice 1992).

Demands on the services of the PCAB increased steadily until the 1993-1994 financial year, when the total number of cases dealt with reached 6 526, at a daily average of 26,3 cases (Citizens' Advice 1994). Since then the case load has decreased slightly, but still remains higher than for 1990-1991 as shown in Appendix E (Citizens' Advice 1996). The official opening hours are still 09:30 to 13:00. However, interviewing volunteers often begin work on correspondence and cases referred from previous sessions shortly after 08:00 and continue their work until 15:00 or later.

The case load of this Bureau indicates that the service is needed more than ever before, but it is becoming more and more difficult to recruit volunteers to run the service. Funding has become a little easier since 1995, because the Greater Pretoria Metropolitan Council (GPMC) has made generous grants-in-aid for a few years, making it possible for the PCAB to seriously consider computerisation of its information storage and retrieval system. However, the GPMC has gradually become better known as a possible source of funding for various causes, and has

warned that it may in future be forced to allocate "smaller slices of the cake" to its beneficiaries. Funding may therefore once more become problematic in the future.

3.3 SUMMARY

The creation and development of the Pretoria Citizens' Advice Bureau have been outlined, using information gained from minutes, annual reports and other documents. Chapter 4 will be devoted to the description of the information storage and retrieval tools created and used by volunteers to provide the services of the PCAB.

CHAPTER 4

INFORMATION RESOURCES IN THE PRETORIA CAB

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the information resources created, collected and used by voluntary workers of the PCAB will be described as they existed at the beginning of 1997. The evolution of individual information resources, as it emerged from the interviews with voluntary workers and other sources, will be mentioned where it is deemed appropriate.

The following resources have been identified:

* card index
* pamphlet file
* client case files collection
* alphabetic client index
* communication media
* black information file
* Legal Resources Centre file
* LEAP para-legal manual
* Reader's Digest Law books
* telephone directories

4.2 CARD INDEX

The core of the information resource of the PCAB is a card index consisting of 125 mm x 75 mm (5 inch x 3 inch) cards stored in a two-drawer steel cabinet. Two sets are maintained, one cabinet on each desk where clients are interviewed. These

sets are almost identical. Differences will be described below. Subjects and names (e.g. of organisations) are arranged in one alphabetical sequence with guide cards for the letters of the alphabet. There is no standard list of headings. The indexers decide on headings according to their own insights.

If a subject requires subdivision, a yellow card is made to front a series of cards for the subdivisions (see Appendix F). The yellow cards do not have index tabs, but stand out in the file because of their colour. Each card in a series behind a yellow card carries the main heading and any subheading that may apply. The cards in the series are numbered in chronological order, as they are created, and filed in order of the numbers. The yellow main card contains a numbered list of the subdivisions under that heading. As can be seen in the example in Appendix F, this list often continues on the back of the main card and sometimes even on a second card.

Certain topics have been taken out of the alphabetic sequence and filed at the back of the index cabinet, either on the first or on the second desk. The index on the first desk contains cards for helpers, that is people who are prepared to help the voluntary workers or clients of the PCAB with various problems. Some of the helpers are professional people, such as attorneys, who will give advice, or even take on a client's case. Others are people willing to befriend lonely people or transport senior citizens to hospitals to visit their partners or friends. Topics for which there are subdivisions are, for instance, Legal, Finance, Alcoholic Problems and Visiting and Befriending. At the back of the index on the second desk there are cards under three main sections, viz Recreation and Hobbies, Women's Clubs and Clubs and Organisations. Each section is identified by tabs of a different colour.

4.2.1 Evolution

The minutes of the early meetings do not contain information on the form of the index. From the interviews with long-serving voluntary workers it appears that the initial record of information was kept in the form of a looseleaf file, called "File B".

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(File A contained the early case records). When this format became difficult to handle, a card index was established. Over the years various voluntary workers have influenced the choice of index terms and arrangement of the cards. The present arrangement was initiated by a voluntary worker who is still a member of the Information Team.

The long-serving voluntary workers mentioned information volunteers in the past who had experience and possibly education in the field of librarianship. Accurate information on their experience and education could not be obtained, as they could not be traced. Over the years their contributions have been superseded by methods introduced by later voluntary workers who had no formal training in information handling.

4.2.2 Compilation

The index is compiled by a team of voluntary workers (herein referred to as information volunteers), who for various reasons do not wish to interview clients, but want to contribute to the work of the PCAB. The information volunteers visit the office at times that suit them, mainly in the afternoon. They are responsible for adding new information and up-dating the existing information. In this they are assisted by suggestions made by the interviewing volunteers and the Administrative Secretary.

Interviewing volunteers (volunteers dealing with the clients) are not supposed to make changes to the index cards. The reason for this is that the changes should be made in both indexes for them to operate effectively. To provide for changes that interviewing volunteers may wish to make, a thin exercise book, in which suggestions for changes and improvements can be written, is kept on top of each index cabinet (see section 4.6.4 below).

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4.3 PAMPHLET FILE

A standard four-drawer steel filing cabinet contains a collection of pamphlets, booklets and other information-bearing documents used to augment the brief information in the card index. Arrangement is alphabetical, using the same headings chosen for the card index. Items dealing with the same subject are gathered in an envelope, which is clearly marked with the relevant heading. If material is placed in the pamphlet file, a note is made on the card in the index with the corresponding heading to refer the user to the pamphlet file.

Material for the filing cabinet is collected by the Administrative Secretary and all the voluntary workers. These entities contain information that is regarded to be relevant to one of the many aspects of the operations of the PCAB and can sometimes be used to answer queries. The material is organised, revised and weeded by one of the information volunteers.

4.4 CLIENT CASE FILES COLLECTION

Since the PCAB is operated by voluntary workers, each of whom usually works a half-day shift at a time, detailed descriptions of the clients' cases are kept to ensure communication between clients, voluntary workers and the Administrative Secretary.

Case sheet forms are prepared by the Administrative Secretary, numbered and laid ready in a lever arch file cover for use when new clients visit the office. The form provides space for recording the client's name, identity number(s), address, details of employment, and other relevant particulars (see Appendix G).

When a client visits the PCAB for the first time, personal particulars are filled in on a new case sheet from the client's identity document. The interviewing volunteer questions the client and collects as many details about the client's problem as

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possible. The story is recorded on the case sheet, together with any action taken or advice given. The date on which the case sheet is opened is noted and the case is coded with the category in which the problem falls, e.g. health, employment. Appendix H is the list of categories.

The client is given a PCAB business card, showing the address, telephone number and hours of opening (see Appendix I).

The interviewing volunteer records the client's case number (from the case sheet) on the card. The client is advised to present the card on future visits and the telephone number of the PCAB is pointed out for possible use.

When a client returns to the PCAB, he is asked for the card and the relevant case file is retrieved so that the interviewing volunteer can read what progress has been made and report to the client. If a client telephones the PCAB, the interviewing volunteer who answers the call retrieves the file and reads out to the caller what progress has been made. If the interviewing volunteers considers that further action is necessary, she takes such action, if time permits, or notes the case number in the diary for the attention of the next day's volunteers.

Continuation sheets are marked clearly in the upper right hand corner with the case number and arranged in chronological order behind the first sheet. Any correspondence relating to a specific case is filed behind the relevant case sheet(s) in *reverse* chronological order, so that the latest correspondence and the latest case sheet are close to one another.

The detailed documentation makes it possible for different interviewing volunteers to deal with a case as time progresses. Insistence on a set procedure to be followed by all interviewing volunteers is an important factor in the smooth functioning of the system.

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Each file contains the documents relating to 120 cases. The files are kept in number order in two steel filing cabinets. About once a year, the files of clients who have not consulted the PCAB for 10 years are destroyed.

4.5   CLIENT INDEX

An extensive index of the particulars of clients of the PCAB is maintained. This is kept on 125 mm x 75 mm cards, filed in single drawer steel cabinets, arranged in alphabetical order by surname. When a new case file is opened, the interviewing volunteer dealing with the case is responsible for making out a client card. Details entered are: Surname, given names, identity number(s), case file number, address and the date when the file is opened (see Appendix I). The client index is weeded approximately once a year, when inactive case files are removed from the case file system.

The client index is used to check whether a client who visits the office without a PCAB visiting card has been there before. If yes, the case file number is obtained from the card. Clients who have not visited the PCAB in recent months, or who have a new problem, sometimes state that they have not been there before. Discovering that they have been, and what has been done for them in the past, may be important information when the client's case is resumed, even if an entirely new problem is presented. Continuing the existing case file saves the interviewing volunteer the time and effort of recording a client's details, as particulars seldom change much. Earlier information on the client's history with the PCAB can be very useful, particularly in the case of problem clients.

4.6   COMMUNICATION MEDIA

As indicated in section 4.4, the informal structure of the PCAB requires that some

means of communication between the interviewing volunteers, the information volunteers and the Administrative Secretary be maintained. As at January 1997 there are nine communication media:

*   the desk diaries
*   the personal notebooks
*   the "black book"
*   a notebook with each set of the index
*   checking notes
*   individual notes
*   letter box
*   office box
*   the meetings of the voluntary workers.

4.6.1 The desk diaries

An A4-size diary with a page for every weekday is kept on each desk. It is used by interviewing volunteers to list the cases with which they deal during that day. The interviewing volunteers on duty write their names at the top of the page. Space is also left at the top for interviewing volunteers and the Administrative Secretary to note requests that the new day's interviewing volunteers should attend to specified cases needing action, that could not be carried out the previous day.

The main part of each page is ruled to provide space where interviewing volunteers can write the case numbers of clients assisted, the category of the problem dealt with, whether the client was sent by a government department and whether the case was dealt with by letter, telephone, or interview. There are two columns for case numbers: new cases and repeat cases (return visits by existing clients). A sample page appears in Appendix J.

Telephone enquiries not related to existing clients, and for which case sheets are not

opened, are marked NCS (No Case Sheet) and entered in the column for new cases. A summary of the enquiry and the information provided is written in the centre column. Such cases are not given numbers and case sheets are normally not opened for them. A case sheet is opened for a telephone caller who is not a current client only if further contact with the PCAB can be foreseen.

Besides fulfilling a communication function, the diaries are used in compiling the monthly and annual statistics of the PCAB's case work, when the details noted there are added together and analysed.

4.6.2 The personal notebooks

Each interviewing volunteer is given a reporter's notebook in which to make informal notes of interviews with clients, telephone calls and other matters handled while on duty in the PCAB. Typically, the date is written down, and under it the file number of each case handled, the name of the client and the category of the case, together with incidental information, such as telephone numbers for calls to be made, any calculations that need to be made and occasionally a contact name. These notes are used when the voluntary worker completes a case sheet, and act as back-up, if a voluntary worker makes a mistake in entering information in the diary or on a case sheet.

4.6.3 The "black book"

A hard-cover notebook (A5 size) is kept in the upper left-hand drawer of the desk in the main office. The Administrative Secretary and voluntary workers write messages for one another in this book, for instance, to notify all voluntary workers that the Salvation Army has no more money for food parcels and that clients should therefore until further notice not be sent there with notes to request food parcels.

Voluntary workers are instructed in their first orientation that they should read the

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"black book" when they arrive in the office for a duty shift, to see what messages have been left.

4.6.4 Notebook with each copy of index

A thin A5 notebook is kept on the cabinet of each set of the card index. Interviewing volunteers and the Administrative Secretary can make notes in it of new information they find during interviewing sessions or information in the index that needs to be up-dated, such as changed telephone numbers discovered in the course of dealing with a case. They can also make suggestions for more cross references or new headings if they search for information under non-existent headings. It is the responsibility of the information volunteers to act on these suggestions.

4.6.5 Checking notes

The case histories written up by the interviewing volunteers in the case files and the action they take about cases are checked to establish whether all the required information has been recorded and the appropriate action has been taken. Checking is normally carried out by the Administrative Secretary. When she is absent on leave, one or more interviewing volunteers undertake the checking.

The Administrative Secretary compiles comments on aspects of the cases which need to be brought to the attention of the voluntary workers. These comments, called "checking notes", are photocopied and handed to the voluntary workers at their monthly meetings (see section 4.6.9). The Administrative Secretary presents these checking notes to the meeting and they are discussed. This acts as a mechanism to provide feedback and informal in-service training.

Evolution

The minutes of a meeting of the steering committee held on 25th August 1968

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contained the following:

> It was agreed that some supervision of case-handling and reporting would be beneficial to ensure continuity, conformity and accuracy of indexing and filing. Therefore 3 counsellors would meet at suitable intervals to go over the case-files and do anything possible to finish off what was required and to point out any mistakes or negligence by other counsellors. One of the 3 would be replaced each month, so that each 'checker' would serve for three months at a time. It was agreed that all criticism by 'checkers' would be accepted in good grace by counsellors as the efficient running of the Bureau is our main objective. (Minutes 1968b)

When a part-time Administrative Secretary was appointed in 1986, she took over the checking function (Pretoria Citizens' 1986).

4.6.6 Individual notes

If the Administrative Secretary finds it necessary to bring to the attention of individual interviewing volunteers something that does not fit in with the more general checking notes, she leaves notes for them about cases they have handled. These are left in the letter box, in the upper left hand drawer of the desk in the main office. Interviewing volunteers are instructed to check the box for notes when they enter the office to commence a shift on duty.

4.6.7 Letter box

In the upper left hand drawer of the desk in the first office, a box is kept where messages for voluntary workers and copies of the minutes of meetings destined for them can be placed. Voluntary workers are expected to check this box when they report for duty. Messages usually emanate from the Administrative Secretary, but cards and letters from former voluntary workers or those on holiday are also placed in the box to be read by interested members.

4.6.8 Office box

The office box is used to keep cheques, cash or UIF membership cards received for clients in a safe place. It is kept in a drawer of the pamphlet cabinet, which is normally locked. Items placed in the office box have been noted in the clients' files, so that voluntary workers dealing with those clients will know that something is awaiting the respective clients. The items are usually in envelopes, which are marked with the clients' case file numbers.

4.6.9 Meetings of voluntary workers

The voluntary workers meet once a month to discuss matters relating to the PCAB, such as new information added to the index and pamphlet file, the checking notes and interesting cases encountered. A sample agenda appears in Appendix K.

The meetings originated with the steering committee which launched the PCAB in 1967 and have been continued on a regular basis ever since.

4.7 BLACK INFORMATION FILE

The black information file was formerly called the "blue file" because it was originally covered in blue paper. In an interview the Administrative Secretary stated that she initiated the file as a notebook of details on the subjects on which information was most frequently sought by the voluntary workers. It consists of a lever arch file (8 cm thick) with transparent plastic pockets, open only at the top, which contain A4 sheets carrying a variety of information. Pockets are numbered and a list of the subjects for which there are pockets is kept inside the front cover.

4.8   LEGAL RESOURCES CENTRE FILE

The Legal Resources Centre (LRC) is a public interest law organisation controlled and funded by the Legal Resources Trust. The LRC "works for the development of a democratic society which functions in accordance with the principles of social justice and human rights" (Legal Resources Trust 1994). The LRC has regional offices in various large centres, including Pretoria, and advice offices in many towns and townships. It employs salaried lawyers and para-legal support staff who provide legal services without charge to poor, homeless and landless clients. The para-legal staff is trained by the LRC, and it offers its training to people working for organisations such as the CAB. The researcher attended such a training session lasting two days shortly after joining the PCAB.

Voluntary workers of the PCAB have over the years attended training sessions offered by the LRC in Pretoria and Johannesburg. A copy of the handbook created for the network of advice offices of the LRC throughout the country is kept in the office for study and consultation. The handbook is in looseleaf form in a lever arch file. The text currently in the file cover is not dated and the Administrative Secretary could not say when it had been received. A counsellor of the LRC interviewed by the researcher could also not provide a date.

4.9   LEAP PARA-LEGAL MANUAL

The *LEAP para-legal manual*, published by the Legal Education Action Project (LEAP) and the Black Sash, is another looseleaf manual intended to be updated regularly. The title page carries the date 1992 and some pages are marked "November 1992 update series". The Legal Education Action Project is situated in the Institute of Criminology of the University of Cape Town. The researcher wrote to LEAP early in 1996 to enquire whether further updates had been published. Some months later looseleaf replacements and notes for updating the existing text were

received. The updates were dated February 1995 and covered recent legislation.

The Administrative Secretary commented that she did not find the *Para-legal manual* as accessible as the handbook of the Legal Resources Centre.

4.10   READER'S DIGEST LAW BOOKS

Two of these books are kept in the office. They are:

> *Reader's Digest family guide to the law in South Africa*. Cape Town:
> Reader's Digest Association of South Africa, c1982.

and

> *You and your rights: an A-Z guide to 1000 South African consumer, legal and money problems*. Cape Town: Reader's Digest Association, c1992.

The second title appears to be an up-dated, rearranged version of the first. However, on the reverse of the title page it is labelled "first edition" and it appears as such in the *South African National Bibliography* for 1992.

Several interviewing volunteers mentioned in interviews with the researcher that they possessed a copy of one or the other of these books at home. Some of these people use the reference books to research clients' cases at home. The same people, because of familiarity with the source, expressed satisfaction with it.

4.11   TELEPHONE DIRECTORIES

The telephone directories for the Pretoria and Johannesburg areas are kept in the office. Up-dated versions are obtained whenever they become available.

As a result of the reorganisation of Government structures following the general election in 1994, voluntary workers have reported great difficulty finding certain Government and local government agencies in the 1995/1996 and subsequent telephone directories.

Out-of-date issues of telephone directories of other parts of the country were kept in the office. These may have led to some remarks made in interviews by voluntary workers about old telephone directories. These were discarded during a clean-out of the offices during 1996.

4.12 SUMMARY

The information resources collected, organised and used in the PCAB have been described. The story of the development of the tools created in the Bureau has been told as far as it could be found in minutes and other documents of the Bureau.

Chapter 5 contains a description of the work done by the voluntary workers and their training, as well as some comments on these and related topics.

CHAPTER 5

ACTIVITIES OF THE PRETORIA CAB

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the activities of the PCAB will be described to lay the foundation for an analysis of the information-handling behaviour of the voluntary workers. Section 5.2 is a description of a typical day at the PCAB as experienced by the researcher as participant observer. References in parentheses are to descriptions of information retrieval tools in chapter 4 and to photocopies in appendices. Section 5.3 is a description of the use of the information storage and retrieval tools while helping a client. In section 5.4 the training received by interviewing volunteers is described and appraised. Section 5.5 comments on personal aspects of providing information in the PCAB.

5.2 A DAY AT THE PRETORIA CAB

The researcher describes the procedures followed to deal with a number of cases handled during a normal day at the PCAB from her own experience.

I arrive at the CAB office about 08:30. Chairs for waiting clients have already been placed outside the door of the office by one of the cathedral's cleaners. As I am the first interviewing volunteer to arrive, I get the bunch of keys from its hiding place in the cathedral and unlock the office and the filing cabinets. I set out the latest file of case sheets (see section 4.4) and from the file cover get the key for the pamphlet file cabinet (see section 4.3), where the telephone keys and other valuables are kept. I unlock the telephones and return the telephone keys to their hiding place. I lock away my own handbag in the computer cupboard for the sake of security.

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Now I check the "black book" (see section 4.6.3) for any messages left for voluntary workers in general. There is a note from the Administrative Secretary that the supply of postage stamps will be replenished later in the day. I also check to see whether any individual messages or minutes of meetings have been left for me in the letter box (see section 4.6.6). There is a message from the Administrative Secretary, that I had not recorded any progress on a case I listed in the desk diary (see section 4.6.1) when I was last on duty. I compare the case numbers on which I worked that day and which I noted in my personal notebook (see section 4.6.2) with the case numbers noted in the desk diary, and find that I had inverted the digits in noting the case number in the desk diary. I check this with the case file written in my notebook. Then I correct the number in the desk diary for the relevant day and write a reply to the Administrative Secretary, explaining and apologising for my mistake.

Next I check the desk diary on my desk for cases referred from yesterday or earlier. There is one case and I fetch the relevant case file to do what is necessary. This is the first case for the day.

Case 1: The referred case calls for telephoning someone who could not be reached yesterday. I make the necessary call. Since the relevant person is not available, I leave a message for that person to return my call and keep the file next to me in anticipation of the call. If the call is not returned by the end of the morning (about 12:00), I will try phoning again. Keeping the file next to me is a reminder that I should follow up if the recipient does not return my call.

While I am busy with the above activities, my fellow voluntary worker, who does duty at the other desk, arrives and we pass the time of day and compare notes on PCAB activities. She reports that she has checked the PCAB's pigeon hole in the Diocesan Office and found no mail.

Case 2: I call in the first waiting client and ask him if he speaks English or Afrikaans. In the language of his choice (of those two) I ask whether he has visited

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the PCAB before. He has, therefore I ask for his PCAB card (see Appendix I) showing the number of his case file, and fetch the corresponding file from the filing cabinet. There is a message which arrived since his last visit. I communicate the message: his former employer says that the client's pension contributions were paid out when he was dismissed, therefore he can expect no more money from that source. This should be the end of the visit, but the client argues, alleging that he paid much more into the pension fund than he was paid out. I make calculations, based on the time he worked for the firm and his pension deductions (details recorded by a previous voluntary worker), and conclude that he was paid correctly. I explain the calculation, to try to convince him. Eventually he leaves, obviously disappointed and still not satisfied. I note on the case sheet what had happened and what was said, and enter the case number in the desk diary.

Case 3: The next client called in has also been to PCAB before. I collect his case file and find a note which says a cheque has arrived for him. I fetch the waiting cheque from the office box (see section 4.6.8) in the pamphlet file cabinet. I ask for the client's identity document (ID) and check whether the number on the cheque agrees with that in the ID. I get the client to sign on the case sheet to acknowledge receipt of the cheque. He departs more cheerfully than the previous client. I note his visit on the case sheet and the desk diary.

Case 4: The next repeat client has a problem with his ID book. He says the ID number is wrong, as he was born in a different year than the one given in the ID book. I look in the card index (see section 4.2) and eventually find an entry under "registration" that covers identity documents. The card indicates that such matters are dealt with by the Department of Home Affairs and provides telephone numbers and addresses. I phone the relevant number and am told that a person who does not have a birth certificate and who contests the birth date on his ID should bring an older relative, such as his father or mother or an uncle or older sibling, who knows exactly when he was born, to the Department of Home Affairs to swear an affidavit stating the correct date. I explain this in great detail to the client, as he immediately

sees problems: his parents have both died. I suggest alternative persons who may serve the purpose. He has to go away and think of possibilities and go directly to the Department of Home Affairs or return to the PCAB. I write down the address and telephone number of the Department for him. I write everything I did on his case sheet, and the case number in the desk diary.

Case 5: The next waiting client says it is his first visit to PCAB. I ask for his ID and check in the card file of clients' names (see section 4.5) whether this is indeed his first visit. Since we have no record of him, I collect a new case sheet (see Appendix G) from the current file and complete it with the help of the ID book and questions to the client. Inside the plastic cover of the ID book there is a note with an address. On being questioned, the client says he still lives at that address and that he receives post there, therefore it is noted on the case sheet. I then ask the client what problem brought him to the PCAB. This calls forth a long, involved story, to which I listen, making notes and asking prompting questions where necessary. The client claims to have been engaged by an employer who promised to pay him a stated amount per week. He says he understood that this was to be full-time employment. The employer paid him less than the promised amount. He gives vague dates (for instance "last of last week", "the week before Good Friday") for when he was paid or when other events occurred. I record details of the client's employment as far as I am able to interpret what he tells me. I ask whether he has pay slips from this period of employment, and a "blue card" (Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) membership card). He says he was paid cash, with no pay slip or pay envelope. I have to explain at length why I ask for documents: to see what deductions were made from his pay and to get accurate dates and figures to which I can refer when I telephone his employer. I phone the employer, who sounds helpful and truthful and quite ready to answer questions over the telephone. He denies having employed the man as a full-time worker. He says the undertaking was that the client would be given work as the employer needed his services, and that he would be paid according to the time he worked. When I relate the employer's version to the client, he disputes the employer's statements. I explain that I have to believe both of them,

as I was not present when they made their deal or when the client was paid. Since the client remains truculent and will not accept what the employer told me, we are at an impasse. I suggest that he could lay a complaint with the Department of Labour and direct him to it. Before he departs, I give him a PCAB business card on which I write his case file number. I explain how he can use it, namely that he should bring it along if he visits PCAB again, that the telephone number appears on it, and that he should quote his case file number if he should phone. I note the conversations and actions on the case sheet and make out a card for the alphabetical register of clients. I note the case number in the desk diary.

Case 6: While dealing with case 5, I take a telephone enquiry from a woman without a PCAB file number, who wants information on homes for the aged: she requires addresses and conditions for accepting a person into such a home. I look up the topic in the card index, where I am referred to the pamphlet file (see section 4.3). When I see the amount of information in the file, I ask the caller whether she could possibly visit the PCAB to look at the pamphlets and make her own selection. She accepts the suggestion. I explain where the PCAB is situated and when it is open, note her name and telephone number and make an entry in the desk diary for a NCS enquiry (see section 4.6.1). This woman visits the PCAB during the morning, is given the envelope from the pamphlet file, and copies the information she wants.

Case 7: The next client has a PCAB case file, but presents with a new problem. He was employed by a manufacturer of steel products and has been retrenched. He wants to apply for a refund of his pension contributions. He has already submitted his blue card to the UIF to claim unemployment benefits. Because of past experience I ask him whether he has not already completed an application form for the refund of pension contributions given him by the employing firm. He replies that he was on leave when the retrenchment came through, so no application was submitted. The client has contributed to the Engineering Industries Provident Fund, based in Johannesburg, for which application forms are available in the PCAB. At his

request, I fill in the form for him. The form is completed in duplicate, because of experience of applications being lost in the post. The form has to be certified by a commisioner of oaths and accompanied by a certificate of service from the former employer (alternatively a certified photocopy of the UIF blue card), a certified photocopy of the applicant's identity document and a bank mandate from the provident fund (copies also available at PCAB) completed by the bank where he has an account, so that the money may be deposited into his bank account. The client does not have a certificate of service and will therefore have to return to the employer to request one, as he has handed in his UIF card for payment of unemployment benefits. I explain this and give him a compliments slip on which I write what he needs. I go to the Diocesan Office to photocopy his ID (also in duplicate). I explain to him that he has to have the application forms and the photocopies of the ID certified and explain how and where he can have it done. I explain that he should take the bank mandate to his bank to be completed. I ask him to bring all the completed and certified forms to PCAB as soon as they are ready so that we can post them. He goes off to do what is required. I do not ask him to post the application himself, as I want the date when it is posted to be noted in the client's case file. I also want a voluntary worker to ensure that all the relevant documents have been enclosed with the application (compare section 3.2.4). The duplicate application and ID photocopy will be put on his file to provide for future eventualities. I note everything that was done on his case sheet and leave a note for the voluntary worker whom the client will see on his next visit to make a photocopy of the certificate of service for PCAB's file. I enter the case number in the desk diary.

Case 8: I take another telephone enquiry from someone who does not have a PCAB case number. I note the name and telephone number of the caller. The caller says she moved to Pretoria recently and wants to contact clubs for retired people. I ask in which suburb she lives, and give her a few telephone numbers from the card index on the desk. After a while the caller telephones again, to say that one telephone number given her is no longer in use, and another is no longer held by a club for

retirees. I say that I need a little more time and will call back. The relevant index card indicates that there is more information in the pamphlet file. I take out the relevant envelope, but the information in the envelope also looks dated. I consult my fellow voluntary worker at the other desk, who suggests that there may be something in the section for clubs, at the back of the set of cards on her desk (i.e. only in one set of the index). We find a recent number, which I pass on to the caller. I make a note in the notebook on my desk to alert the information volunteers to the out-of-date information on clubs for retirees in the main set of cards. The telephone enquiry is logged in the diary as NCS. Dealing with such an enquiry makes me feel insecure about passing on the information in the index and in the pamphlet file, and I wonder how much of it is really useful.

Case 1 (continued): It is now after 12:00 and I return to the case that was referred from yesterday. The person for whom I left a message earlier this morning has not returned my call. I ring his number again. Once more I am told that he is out. I repeat the message, making a point of giving the case file number which the caller should quote when he returns the call. I note my actions in the relevant case file and put a note in the desk diary for tomorrow's voluntary worker to follow up the case. I also enter the case number on today's page of the desk diary.

Case 9: The next client I call in is an elderly woman. It is her first visit to PCAB, so I open a case file for her. She says that her husband died and she wants to claim his "blue card money" (UIF death benefits). She has the blue card, but has not thought to bring his ID and the death certificate. I explain what is needed. She says she has the documents at home. The client says further that her late husband was still employed when he died and she does not think his employers paid the family everything owed to him. She gives the name and telephone number of the former employer, whom I telephone. The pensions department of the firm gives me details of what was paid out to the family of the deceased. The spokeswoman explains that the deceased had worked for the firm for a long period and had then left. At the time he received all benefits owed to him (she mentions the amounts). After a time-

lapse he was re-employed by the firm. The final period of employment up to his death had been relatively short, therefore the payment to the family had been negligible. I note details of dates and amounts for the case file. When I relate the details to her, the widow is unhappy about it. On questioning her, however, I find that they bought a house with the earlier pay-out, so that she was aware that they had received a considerable sum from this employer long before her husband's death. I explain why she cannot expect to have the house and receive a further large pay-out as well. I ask her to bring the death certificate and deceased's ID to PCAB. I tell her that she must feel free to go directly to the UIF office to claim the death benefits, but she says she will return to PCAB. Since I noted on her ID that she is over 60, I ask whether she receives an old age pension. She does not, so I explain how and where she should apply for it. I give her a PCAB business card with her file number, and note everything on the case sheet. I enter the case number in the desk diary.

Case 10: The next client, who has been to PCAB before, wants to claim the pension of his deceased father. I remember that something was said in a meeting of voluntary workers about a similar case and look at the checking notes (see section 4.6.5) handed out at the last few meetings, which I have brought with me. The notes provide me with some information. I ask whether the client is the only surviving relative. As he is not, I explain who is most likely to inherit from the deceased. Although he is unlikely to benefit personally, he wants to pursue the claim on behalf of the family. I tell the client which papers are needed before an enquiry can be made. The client has to go and look for further papers and then return. I write details of the conversation on his case sheet, and enter the case number in the desk diary.

My fellow voluntary worker has in the meantime gone to the Diocesan Office to send a fax and brought newly received mail with her. Since there are no more clients waiting in the queue, we share the letters that relate to clients. As we open the letters, we stamp them "received" and enter the date of receipt.

Case 11: One letter given to me has the client's case number on it. I place it in the relevant file and make an appropriate note on the last case sheet as the letter does not require further action. I enter the case number in the desk diary.

Case 12: The second letter does not show the PCAB's reference number (the client's case file number), therefore I look up the client's name in the client index and write the case file number on the letter. I retrieve the client's file.
The letter received contains a message that requires the client to visit PCAB for further discussion. As there is a postal address for the client in the case file, I write a note on a compliments slip, asking the client to visit the office, place it in an envelope, and address it to the client. I get a postage stamp from the stamp box and will post the letter on my way home. I write on the case sheet what I have done, and enter the case number in the desk diary. If there had been no postal address for the client, I would have left a note on the file awaiting a possible future visit or telephone call from him.

Case 13: As we are about to close the office, a client arrives. He says he is awaiting a refund of pension contributions and there is nothing in his bank account. Using the PCAB card he presents, I retrieve his file and see that the last voluntary worker who saw him (about ten days ago) had told him to visit the bank immediately before visiting the PCAB. I ask him when last he had checked his bank account and he says about a week ago. I explain to him that there is no point in his coming to PCAB unless he had been to the bank immediately beforehand: he must go to the bank first, as the bank will not tell us over the telephone what his balance is. If he checks with the bank and no deposit has been made, he can come back or telephone PCAB tomorrow, but must not wait a week again. I note all this on his case sheet, and enter the case number in the desk diary.

The end of our shift has arrived and I check whether I have noted all the cases listed in my personal notebook in the desk diary for today. We lock the telephones and the filing cabinets, switch off the lights and put away the keys in their respective

hiding places.

5.3 USE OF INFORMATION IN THE HELPING PROCESS

In this section the interviewing procedure followed in the PCAB is described, showing when and how the various information storage and retrieval tools are used. A critical appraisal of the procedure and tools, based on the interviews with volunteers and observation by the researcher, follows in Chapter 7.

The procedure for opening the office is not included here, as it has been described under section 5.2. Some information storage and retrieval tools are not mentioned, as they serve as media of communication between the voluntary workers and the Administrative Secretary and are not used physically while an interviewing volunteer helps a client.

When a client is invited into the PCAB office the interviewing volunteer asks whether he prefers to speak English or Afrikaans. The interview is conducted in the language of the client's choice (of those two).

The client is then asked whether he has been to the PCAB before, or whether it is his first visit. If it is the first visit, that is, this is a new client, he is asked for his identity document (ID) and it is checked against the *client index* (see section 4.5). If there is no record of the specific person in the client index, the interviewing volunteer takes a new case sheet from the *latest case file* (see section 4.4), which is lying ready on top of the client index. The voluntary worker fills in details of the client's name and identity number using the ID, and questions the client about his postal address and the reason for his visit to the PCAB, all of which are noted on the case sheet. The client is given a *PCAB business card* (see Appendix I) on which the case file number is written. The use of the card is explained to him: that he should show the card on future visits to the PCAB so that his file can be found, and

that the telephone number and hours of opening are printed on the card for his reference. A card is completed to represent the client in the client index (example in Appendix I).

If the client index contains a record for the client, the case file number is written down, and the case is handled like that of a repeat client.

If the client states that he has been to the PCAB before, he is asked for the PCAB card showing his case file number. Using this number, the interviewing volunteer fetches the *case file* (see section 4.4) from the filing cabinet and reads what has been done for the client in the past. Often the last entry on the case sheet indicates that this is the continuation of an old problem, in which case there may be a message to communicate to the client. Alternatively the interviewing volunteer asks the client whether he has carried out actions suggested to him during his last visit and whether he has anything to report as a result. This may prove to be the end of the client's problem, in which case he leaves. If the problem is not solved, the client is questioned further.

If a repeat client has a new problem, he is questioned about it, and the interviewing volunteer indicates on the case sheet that this is a new problem.

From the interviewing step, the routine for dealing with new clients, repeat clients with new problems, and repeat clients whose problems have not yet been solved, is the same. The interviewing volunteer questions the client, listens to him, and takes notes of answers and any information the client may contribute.

It must be noted that interviewing volunteers, as they grow more experienced, often do not use any of the information retrieval tools, but act purely on the basis of accumulated experience.

Depending on the problem presented and the information provided by the client, the

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interviewing volunteer is likely to begin searching for a solution first by consulting the *card index* (see section 4.2) present on each desk. Some information is summarised on the cards, so that the volunteer may be able to give the client the needed information, or tell him what he can do to solve his problem.

Alternatively the card index may provide the name and telephone number(s) of a person or agency that can be telephoned to request information. The interviewing volunteer may telephone the person or agency and either be given the needed information, or be asked to send the client to the person she telephoned. If the client is referred elsewhere, he is given a compliments slip of the PCAB, on which the interviewing volunteer writes the name and address of the person to whom the client must go. The client is also given verbal directions on how to get to the person or agency.

Consultation of the remaining information storage and retrieval tools is described in order of the observed frequency of their use.

The *telephone directories* (see section 4.11) for Pretoria and Johannesburg are often used to check the address and telephone number of an employer or other individual named by a client, or to find a government department or other agency that may help with the particular case. This may follow from incomplete information supplied by the client, from information in the card index or from the interviewing volunteer's experience.

The card index may refer the user to the *pamphlet file* (see section 4.3), where she will find an envelope marked with the same subject heading as the card in the index which contained the reference. The envelope contains a collection of pamphlets, leaflets and newspaper cuttings supplying more detailed information than can be accommodated on a card in the card index. The interviewing volunteer selects items which may be relevant to the client's case, and communicates and often interprets information that may help the client. Throughout the interviewing volunteer must be

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aware that some of the information may be out of date. If the query is received by telephone and the information is very voluminous, the client may be asked whether he could visit the CAB to make his own selection (see for instance Case 6 under section 5.2).

An interviewing volunteer is most likely to be referred from the card index to the *black information file* (see section 4.7) to find the address and telephone number of one of the industrial councils (recently renamed bargaining councils), a countrywide list of which is kept there. Only the most frequently consulted industrial councils have cards in the card index. The black information file consists of numbered plastic pockets, each of which contains information on a specified topic. In front there is a table of contents. The list of industrial councils is identified and taken from its pocket for perusal and the information required for the present case is copied for use in a telephone call or letter. The list is returned to its pocket.

If a legal problem is encountered, the interviewing volunteer may consult one of the sources of legal information kept in the PCAB, that is the *Legal Resources Centre file* (see section 4.8), the *LEAP para-legal manual* (see section 4.9), or the *Reader's Digest law books* (see section 4.10). While some of these tools are out-of-date, they can still guide an interviewing volunteer in the direction where useful information can be found. However, using these tools is time consuming, so that interviewing volunteers are often reluctant to consult them.

The flow chart in Appendix L gives an indication of the helping procedure.

5.4   TRAINING

Since all voluntary workers in the PCAB need some form of introduction to the procedures and ISAR resources, the training they receive is an important component of their ability to handle information. This section contains a description and

appraisal of the training procedure.

5.4.1 Systematic account of the training procedure

Interviewing volunteers at the PCAB are trained for the work they will do in the office by one of the experienced voluntary workers. When trainees attend the office for the first time, they are given a procedure document (Appendix M), which briefly states the philosophy of the PCAB and tells them what steps they should take when working a shift as voluntary workers. The trainer explains the procedure and shows the trainee what various information storage and retrieval tools, such as the black book, the office box and the information cards, look like, where they are kept and what they are used for. The trainer stresses the importance of listening and of the interviewer showing empathy, explaining how this is done.

The trainee then sits in on interviews with clients conducted by the trainer and other experienced voluntary workers. The trainee may sit in for many sessions or for only a few, depending on how quickly the specific trainee picks up the routine, the matters being dealt with and the use of the information resources, and on whether the PCAB is short of voluntary workers to take duties at that time. One interviewing volunteer told the researcher:

> "Actually it [the training] was very little. I went in one morning and sat in with [X], and they were terribly short-staffed, so they asked me the next day if I'd do a duty."

The specific trainee's career background may contribute to that person being entrusted with independent duties sooner than others, for instance the trainee who used to work in the government's pensions department, which gave her considerable knowledge and experience of an area where clients often have questions.

Sitting in is also the means by which the trainee learns details of the administrative

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procedure, such as filling in case sheets and client cards to add new clients to the alphabetical client index, giving the clients PCAB cards, keeping her own notes and filling in the desk diary. This administrative procedure is very important, because every voluntary worker who writes up a new client, must make it possible for subsequent voluntary workers to continue with the case. While sitting in, the trainee may start carrying out part of the procedure, such as checking in the client index whether a new client's name occurs there, or fetching clients' case files from the filing cabinets.

The trainee may take telephone calls, but is likely to hand them over to the trainer or another experienced voluntary worker. Such telephone calls are explained to the trainee afterwards, so that she gets an idea of the kind of calls received and how they are handled. When a trainee begins to take cases independently, the Administrative Secretary usually tries to schedule that person in shifts with experienced voluntary workers, who can help if the trainee does not know what to do next.

Trainees are encouraged to read some of the case files to gain background on the problems clients present and the work done for them. They are also encouraged to attend the monthly meetings of voluntary workers, where they can learn much from the discussion of cases and related matters. Occasionally arrangements are made for knowledgeable persons or specialists in some part of the work to address the meetings. Examples of such specialists are senior officials of the Department of Labour or the local social welfare office. These talks and the discussion during meetings can be seen as a form of continuing training of voluntary workers.

5.4.2 Knowledge from general background of voluntary workers

Information collected in the interviews conducted with voluntary workers of the PCAB showed that they come to their duties with varied knowledge gained from their education and occupations, as summarised in Appendix N. Interviewing,

communication, typing, filing and information retrieval skills are kinds of knowledge volunteers can apply to their work for the PCAB. While interviewing and communicating readily with other people are skills learnt by most of the voluntary workers, very few of them gained other information handling skills as part of their education or earlier experience. Some volunteers had gained secretarial skills, such as typing and filing, which were useful. The table in Appendix N shows that a few engineers and a medical practitioner had learnt how to retrieve information from the scientific and technical literature. This gave them no theoretical background in the design and maintenance of information storage and retrieval systems. The other varieties of background knowledge can be of use in particular cases, but their usefulness would depend on the coincidence of a specific interviewing volunteer being on duty when a client presents a problem to which that volunteer's background knowledge can be applied.

5.4.3 Critical appraisal of the training procedure

In interviews, meetings of voluntary workers and occasional conversations, it has become apparent that the training received by the various interviewing volunteers differs considerably from one person to the next. One person, for example, in an interview denied having received the procedure document supposedly handed to all trainees. There was evidence that some interviewing volunteers did not understand the informaton storage and retrieval tools and their potential for providing information in helping clients.

At the time when this investigation was begun, training was handled by one of the longest-serving voluntary workers. After approximately three years she left because of poor health, and since that time the training has been handled by the Administrative Secretary and some of the experienced voluntary workers. However, it is not everyone who can train another successfully, no matter how suitable the trainee's background for the job.

Most of the interviewing volunteers felt that the training they received prepared them adequately for what they were expected to do, as typified by the following remark from an interview:

"...that training was good in the sense that it taught you what to expect."

On the other hand, an interviewing volunteer who commenced training at the same time as the researcher, and who was trained by the same long-serving volunteer, expressed grave misgivings about the training when interviewed approximately eighteen months later. She expressed the need for more thorough training in the cognitive aspects:

"I didn't know what on earth they were talking about, and I had no knowledge of how pension schemes and that sort of thing worked, and this you had to pick up as you went along. And to me it was traumatic, that people came and I felt I was unable to give them the proper guidance that I should be giving, because I am not properly ... I'm not really clued up as far as that's concerned ... It's the knowledge aspect that worries me, the background, someone who hasn't been involved in business at all, or legal affairs ... To me it was really like being thrown into the deep end in a swimming bath, without knowing properly how to swim."

The voluntary workers interviewed for this study were mostly trained by the long-serving volunteer mentioned before. Some voluntary workers had at one time or another attended a training course for Life Line counsellors. Although several of these people said that the work at the PCAB differed very much from that done by Life Line, a telephonic counselling service, everyone who had taken the course said it had been useful.

There is no formal selection procedure for voluntary workers, simply because there are never enough people willing to undertake the work. Selection occurs mainly by

people undertaking to join, undergoing the training or part of the training, and then staying on or possibly deselecting themselves, because they realise they are not interested in or suited to the work. The latter group then simply drop out, or participate less and less frequently, thus losing contact with the work.

The monthly meeting of voluntary workers is the main means of continuing training of the workforce and communication among volunteers responsible for different tasks. However, observation has shown that attendance at the meetings is seen by some as a chore and waste of time, not an opportunity for learning and communicating with other voluntary workers.

From observation and experience the researcher has learnt that the initial training procedure and continuing training efforts concentrate on interviewing, communicating and cognitive skills and on the clerical procedures carried out in the PCAB. No training in information handling skills such as indexing, excerpting and abstracting is offered.

5.5   THE PERSONAL DIMENSION

Certain personal factors impact on information handling by voluntary workers in providing the services of the PCAB. They are described and commented on in this section. While these factor may not have a direct bearing on the collection, organisation and use of information, they have an impact on these activities.

5.5.1 Personal skills and resources

The voluntary workers who join the PCAB to provide its services, are by-and-large laypersons with regard to information handling and therefore have to be taught certain simple information handling skills. In addition they may need personal skills not demanded of them before, to carry out the duties at the PCAB.

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5.5.1.1 Cultural adjustment

Thus far almost all the voluntary workers at PCAB have been white people who had relatively little prior contact with and experience of the way of life of the majority of the clients of the PCAB, who come from the disadvantaged, mainly black sector of the community. Dealing with the clients, demands a cultural adjustment from the voluntary workers. Several voluntary workers in the interviews mentioned the need for adjustment to a different culture. The adjustment is needed in respect of language, patience and a general awareness of a different lifestyle to their own.

*   Most of the clients speak English or Afrikaans as a second or third language, therefore their pronunciation of street names, the names of employers and other words in the language of the interview often makes it very difficult for voluntary workers, who are mainly first-language speakers of English or Afrikaans, to understand what clients are saying. They have to learn to listen for the name hidden under the different pronunciation as much as to the nuances of feeling expressed by the clients.

*   Many clients are illiterate or semi-literate and have a limited vocabulary in the language of the interview. They therefore tend to describe places and routes in an inexact manner. Possibly because they realise that they are not expressing themselves well, clients tend to repeat several times what they are trying to convey. A prompting or confirming comment or question by the interviewer may set off another repetition of the story from the beginning, because the client may get the impression that the interviewer has not understood what he said before. Voluntary workers have to exert great patience to hear such stories through to their culmination. Because of the clients' limited grasp of the interview language, voluntary workers often have to rephrase questions several times to get at the real problem or query presented. The same is true of explanations, which are often not understood and have to be simplified or reworded several times.

5.5.1.2 Terminology

In the interviews, it was noticeable that most of the voluntary workers lacked terms in which to express information retrieval concepts.

* Most voluntary workers spoke of "the cards" or "the information cards", rather than "the index" or "card index". One even spoke of the "filing cabinet", where subsequent comments made it clear he was referring to the card index on the desk rather than the pamphlet filing cabinet. The inexact use of terms was heard even from those voluntary workers with a tertiary education and research degrees, who had experience of the application of certain information skills, such as using a library catalogue, prior to joining the PCAB.

* The term "index" was used very loosely. One voluntary worker, for instance, spoke of the "index books" when referring to looseleaf reference works in file covers. Another spoke of "the index of all the different industrial councils" when referring to a simple roneoed listing in broad industry groups with no index attached to it. Even a former paraprofessional library worker interpreted a question about the structure of the index as referring to "alphabetical [arrangement] and neat writing", a lay concern, not reflecting the inner structure of the index.

  [Q: But the particular design of that specific index, did it not strike you as strange or difficult to use?
  A: No, I suppose I learnt a lot in the library there {where she worked long before}, about alphabetical ... and neat writing.]

The terminological naivety illustrated by these quotations from the interviews can cause considerable confusion and poor communication.

5.5.2 The emotional/affective dimension

People engage in voluntary work for an agency such as the PCAB because they feel a need to contribute something to the wider community in which they live. This motive was expressed by several voluntary workers interviewed by the researcher. While it points to a certain selflessness in the voluntary workers, some are less prepared to become deeply involved in the work than others. The difference in level of commitment can cause friction, for instance in discussions of the hours of opening of the office during meetings of voluntary workers.

Self-criticism and feelings of inadequacy *vis à vis* the information storage and retrieval system were revealed in a few interviews, such as the one where a voluntary worker of foreign origin (for whom English is a third language) described her difficulties with finding information in the (English) card index under the terms that occurred to her. When asked whether she had made suggestions for alternative entries in the index, she said:

> "No, I haven't. I thought I was stupid, and that's why I couldn't find it. I didn't blame the cards. I blamed myself."

In reaction to the suggestion that a concept may be entered under several terms, she reacted with:

> "The first thing I said if [Z] said: 'Didn't you look under that?' was to say: 'Oh, how stupid of me!' So I didn't think of saying: 'Well, why didn't you put it under the other one?'"

5.6 ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

Several voluntary workers in the interviews emphasised the importance of applying

the administrative procedure rigorously to ensure the continuity of work on individual cases by successive volunteers. One volunteer said:

> "What is important about CAB is their system of dealing with cases. It's a very cut-and-dried procedure that you have to follow. And it's important, because this is a volunteer organisation, and tomorrow there's going to be somebody different dealing with this case. Unless you all work in the same way, another person come dealing with the case will have to start from the word go."

Another volunteer spoke of:

> "... CAB'S administrative procedures, which are important - you get to realise they're important when you work there for a while - exactly how you fill out a case sheet and do this and that and the other thing, and a good line of the information you should get from every succeeding case. ... With CAB you've got someone different handling the same case many, many times, possibly. So that the accuracy of your reporting to the next voluntary worker and subsequent ones is important."

While other volunteers expressed similar sentiments, it has been observed that all volunteers do not adhere to the procedure as meticulously as needed to make it really effective. Details are not invariably noted, even when it can be deduced from the notes in a case file that the interviewing volunteer must have retrieved needed information, such as a telephone number, and not written it down, so that a subsequent volunteer has to search for it again.

5.7   SUMMARY

In this chapter the information providing activities of the PCAB have been described

as experienced by the researcher and as carried out routinely by all interviewing volunteers. The use of the information storage and retrieval tools was described. Their discussion follows in Chapter 7. The training of interviewing volunteers was described and appraised. Certain personal dimensions of the counselling work carried out were identified.

In Chapter 6 information storage and retrieval as carried out in professional situations will be outlined.

CHAPTER 6

INFORMATION STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL:
THE PROFESSIONAL APPROACH

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter information storage and retrieval (ISAR) is described as it is practised professionally. Over a number of decades a professional theory of ISAR has been built up. Thus far the researcher has looked at the ISAR system of the PCAB from the view of a participant. The time has now come to compare the naive practices of the voluntary workers at the PCAB with a professional approach. As a first step a brief overview is given of the theory that underlies professional practice.

6.2 DEVELOPMENT OF ISAR

The study of ISAR developed parallel to the development of Information Science as discipline. Information Science evolved as a result of the production of large amounts of scientific and technical literature since the beginning of the twentieth century. This production accelerated during and after World War II, making the need for efficient methods of analysing, storing and retrieving the information in the documents ever more urgent. A precursor of Information Science was Documentation, which emphasised the intellectual organisation of knowledge, rather than the physical arrangement and handling of documents (Wellisch 1972:160). In the early fifties Mooers coined the term "information retrieval" to refer to the activities aimed at ensuring access to recorded knowledge, with the implication that it concerned the subject content, regardless of the form in which it was presented (University of South Africa 1992:34). Mooers "viewed an information retrieval system as a machine that indexes and selects information in a library" (Kochen 1974:3). The term "information retrieval" was later expanded to "information

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storage and retrieval," a more accurate description of the activity. Possibly even more accurate is "information organisation and retrieval," which occurs in some texts. In this thesis information storage and retrieval (ISAR) will be used.

6.3   PROFESSIONAL ISAR

The researcher chose the work *Organising information: principles of data base and retrieval systems*, by Dagobert Soergel (San Diego, California: Academic Press: 1985) as the point of departure for the description of current professional ISAR systems, because Soergel presents them in a very simple, lucid manner. Soergel provides a general framework for ISAR systems that can be applied in the design, maintenance and analysis of small systems used in information agencies, such as information and referral centres, or of very large management information systems (Soergel 1985:3). He explains his ideas by means of a series of diagrams that range from a very simple outline to a quite complex and detailed flow chart. However, each succeeding diagram is a development of the previous one, so that the ultimate diagram is compatible with the first, and with every intermediate one.

Another reason why Soergel's book was chosen, is that it is used as a recommended text in tertiary studies of the organisation of information, for instance in the Department of Information Science of the University of South Africa. Other texts could have been chosen, but this one is an accessible work, well suited to serve as a representative example.

The retrieval of information in answer to a question, depends on the organisation of data or entities to provide for the selection of required information according to characteristics specified by information users. The term "entities" is used in the sense intended by Soergel (1985:xiii) when he wrote: "Information systems deal with many types of entities: events, persons, documents, business transactions, museum objects, research projects, and technical parts, to name a few." The system must

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collect information-bearing entities which will form the resource from which the information needs of the users can be fulfilled. An information system must also collect information about the needs of users and potential users of the system.

There are two sides to ISAR: the selection, organisation and storage of information on the one hand, and the retrieval of information on the other. These two sides are interdependent, as the manner in which information is retrieved determines what entities and information should be selected and how they should be organised and stored.

Soergel (1985:3) presents an information system as an open system, which receives an input or inputs from its environment, processes and stores what was input in various ways, and delivers an output to the environment.

Figure 6.1. Outline of the structure of an information system
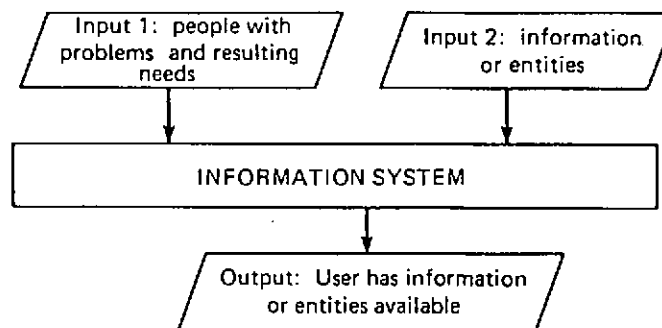
Source: Soergel (1985:3)

6.3.1 Input

Input 1 in Figure 6.1 represents the actual requests with which users approach the system. The information bearing entities added to the system are the major part of

Input 2.

The purposeful selection of information sources is carried out by professionally
trained information workers who scan publishers' lists, reviews in professional
periodicals and other selection tools. In this selection the information professionals
are guided by selection standards established over the years. These standards govern
the presentation of the content and the physical format of information retrieval
entities. Depending on the users' needs, collections of data or isolated pieces of
information may also be selected. Selection of this kind of input may be carried out
by means of the monitoring of newspapers, journals and broadcasts. An aspect of
selection is the screening of donated entities or information to ensure that such
materials can satisfy users' needs and are not out of date.

In the case of professionally managed information systems, information about the
needs of users is collected by means of surveys of the information needs of the
population served by the specific information system. Information needs expressed
as individual requests can also be regarded as input to the system, as they may
influence subsequent selection of information sources. Soergel (1985:94) refers to
this procedure as collecting information on user needs by an incremental process.
Information gathered in these two ways is a determinant of Input 2 in figure 6.1.
The information on needs is processed to assist information professionals who are
charged with selecting information to be input into the system.

6.3.2 Processing

When selected entities are received in the information system, their arrival is
recorded as part of an acquisition procedure and each item is allocated a unique
identifying number. This number is often used in the retrieval system to identify the
specific entity.

The processes used to organise the entities with a view to later retrieval of

information from the system fall into two broad categories, namely the analysis of the content of entities by subject, and the description of the physical entities containing the information. Both these categories lead to the creation of surrogates to represent the entities in data bases such as catalogues and indexes, which can be consulted in the process of information retrieval. A *surrogate* is a brief representation of the complete entity, which takes the place of the entity when it is not practicable to use the complete entity. Borko and Bernier (1975:5) are of the opinion that "without surrogates, such as abstracts, search through the accumulated literature would be impossible." The surrogates, whether abstracts, or entries in catalogues or indexes, provide access points through which users can gain entry to ISAR systems. *Harrod's librarians' glossary* (1984:4) defines an *access point* as "any unique heading, or heading with its qualifier, in an index". *Index*, here, may be given a broad interpretation of any database referring to sources of information. Owing to advances in computer technology, full-text search is now possible. However, extensive use is still made of surrogates.

6.3.2.1 Subject analysis procedures

Subject analysis practised in libraries and related information enterprises comprises three procedures, namely classification, indexing and abstracting. Lancaster and Warner (1993:79) caution that extreme care should be taken in the choice of the method of subject analysis and description used in an information system, as it influences the searches that can be performed in the system.

Classification, or the arrangement of entities according to their likeness or unlikeness, is usually carried out in accordance with a standardised scheme, such as the *Dewey Decimal Classification*, depending on the needs of users of the specific information system. Classification comprises the intellectual analysis of the subject content of the entity and the allocation of one or more notations from the classification schedules to represent the content of the entity.

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Indexing also involves the intellectual analysis of the subject content of entities. The content is then represented using words, known as descriptors or index terms. Descriptors are sometimes derived from the title or text of the entities, that is, natural language is used. This type of indexing is known as "derived" indexing. Alternatively descriptors are chosen from a standardised list of terms or a thesaurus and assigned to entities, according to the needs of the information system. This is known as "assigned" indexing (Foskett 1982:68). In such cases a controlled vocabulary is used. The *Thesaurus of ERIC descriptors* could, for instance, be used to index entities and information for an information centre active in social work.

Some systems coordinate concepts at the time information is analysed and are called precoordinate ISAR systems (precombined, Soergel 1985:291). Precoordinate indexing entails that important relationships among topics discussed in an entity are recognised by the indexer and explicitly brought together in the index entries used to represent the entity (Lancaster 1979:17). Precoordinate indexing terms usually consist of combinations of two or more words, for instance "Child abuse". The way in which the relationships among terms are represented is decided at the indexing stage and the searcher will have to approach the system from the same angle as the indexer has decreed. An example of a precoordinate indexing vocabulary is the *Library of Congress Subject Headings*.

A type of precoordinate indexing is alphabetico-classed arrangement of index terms. In this type of index, "a topic is entered under a broad heading which includes it, if necessary using a whole series of intermediate divisions of the broad subject" (Foskett 1982:143-144), for example "Animals - Horses - Lippizaner". Headings are indirect, as contrasted with the usually direct descriptors used in postcoordinate indexing. A system of references is required to serve as an entry vocabulary to lead users from the specific terms under which they may search to the more general heading under which those terms are subsumed (Foskett 1982:287).

An authority list of indexing terms is compiled if an existing list, such as *Sears list*

of subject headings, is not used for the assigning of indexing terms.

Other systems provide for the analysis of subject content using simple concepts, represented by descriptors, which can then be coordinated or combined at the time a search is carried out. These are called postcoordinate ISAR systems (postcombined, Soergel 1985:305). Several concepts may be chosen to represent a single entity, for example "nutrition", "feeding schemes" and "children". At the time of an information search, two or more concepts representing the topic of the search are linked with the help of Boolean logic to retrieve information on a complex subject. To search an information system using postcoordinate principles, some mechanical search apparatus (e.g. edge punched cards and a "knitting needle") is necessary. These mechanical postcoordinate search tools have now mostly been superseded by computers.

Terms chosen for use in indexing vocabularies, such as the lists of subject headings and thesauri mentioned as examples above, are often related to one another in relationships of equivalence, hierarchy or affinity/association (Foskett 1982:72). Such semantic relationships are indicated in the indexing vocabularies (also called index languages) by means of cross references. The creator of the indexing vocabulary will, for instance, decide to use the term "children's homes" and refer to it from all synonymous or near-synonymous terms, such as "orphanages" and "places of safety". Semantic relationships in indexing languages are discussed in detail in the work by Foskett (1982:67-85). Lancaster (1972:16) quotes Cutter as saying that the cross references provide a "syndetic structure", that is, a hidden classification scheme, in the list of subject headings.

Abstracting consists of the writing of condensed representations of articles or other documents, a specialised activity. The purpose of an abstract is to "give the reader exact and concise knowledge of the total content of the very much more lengthy original" (Collison 1971:4). Abstracting is carried out to decrease the time required for searching the tremendous amount of scientific and technical writing produced

throughout the world (Cleveland & Cleveland 1983:105).

6.3.2.2 Subject analysis decisions

In choosing a method or methods of subject analysis to apply in a specific ISAR system, the designer of the system should consider whether it is desirable to put a great deal of effort into the processing of information, with the aim of making the search for information relatively effortless, or to put less effort into the processing stage, thus making searches for information more laborious. Cost considerations are likely to have an important influence on the choice. The choice will lie between the use of natural language and a controlled vocabulary; between a precoordinate and a postcoordinate approach; and between one-step search and a multi-step search operation.

When indexing terms are derived from the title or text of entities, natural language is used in the indexing process. Natural language is likely to provide many more access points in an ISAR system than a controlled vocabulary. Since the specific words of the author are used, natural language allows greater specificity in the selection of indexing terms than a controlled vocabulary. According to Cleveland & Cleveland (1990:79) the rationale for using natural language in ISAR is that the authors use words that conform to the subject field under discussion and thus communicate directly with the readers in a commonly understood language. Lancaster (1991:199) points out that "the full text of a document [that is, natural language] is likely to provide considerable redundancy, increasing the chance that it will include an expression used by a searcher". On the other hand, the large number of access points may entail that some of them relate to relatively minor aspects of the entities retrieved with their help, or that the relationship between access points and entities may be spurious (Lancaster 1991:198). Carrying out a search in a natural language system generally demands more time and effort than searching a system using a controlled vocabulary (Cleveland & Cleveland 1983:48). The searcher has to think of possible access points, spelling variants, synonyms and so

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forth, and to think of *all* possible access points if an exhaustive search is required.

A controlled vocabulary is used to improve consistency among indexers, that is, they are limited in the choice of access points which they may assign to entities (Lancaster 1972:2). At the same time the list of terms in the controlled indexing language acts as a guide to information searchers when choosing classes in which relevant entities may be found. A primary function of a controlled vocabulary is that it controls the use of synonyms and near synonyms. It shows horizontal and vertical relationships among terms by means of cross-references (Cleveland & Cleveland 1983:49). However, it is expensive to create and maintain a thesaurus for a large system using a controlled vocabulary (Lancaster 1972:218). Input to a system using a controlled vocabulary is more expensive and time-consuming than input using natural language.

Whether natural language or a controlled vocabulary is used, it is possible to allocate multiple access points to concepts identified in the subject content of indexed entities, for instance, by making access points for all synonyms or near synonyms of a concept chosen to name the subject content of an entity. The system of cross-references made to deal with the relationships among such access points, was outlined in section 6.3.2.1. One of the decisions which the designer of an ISAR system should make, is how far provision for multiple access points will go: should the indexers provide an unlimited number of access points to a concept, that is for every synonym or near-synonym they can think of, or for every acronym or abbreviation under which a searcher may look for that concept? The provision of unlimited cross-references will increase the effort and therefore the cost of constructing the index. On the other hand, it may make searching the index much easier for the user than if he has to think of one of a limited number of access points to find the required information.

The matching process in library and information services is of necessity a multi-step process, as different types of entities are stored in more than one parallel sequences,

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because of the differing formats in which those entities occur, for instance reference books and books for loan, sound recordings and videos. Use is then made of surrogates such as bibliographic descriptions in catalogues, indexes and the like, as a first search step to provide access to entities required.

A user who understands the use of a catalogue or index, may be able to carry out the first step of identifying a required entity in such a retrieval tool. Using the information found in the catalogue or index, and given an open access collection, the user may also be able to follow this up with the second step, of finding the required item on a shelf or in a filing cabinet. If the user does not have the necessary library skills, or has only a vague information need, another step will be added to the process, as he will have to ask the help of a librarian or information officer to assist him in finding the required entity (see also section 6.3.4).

Processing entities for one-step search is likely to demand greater effort and be more expensive than processing them for multi-step search. A multi-step search, on the other hand, involves greater effort at the time a search is conducted.

6.3.2.3 Physical description

In the context of libraries, the physical description of entities is called cataloguing, also known as "descriptive cataloguing". In a large part of the world, this is carried out according to a set of rules known as the *Anglo American Cataloging Rules* (*AACR*), now in the revised form of the second edition (*AACR2R*). These rules also serve as the basis for computerised cataloguing. The purpose of descriptive cataloguing is to identify a bibliographic entity in such a manner that it can be distinguished from other bibliographic entities (University of South Africa 1992:124). Index entries and abstracts also contain bibliographic descriptions of entities compiled in accordance with the *AACR* or alternative sets of rules.

6.3.3 Storage

The storage of information entities in an ISAR system depends on the organisation of the particular system and the format of the entities. In a library, for instance, much of the stock is likely to be in the form of books and periodicals which will be stored on shelves. When access is open to users, it is customary to arrange these materials in order of the classification notations allocated to them. This makes the individual entities readily retrievable. Reports, preprints and other pamphlet-type documents, which are often in a limp format not suitable to be kept on bookshelves, are likely to be kept in vertical files, for instance in filing cabinets, in which they will be arranged alphabetically or according to classification notation. Entities in other media, such as sound recordings, will be stored according to their shape and size. In a management information system much of the information is likely to be in electronic form, retrievable by subject descriptors or other codes, allocated during an indexing process.

6.3.4 Information retrieval

To arrive at the output of an information system, it is necessary that the user or an intermediary should match the expressed need (demand) of a user with the entities or information processed and stored in the system or their surrogates. This is the true information retrieval step, that is, the raison d'être of the ISAR system. *Harrod's librarians' glossary* (1995:321) defines *information retrieval* as "the finding and recall of information from a store".

In a library a user may personally search the catalogue for a publication of which he knows the title or author. At this stage the user retrieves a surrogate of the required entity, which indicates that the entity forms part of the local system and where it can be found. If successful, and if the collection is open to access, the user can then search the shelves for the required entity, using the notation obtained from the catalogue. A user who possesses the necessary skills may also search indexes and

abstracting publications or the equivalent databases for needed information. If a user's search is unsuccessful, or if the need is more complex, the user may ask a librarian to act as intermediary in the search. In a technical information service, the user is likely to begin by stating the need to an intermediary (a librarian or information worker). At this stage, the information need is regarded as input. When the library user finds the corresponding publication and has it issued to him, the information system can show a successful output. The same happens when the intermediary has supplied the user of the technical information service with the required information, which is not necessarily in the form of entities from the collection, but may be processed data or information from a computerised source, that is, repackaged information.

If the user of a library or information service does not know the identifying characteristic(s) of an entity, but expresses a vague need, an information worker conducts an interview with the user to establish the nature of the need. The information worker then interprets the user's need in terms of the language of the information system, to make possible the matching procedure that will yield the required information. The result may be classification notations or descriptors which represent the subject content of entities or information retrieved from the system and that may fulfil the user's information need.

If the user is not satisfied with the retrieved information, that is, it does not satisfy the need or it is out of date, this judgement must be fed back into the system so that the information in the system can be adapted or up-dated, or the query can be reformulated, as shown in Figure 6.2.

6.4 EVALUATION

The evaluation of information storage and retrieval systems has gained importance over the past two to three decades as commercial databases and other ISAR systems

Figure 6.2. The structure of an ISAR system
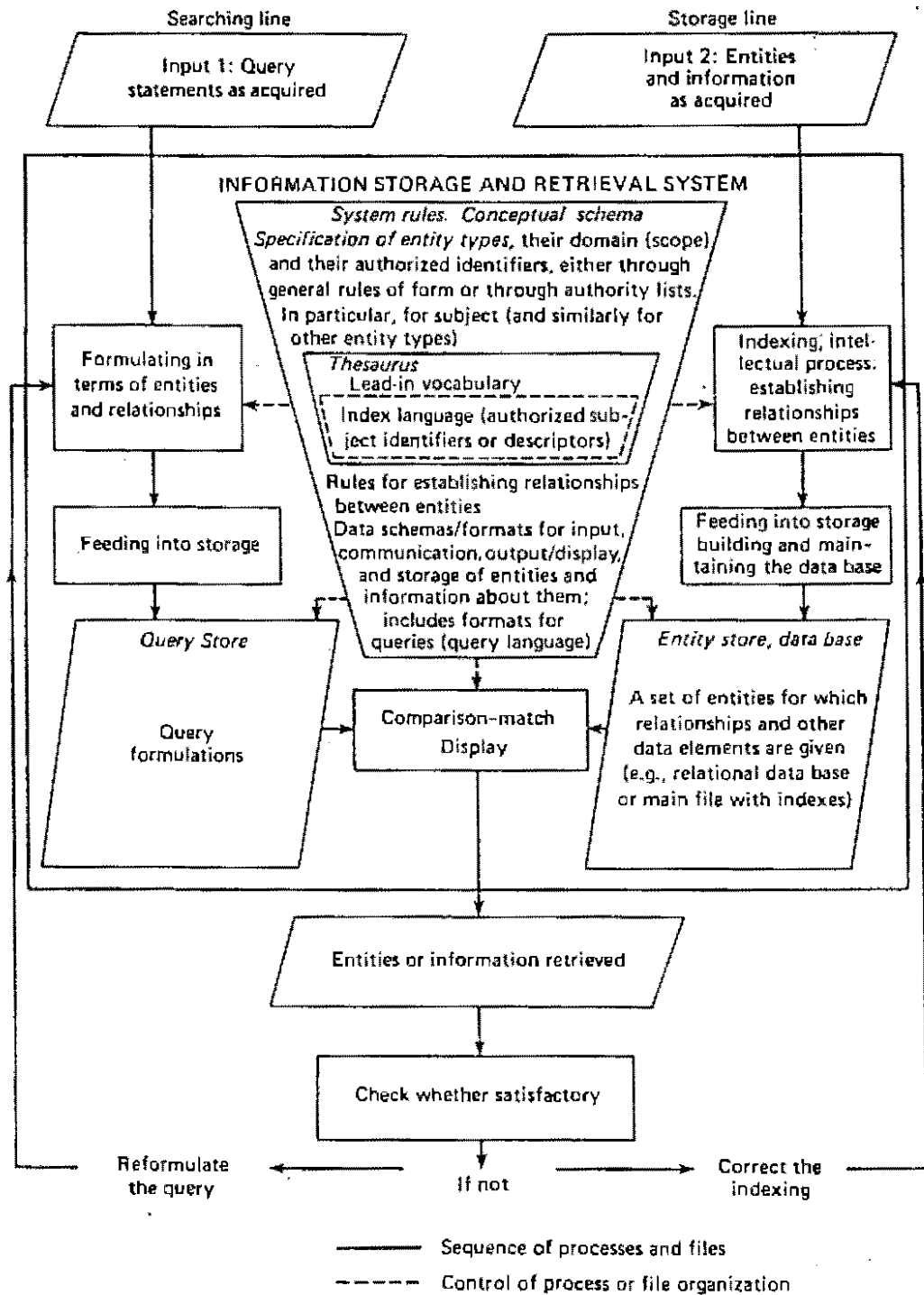
Source: Soergel (1985:58)

have proliferated. It has become necessary for libraries and other users to be able to apply scientifically established performance measures and criteria to such databases or systems to determine their quality or to find the ones most suitable for their purposes.

Boon (as translated by Lor 1990:102) draws the following distinction between a criterion and a measure:

> A *criterion* can be defined as a norm or requirement, as expressed in words, which a retrieval system should meet, while the *measure* is a quantitative indication by means of which it is determined to what extent the criterion is met.

Recall, precision and novelty are performance measures applied in the evaluation ofprofessionally operated information systems. Lancaster (1991:4) defines *recall* as "the ability to retrieve useful items" and *precision* as "the ability to avoid retrieving useless items". Recall and precision are in inverse proportion to one another. *Novelty* is defined as "the ability of the system to retrieve information which is not familiar to the user" (University of South Africa 1992:340). The individual who requests the information should judge whether retrieved items are useful or useless. In this connection the terms "relevance" and "pertinence" are used. Judgement of the relevance or the pertinence of items retrieved in an information search is subjective and therefore controversial (Soergel 1985:127). Lancaster and Warner (1993:47-63) discuss the problems connected to these concepts in depth. Since these performance measures will not be applied in this thesis, they will not be discussed in greater depth.

Soergel (1985) integrates the evaluation of an ISAR system with the process of designing the system and deciding on the choice of various features, such as a classification schedule to fit the system's requirements. In the present study, an existing ISAR system is examined. While the ISAR tools in the PCAB may superficially conform to the description of professional ISAR tools, they are not

amenable to evaluation with the help of performance measures applied to professional ISAR systems. However, following Boon's definition, cited above, criteria can be expressed against which the ISAR tools of the PCAB may be evaluated.

Some criteria that may be considered are:

coverage   which is the scope of the ISAR system in respect of subjects and languages and the type of entities it contains

time   which may be

(1) the period covered by the ISAR system, or

(2) the time needed to search the system and provide the user with information or an entity

effort   which may be

(1) the effort put in by the information worker in adding information to the system, or

(2) the effort the user has to expend in searching the system

novelty   which is the ability of the ISAR system to bring previously unknown items to the attention of users

accuracy   which refers to the correctness of information retrieved from the ISAR system (University of South Africa 1992:337).

Some of these criteria are applied in discussing the ISAR tools of the PCAB in Chapter 7.

6.5   SUMMARY

The development of ISAR was outlined. The current practice of ISAR and some criteria for the evaluation of ISAR systems were described, to form a basis for the comparison of the practice of ISAR in the PCAB in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7

COMPARISON OF THE PROCEDURE AND TOOLS AT THE PCAB WITH THE PROFESSIONAL APPROACH

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the procedure for helping clients in the PCAB and the ISAR tools used to do so are compared with the professional approach to information storage and retrieval explained in Chapter 6. Comments and criticism expressed by voluntary workers during interviews are used to illustrate aspects of the discussion. Observations by the researcher are included where appropriate.

Professional tools and procedures for ISAR are purposeful. They are based on theory that has developed over many years, particularly the last century (see section 6.2). By comparison, the ISAR tools and procedures in the PCAB came into being in an evolutionary fashion and do not rest on any formal theoretical base. This is supported by the evidence presented in Chapter 4.

7.2 INPUT

As indicated in Figure 6.1 and described in section 6.3.1, the input to an information system consists on the one hand of the requests of users and on the other of information entities to be used in answering those requests.

7.2.1 Users' requests

In respect of professional ISAR, reference is usually made to "user needs". In the PCAB the users of the ISAR tools are the interviewing volunteers. However, the user needs reflected in those tools are the needs of the clients. In the case of the

PCAB, the requests of clients for assistance, interpreted by the interviewing volunteers as information needs, are part of Input 1 in Figure 6.1.

In early minutes of the pilot committee that founded the PCAB there is mention of committee members and counsellors collecting information with a view to dealing with the needs expressed by clients. References to this period in interviews conducted by the researcher give the impression that the participants in this procedure were feeling their way and guessing what information would be required. A voluntary worker recollected:

> "We weren't quite sure what we'd be asked or what the problems would be. We had no know-how really. So we said: 'Well, let's spend a month or so collecting some information and then we'll open the office.'"

and later:

> "When a problem came up, we had to do our best to find out about that. And then we started keeping useful information, and the information just slowly grew and got better and better."

As the PCAB became operative, the enquiries received provided the voluntary workers with a better basis for selecting information to be entered into the system.

In the PCAB today, interviewing volunteers collect information about the needs of users through interviews with clients. If answers cannot be found using the existing ISAR tools, the unfulfilled needs may be brought to the attention of the Administrative Secretary or other voluntary workers when they are consulted by the volunteer who interviewed a client with an unusual need. Alternatively such needs may be brought to the attention of others during the monthly meeting of voluntary workers. The agenda for those meetings provides an opportunity for the presentation of interesting cases by individual interviewing volunteers. The presentations and

their discussion sometimes contain ideas for augmenting or amending the card index and the indexing vocabulary. These activities are unsystematic. The collection of information about user needs in the PCAB, therefore, takes place in an informal and largely haphazard manner (compare section 6.3.1).

7.2.2 Information resources

In South Africa there is no central organisation that provides information to all the CABx, similar to NACAB in the United Kingdom (described in section 2.2). Selection of information bearing material for the PCAB is carried out in an unsystematic way. Information is collected informally by voluntary workers reading the daily and weekly newspapers and odd magazines they would have read in any case. At meetings they occasionally mention items they heard in radio or television broadcasts. No systematic attempt is made to throw the net wider by, for instance, buying and scanning newspapers not already seen by voluntary workers from personal choice. Brochures and other pamphlets issued by government departments, welfare agencies and similar organisations are collected as voluntary workers come across or become aware of them, often through news items or reviews in newspapers. Acquisition of information is therefore largely a passive process. A few legal reference works for the layman are kept in the office (described in sections 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10). No systematic selection is carried out to augment this small collection.

During 1996 the Pretoria Community Library (PCL) approached the PCAB with a view to collaborating on the maintenance of a community information database. The PCAB obtained a print-out of the information contained in the computerised community information database of the PCL. Examination of the print-out showed that many entries in the database were out of date. It appeared therefore that the PCL, probably owing to cuts in its income and the resultant staff shortage, was experiencing as much difficulty keeping its data base up to date as the PCAB is having. The database of the PCL can therefore not be seen as a possible source of

reliable information for the PCAB.

7.3 PROCESSING

At the PCAB subject analysis and the physical description of entities input into the
system are carried out in an integrated manner, not as distinct operations.
As mentioned in section 7.2.2, the PCAB has no support system which processes
and supplies information for the development and maintenance of its information
resource, such as that provided by the NACAB to CABx in the United Kingdom.
Moreover, no standard list of headings, like *Sears list of subject headings*, is used to
govern the choice of headings for the card index and the pamphlet file in the PCAB.

7.3.1 The card index

The card index (described in section 4.2) is a hybrid, consisting of actual
information used in answering the enquiries of clients and references to sources of
information, some of them stored in the PCAB, and others external sources that may
be telephoned or to which clients may be referred. The card index is not simply a
collection of surrogates for information-bearing entities, like a library catalogue.

Newspaper cuttings, pamphlets and odd bits of information are scanned regularly by
the information volunteers. Information thought to be possibly useful, is typewritten
on cards to be placed in the card index. This may be on existing cards, or where
necessary, new cards. The card index is up-dated when new information is received
or when a voluntary worker discovers in the course of use that particular
information is out of date. The card index is also up-dated and maintainted in a
continuous operation.

7.3.1.1 Subject analysis

The card index was developed by information volunteers without formal training in

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information skills. The headings allocated are a mixture of subject headings and arbitrarily chosen terms. No discernible rules are applied in establishing the form of headings, for instance, the adjective "legal" appears as a heading on a yellow card. In professional systems concepts are denoted by nouns. Adjectives are used only in conjunction with nouns, to show adjectival properties (Foskett 1982:70). The general approach discerned in the subject headings is a precoordinate one, while many proper names are used as headings (see examples in Appendix F).

Since much of the information required is of a local nature, it is possibly not a serious defect that no standard list of terms is used, as a standard list would have had to be augmented by local terms. However, such a list could assist information volunteers in choosing index terms and interviewing volunteers in finding terms on which to search. It could also contribute to greater consistency in the selection of new headings and standardising the form of headings.

The card index serves as its own list of headings. If an information volunteer thinks an item of information should be given a heading not yet in the card index, she may make a new entry for the heading she wishes to use. If related information has already been indexed under a heading not thought of by the present information volunteer, it may happen that no relationship is shown between the information already present and the newly added information. The semantic relationship which exists in indexing vocabularies is explained in section 6.3.2.1. Interviewing volunteers may make suggestions for the addition of headings if they search for information in the index under headings not provided (mechanism explained in section 4.6.4). The information volunteers decide whether to include the suggested headings or not. Very little consultation takes place because information volunteers usually work in the office at times when the interviewing volunteers are not there. There is no formal mechanism for coordinating ideas about entries in the card index. This leaves room for personal preferences to bring about an idiosyncratic index.

Because the headings chosen as access points in the ISAR system are not formally

structured, the number of cards in a series under a yellow main card easily becomes large. Appendix F is a reproduction of the two yellow cards for the subject "Child/Children", showing how the subtopics for which cards follow are numbered as they are added to the index. The numbering of subtopics, rather than arranging them in alphabetic sequence, for instance, is in itself a confusing factor in the construction of the index. In this example there are already 33 subtopics. As can be seen, headings for the subtopic cards are not consistent: some are precoordinate subject headings, such as "Child abuse", others are alphabetico-classed headings, such as "Children - Gifted", whereas others are proper names, such as "Childrens' Villages Association". However, proper names are accepted as subject headings in professional ISAR systems. Since the main heading is "Child/Children", it is unnecessary to have subsidiary entries reading *Child* abuse" or *Children* - Gifted". The entry "Children - Minors" should not be in this sequence at all. Instead there should be a cross reference in the main sequence of cards reading "MINORS *see* CHILD/CHILDREN". In a professional ISAR language the heading "Child/Children" would be simply "Children", as the plural is normally used, the singular being subsumed under it.

Some subtopics represent problems (for instance, "Child abuse"), whereas other subtopics represent possible solutions (for instance, "Child line"). In the present arrangement the possible relevance of particular solutions to problems indicated by headings is not shown and such connections may not be obvious to interviewing volunteers. Confronted with a particular problem an interviewing volunteer may have to read through several subtopic cards to find the applicable solution.

As mentioned earlier in this section, the headings are chosen by information volunteers without reference to a standardised authority list. It is therefore interesting to note the almost instinctive tendency shown by the information volunteers to classify, that is to form alphabetico-classed headings (explained in section 6.3.2.1), for instance "Children - Gifted" and "Children - Missing".

When so many subtopics are placed under a main heading, it becomes difficult to search for information and a searcher can easily miss relevant information. In spite of the numbering of subtopics, cards for subdivisions under a yellow main card are easily misfiled. These problems point to a need to reconsider this method of subdividing the index.

Inconsistency in indexing is illustrated by the allocation of the headings "Clubs and Associations" and "Clubs and Organisations" in the parallel sequence set aside for recreation and hobbies, women's clubs, and clubs and organisations at the end of the second copy of the card index. The rationale for the distinction is not apparent. This points once more to a need for a standard list of headings or a thesaurus, to assist information volunteers in allocating headings to new topics added to the index.

The card index embodies the assumption that grouping cards together under broad headings, that is, applying broad subject classes, will make the information they contain more accessible than if concepts of smaller extent are arranged in alphabetical order. This illustrates the human instinct to classify objects according to their likeness. As carried out by the naive information workers of the PCAB this principle breaks down, because the information volunteers do not appreciate the multidimensional nature of information. Cards are often placed within a group simply because a certain word has been used in a name or heading, not necessarily because the subjects they represent really belong in that group. When the number of cards under a group heading becomes large, confusion can arise, as subtopics may be hidden under a main heading that does not occur to interviewing volunteers. Moreover, specific topics can be lost in the larger grouping if meticulous use is not made of cross references. The mode of arrangement applied under each group heading, that is, a chronological numbering of subtopics as they are added to the index, is another source of confusion.

7.3.1.2 Coverage

Some voluntary workers expressed approval of the coverage of the card index during interviews, for example:

> "I was impressed by how varied it was. I've always been impressed by that card system."

Several people interviewed suggested that the coverage be extended, for instance that more information should be placed in the index, and that information at present available in other resources could possibly be placed on the cards, for instance:

> "I would like to have everything in the cards. Am I asking too much?"

and

> "I feel that all those industrial councils could be on the cards, and not in that file."

It was clear that these interviewing volunteers did not realise the implications in terms of effort and time of the improvements they suggested. The comments above imply the creation of a system with one-step search instead of the multi-step search at present in use. This would require more work at the processing stage than is at present carried out, but have the advantage of less effort at the time a search is conducted than is at present necessary.

Abstracting or excerpting could be applied with benefit to some of the entities added to the resource base, thus helping to create a one-step search facility as hinted by the following remark in an interview:

> "If you have it in front of you, and say there was a short summary of the notice periods, and somebody phones, then you can quickly read it off."

However, the question arises whether it would be realistic to expect that this type of activity be undertaken by volunteers without formal training in information handling skills, such as the majority of those employed in the PCAB.

7.3.1.3 Accuracy

During meetings of voluntary workers, individuals often express concern about out-of-date information in the card index and the pamphlet file, as a factor that causes the PCAB to appear in a bad light when enquirers are given dated information, such as superseded telephone numbers (compare Case 8 under section 5.2). In interviews this concern came out as follows:

> "One of the problems is, of course, the darn thing [card index] isn't always up to date."

and

> "The cards are difficult to keep up to date. ... After I got about three out-of-date telephone numbers, I got very touchy."

and

> "I really feel the cards could be up-dated more."

Keeping the information in an index such as that in the PCAB up to date calls for continuous checking and maintenance. Because the information volunteers each work for a few hours a week, input into and maintenance of the index is carried out intermittently. Possibly not enough hours are devoted to this never-ending task. It is complicated by the existence of the two copies of the index, in which the same amendments have to be made. Computerisation of the index offers a likely solution to this problem.

7.3.1.4 Ease of use

The same interviewing volunteers who praised the index, also offered criticism, that

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more access points were needed, for instance:

> "For this type of system you've got to have more words. In the olden days
> you had various keywords. You cannot be as complete as with a computer
> system with searches, but you should have more keywords."

The *Encyclopedia of library and information science* (1986:126) offers the following
definition: "Keyword: A content-indicative word. A word selected from the title
and/or abstract/extract of a document that serves somewhat like an index term."
This appears to be the connotation the term has for the volunteer cited above, the
only one who consistently spoke of "keywords". It is clear, in any case, that he is
requesting more access points in the index.

Another volunteer commented:

> "There could be more cross-references for different approaches."

On the other hand, one interviewing volunteer, questioned about the use of the
index, said:

> "I find it reasonably easy to use. There are some cross-references, so
> usually, whatever I've looked for, if I hadn't found it in my first guess, I
> found it at the second guess."

The functions of cross-references in an indexing vocabulary are explained in section
6.3.2.1. In an organisation such as the PCAB, where no ready-made list of subject
headings or thesaurus is used, it is important that users of the card index should
realise that each of them can make a contribution to the store of cross-references and
the resulting hidden structure of the index, by noting terms under which they
searched for information without finding anything (mechanism described in section
4.6.4). It appeared from the interviews that interviewing volunteers were not always

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aware that they could make suggestions for the improvement of the card index, for instance by suggesting additional access points. At least one was under the impression that it was a personal shortcoming if she could not think of the access point provided by the indexing volunteers. Asked whether she had experienced any difficulty in using the index, she said:

"I was a little bit confused, because something that I would have put under a certain term, I didn't find it there, and it was under some other term ... I thought I was stupid, and that's why I couldn't find it. I didn't blame the cards. I blamed myself."

English was not this interviewing volunteer's first language, which brings us to the next point.

7.3.1.5 Language

The voluntary workers come from heterogeneous backgrounds. The language of the ISAR system of the PCAB is English. The country's government was bilingual English and Afrikaans, from the time of the foundation of the PCAB until the early nineties. The fact that some of the voluntary workers had Afrikaans or a European language other than English as their first language, was a complicating factor when they had to think of access points to the information in the system, since English is not the language in which they would normally think, as expressed in the following excerpt from an interview:

"Being Afrikaans, I think in Afrikaans, and I've got to start thinking in English. Certain things you find under ... which I think I could have found someplace else."

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7.3.1.6 Physical format

The physical format of the card index, namely two parallel sets of cards, supposedly containing identical information, presents certain problems, as is shown in this section.

As described in section 4.2, certain topics are filed outside the main alphabetical sequence, some at the back of the index in the main office, others at the back of the index on the second interviewing desk.

The researcher could not establish from the minutes of meetings, annual reports or interviews with volunteers when the decision was made to create a duplicate set of the index. It is known that in the early days of the existence of the PCAB, volunteers were on duty in the Bureau one at a time, so that there was no need for a duplicate index. The Administrative Secretary, when questioned, remembered that there was only one copy of the card index when she joined the PCAB in 1978. Moreover, it was still in handwritten form. She thought the duplicate index was created more than ten years before the researcher questioned her, that is, in the early eighties. She remembers it was already quite large and that it demanded a major effort to create the duplicate index. However, the sections kept at the back of one or the other set of the index contain relatively few cards. To duplicate the sections at present contained in only one of the two sets would not have added much effort to the overall operation of making a duplicate index.

This problem could have been obviated by computerising the index, but one can only speculate that this possibility would not have occurred to naive information workers in the early eighties. It is highly likely that most, if not all voluntary workers at that time were not computer literate and probably apprehensive of using computers. Creating a duplicate card index must have seemed to them like the obvious solution. Today, in the late nineties, the situation is quite different. People who come to the PCAB for the first time, for instance prospective voluntary workers, often have

experience of using a computer in the work situation and immediately suggest that computers be used to solve the problem of simultaneous access to the collection of information by more than one person, and to streamline storing, up-dating and accessing the information required for providing the PCAB's service to its clients.

Following from the demands for more information in the card index, the question arises: what would have happened if the original choice had fallen not on cards measuring 125 mm x 75 mm (5 inch x 3 inch), but on cards of a larger size, such as 152 mm x 100 mm (6 inch x 4 inch) or 220 mm x 127 mm (8 inch x 5 inch), to accommodate more information on certain subjects? Would the needs of the interviewing volunteers have been satisfied? The researcher has observed that many of the index cards carry the signs of multiple corrections. Information, for instance a telephone number, is deleted with the help of correcting fluid (*tipp ex*) and new information is typed or written in. After a few corrections a card looks very untidy (see examples in Appendix P). The practice of making corrections on existing cards rather than typing new cards, could have sprung from reasons of economy or from reluctance to retype unchanged information while correcting changed information. If larger cards had been used, the considerations of economy and retyping would have been stronger, as each card could have contained more information than the smaller ones do. Moreover, the problems with the current clumsy sub-division would have been proportionately larger, as a larger card size would have allowed a larger number of subsidiary entries to be typed on the main card (see section 7.3.1.1).

The problems arising from the format of the index illustrate the influence exerted by the decision to choose a specific format for an ISAR tool on the subsequent development, including the form and content, of such a tool. Once a format has been chosen and used for some time, the effort demanded to make a change can be seen as too great to consider, even in a professional situation.

7.3.2 The pamphlet file

The pamphlet file contains entities which the indexing volunteers consider worth retaining because of the information they contain, but which carry more information than can conveniently be placed on cards in the index. Entities are processed by being placed in large envelopes to which headings already used in the card index have been allocated. References to the pamphlet file are then made in the card index (described in section 4.3).

Very little attempt is at present made to abstract sections of the pamphlets containing the text of laws and other matters which may be used frequently, or the law books in the PCAB (compare section 7.3.1.2). The following comments from interviews point to a need for abstracting or excerpting the content of entities:

> "The only trouble with the filing cabinet [pamphlet file] is that the information is too detailed, when you just want a series of broad statements; one-line sentences: this, this, this and this. If you look at [the file for] Unemployment Insurance ... it's the actual laws and regulations, and you don't need that, you don't need all the circumlocutions. Just want broad statements, or facts."

and

> "You'd like a lot of condensed information available, rather than having to open a book, go through the index and get the information."

and

> "I only use it [the pamphlet file] when I have to. It needs to be extracted, really, and put on the cards."

The researcher observed that information on topics she consulted in the pamphlet file was often rather dated. While some of the pamphlets and brochures contained information that was still valid, for example brochures of homes for the aged, there were others that should have been removed, for instance in the envelope containing

leaflets dealing with bursaries.

The information volunteer who processes entities for the pamphlet file does not interview clients and therefore does not consult the pamphlet file. She possibly does not appreciate that it would be better rather to have *no* information on a subject in the pamphlet file than to have out of date documents. At meetings the interviewing volunteers do not criticise this ISAR tool, possibly because they make very little use of it.

7.3.3 The black information file

Entities placed in the black information file (described in section 4.7) are similar to those placed in the pamphlet file, but are regarded by the Administrative Secretary to be more frequently sought by interviewing volunteers. References to these entities are entered on the cards for the corresponding headings in the card index.

Comments about this tool in the interviews dealt with aspects of the retrieval rather than the processing of information.

The researcher regards this file as an anomaly. It was created to make selected, frequently consulted entities more easily accessible to the interviewing volunteers than they are in the pamphlet file. However, with time the file has grown to such an extent that it is now difficult to consult, so that interviewing volunteers are reluctant to use it, as will be shown in section 7.5.3. The separate existence of the file should be examined critically. It may be that some such tool can be justified in stead of the pamphlet file, but not in addition to it. The individual entities included in the file should in any event be evaluated for their currency and usefulness.

The continued maintenance and augmentation of the black information file, in spite of the fact that the interviewing volunteers dislike it and underutilise it (if they use it at all) points to a weakness of the system of episodic labour by voluntary workers,

as and when it suits their personal programmes. There is insufficient consultation between the information volunteers who process information and compile ISAR tools, and the interviewing volunteers who use those tools (compare section 7.3.1.1).

7.4 STORAGE

Some of the information collected for use in the PCAB is stored in the card index. Mention has been made section 7.3 of the fact that the index is a hybrid, in that it contains some information that may be of immediate use, while the rest of the information refers the user to other sources for the real answers.

Information-bearing entities that seem worth keeping but contain information which is too comprehensive to fit on a card for the index, are stored in envelopes in the pamphlet file or in plastic pockets in the black information file.

Other ISAR tools, in which information is stored, are used when an interviewing volunteer deems it necessary. Copies of the local telephone directories are kept next to each desk for rapid consultation. The various law books and files described in Chapter 4, because they are relatively few, are shelved together in the main office.

The interviewed voluntary workers did not comment on the way information is stored in the PCAB. However, in terms of their experience while retrieving information with the help of those tools, the volunteers interviewed by the researcher criticised the card index, pamphlet file and black information file, at present the ISAR tools where most of the information in use by the interviewing volunteers is stored (see section 7.5).

Compared with the majority of professional information systems, the PCAB is a small operation. Since it is a caregiving organisation, it does not often provide or lend its information entities to its clients. The information resources are not open to

access by the clients, but are used on their behalf by the interviewing volunteers. The needs of the clients can be fulfilled with the use of a relatively small collection of entities, so that storage space is not an important consideration. The way in which the information is stored, should however ensure easy access to the information by the interviewing volunteers. Storing excerpts of the texts of entitites as part of entries in the index, should make for easier access than if the whole of entities have to be examined for relevant information. The provision of sufficient access points and cross-references when information bearing entities are processed, may also ensure easy access.

7.5 INFORMATION RETRIEVAL

Information retrieval in the PCAB is carried out by the interviewing volunteers. Clients call at the office or telephone with problems which the interviewing volunteers have to interpret to establish what information may help to solve them. The volunteers may then act on the basis of their past experience, or they may consult one of the ISAR tools. The interviewing volunteers often have to mediate further, by interpreting and explaining supplied information to the clients.

7.5.1 The card index

From the interviews, it was evident that the alphabetic card index is the tool used most readily for information retrieval by the interviewing volunteers. They praised the card index, describing it as "excellent", "varied" and the ideal tool "... because you need quick information", "...it's the quickest thing I can think of".
Two volunteers interviewed expressed their assessment of the card index as retrieval tool as follows:

"Well, the card index is sort of the bottom line of everything. I think there's an amazing amount of information."

and

> "I can't think, with our present resources, of a more efficient system. One of the problems is, of course, the darn thing isn't always up to date. ... But it's still the first and most rapid system of getting onto the target you're after."

Another volunteer said:

> "I think that I use the cards more than anything, because if there is more information on any subject, the card refers you to the pamphlet file, or to another card, or whatever."

It is a disadvantage that some sections occur in one set of the index rather than in both sets (compare section 7.3.1.6). Interviewing volunteers forget that certain topics are not part of the main alphabetic sequence, but are filed at the back of one or the other set of the index. They may therefore omit to search in that section for relevant information, as described in Case 8 under section 5.2 and shown by the following quotation from an interview:

> "I'm not quite sure about the way they file the clubs and certain things right at the back. ... Sometimes you just don't sort of remember to get them. I know I've missed it a few times, when I've needed that information."

The broken sequence in the index may thus cause interviewing volunteers not to retrieve information that is in fact available.

A retrieval problem the researcher occasionally encountered in the card index and the clients index, was misfiling of cards which indicated that information volunteers were possibly ignorant of basic filing precepts such as "nothing comes before something". Instruction in such precepts should be included in the initial training of volunteers.

7.5.2 The pamphlet file

The following quotation from an interview shows an ambivalent attitude towards retrieving information from the pamphlet file:

> "Our pamphlet file actually is a little bit out of date. Quite a few things I've tried have been a bit out of date, but [it] can be useful sometimes. I haven't used it very much."

Most interviewing volunteers said they did not consult the pamphlet file and the reference books because doing so is too time-consuming, as illustrated by the following quotation from an interview:

> "I find it terribly difficult to go to the drawers [of the pamphlet file] and pull out those envelopes and look up things, because one never seems to have time to do it."

Interviewing volunteers particularly mentioned the sense of urgency caused by the knowledge of a queue of prospective clients waiting while they spent time looking up information for a telephone caller or even for the present client. One voluntary worker interviewed summarised the feelings generally expressed:

> "If I can't find something in the cards, I'm reluctant to get up and go and rifle through all the leaflets and booklets [the pamphlet file]. It's probably better than I know it is, because I don't explore it. I only use it when I have to. It needs to be extracted, really, and put on the cards" (see also section 7.3.1.2).

This opinion parallels the information seeking requirements of general practitioners, who find themselves face-to-face with their patients and feel they cannot leave them to search for useful information (Lor 1979:45). They experience time pressure

similar to that of the interviewing volunteers in the PCAB. The perceived immediacy of the information need requires that they should be able to access information that has been selected, reviewed and extracted to suit their particular purposes, that is, "repackaged". They do not want to hunt through voluminous sources for the answer to the problem. This sense of urgency was also expressed in an interview as follows:

> "It has to be done at the time to make it relevant and your service of any value to the person you've got in the office".

The use of "they" in the following quotation from an interview suggests that the interviewing volunteer involved does not identify with the pamphlet file as an information resource:

> "They should perhaps have a list of what pamphlets they've got in there."

Questioned about the use of the ISAR tools besides the card index, one interviewing volunteer replied:

> "Well, to tell the honest truth, and that's perhaps why I'm still having problems, I haven't consulted the information to a great extent in that filing cabinet [pamphlet file]. I've just been relying on the index cards and on what I've gathered as we went along."

The feelings of guilt implicit in some of the above quotations are considered under section 8.2.2.4.

7.5.3   The black information file

Retrieving information from entities in the black information file is a cumbersome procedure. The format, transparent plastic pockets into which typed or printed sheets carrying information are pushed from the open top, is designed for a situation where

no more than two sheets with information on one side each are placed in a pocket, back to back (alternatively a single sheet, with information on both sides, can be filed in a pocket). The black information file contains more than 20 pockets, most of which are stuffed full of sheets containing information. To consult a specific sheet, unless it is the front sheet under that subject, all the sheets in a pocket have to be removed, so that the relevant sheet can be found in the bundle and consulted. This invites misfiling and causes reluctance to use this tool. The following quotation represents one interviewing volunteer's feelings about the black information file:

"I don't like that big black book, with the index of all the different industrial councils. I don't like that at all. I very seldom use it."

There is only one black information file, in a drawer of the first desk. An interviewing volunteer working at the second desk, who needs to consult the black information file, has to leave the desk and fetch the file from the first desk, thus interrupting the work of the interviewing volunteer at that desk. This led to the following comment in an interview:

"I feel that all those industrial councils could be on our cards, and not in that file. ... especially if you work in the second office, you've got to get up, get out the file and go through it. That's another time-consuming thing."

The fact that this file has not been duplicated for the two desks, negates the Administrative Secretary's purpose in initiating the file: to place frequently consulted entities within easy reach of interviewing volunteers. The intention was to make information more easily retrievable. However, insufficient thought was given to what the users would find easy and accessible in its application.

7.6   SUMMARY

The comparison of the helping procedure and ISAR tools of the PCAB with professional practice has indicated a number of areas where suggestions may be made for improvements. Some problems unique to an ISAR system developed and operated by information naive volunteers have been identified. Recommendations for the improvement of information handling, assuming an information naive volunteer work force, will be made in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the discussion of the findings on the comparison of professional ISAR with that practised in the PCAB. It is followed by a discussion of the implications of this study for the PCAB and the broader environment. The theoretical significance of the study is then assessed. Finally, a number of recommendations for further action are offered.

8.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND COMMENTS

In this section the findings reported and the comments from the interviews in Chapter 7 are discussed.

8.2.1 User needs

According to their responses in interviews, interviewing volunteers, the users of the ISAR system at the PCAB, need to be able to consult specific information quickly. One-step search would be ideal, by which the interviewing volunteers mean that they want the needed information in the card index: they do not want to be referred to other information storage and retrieval tools. To achieve this, greater effort would have to be expended when information is put into the system so that less effort is needed when information is searched for.

A certain reluctance to use some of the information retrieval tools created painstakingly to help the interviewing volunteers can be seen in comments made by those volunteers in interviews with the researcher. It must be remembered that the

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interviews were conducted during 1992 to 1994, at a time when the PCAB was under considerable pressure as a result of the dramatic political changes in the country. Rumours that pension funds would disappear when a new government was installed, for instance, brought many people to the PCAB with requests to help them retrieve their pension contributions. The case load was such that interviewing volunteers could not make time to consult wordy information tools. Since 1995 the case load has lightened somewhat. Nevertheless the information volunteers do not show any greater readiness to use the ISAR tools beyond the card index and telephone directories.

In creating more than one ISAR tool for use by interviewing volunteers in the PCAB, the information volunteers and Administrative Secretary assume that users of the ISAR system will, in the course of helping a client or answering a telephonic enquiry, readily use a multiplicity of sources to find relevant information. This assumption conflicts with Mooers' law, which reads: "An information retrieval system will tend *not* to be used whenever it is more painful and troublesome for a customer to have information than for him not to have it" (Mooers 1960:ii). While Mooers postulated his law in the context of science and technology, it can be seen to apply in the present case. Because of the complexity of the information retrieval tools, it is more time consuming for information-naive volunteers to search for information than it would be if the tools were less complex. If they have to leave the desk to consult tools not within reach, the effort is seen as too great. It is therefore "more painful and troublesome" for an interviewing volunteer to search more than one tool to find applicable information, than it would be if all the relevant information were contained in a single tool. If at all possible, the interviewing volunteer will try to do the job *without* the information, rather than search other tools than the index and telephone directories on her desk.

As shown in section 7.3.1.2, several interviewing volunteers expressed the desire to have all the required information to assist the clients in one source, that is, they regard an ISAR tool that makes one step search possible as the ideal. Observation

also showed that interviewing volunteers often forget that additional tools besides the index and telephone directories exist.

From this the conclusion can be drawn that naive information users, experiencing the pressure of dealing with a succession of clients who enquire in person or by telephone, would consider it a dispensable "luxury" to let their clients wait while leaving their work stations to consult information sources. A comprehensive information source, designed for one-step information search would be more acceptable to them than an ISAR system consisting of various resources with references leading the user through multiple steps from one resource to another. To satisfy this preference, it would be necessary to redesign the ISAR system of the PCAB to transform it so that interviewing volunteers need to consult only one source of information when assisting clients.

8.2.2 Nature of the ISAR system in the PCAB

Having outlined professional ISAR systems in Chapter 6 and compared them with that of the PCAB in Chapter 7, the researcher is confronted with the question: What makes the ISAR system at the PCAB what it is? An attempt will be made to identify some factors.

8.2.2.1 *Human resources*

The human resources on which the PCAB depends for the maintenance of its service form an important aspect of the nature of its system. In section 5.4.2 we have seen that the voluntary workers employed generally have few information handling skills and can therefore be regarded as naive in this respect. The skills possessed by the voluntary workers vary from those of office workers to occupational therapists, teachers, engineers and scientists. However, they usually have no formal training in the information handling skills included in the definition provided in section 1.4.

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Since the workers are volunteers, they are a cheap source of labour. Most of them volunteer for duty with the PCAB from a feeling of responsibility to the less fortunate sector of the community, which argues a sense of commitment. This comes out in comments such as:

"I'd like to put something back into the social system."
and
"I consider it as my contribution to do some form of community work."

On the other hand, their volunteer status is a disadvantage in the sense that the services rendered are episodic, that is, volunteers take a duty shift at the PCAB at most once a week. When family and other commitments arise, the volunteers relatively easily see their work at the bureau as of secondary importance, getting another volunteer to take their duty shifts or putting down their names for fewer shifts than before.

No such problem is evident in a report on the use of volunteers in British museums, although the profile of the volunteers appears to be very similar to that of the volunteers engaged in work at the PCAB. Judging from the report, the museum volunteers appear to be wholly committed to their duties and willingly undertake to work a set amount of time, once they have exercised their choice to 'take on something extra' (*Volunteers in museums* 1991:6). However, some authors warn of pitfalls encountered in the employment of volunteers in libraries in the USA and caution that the use of volunteers must be managed in a "professional" manner (Chadbourne 1993; White 1993). A description of the successful use of volunteers in a South African public library is significantly titled: "Volunteer workers in the library - precious pearls or undeveloped grit?" (Steyn 1992), hinting at possible problems.

8.2.2.2 Influence of work force on ISAR

The erratic source of labour outlined in section 8.2.2.1 makes it difficult to maintain continuity in the work of the PCAB, for instance, indexing and the up-dating of the card index is not carried out continuously, but by fits and starts. The illness of one member of the information team can bring the indexing input and maintenance almost to a halt.

The volunteer work force, with its naivety in information matters can be seen as the main reason why the ISAR system of the PCAB has developed in an unplanned, incremental manner. Information volunteers do not have a background of information retrieval theory on which to base decisions about the formation of index headings or the choice of a possible new information retrieval tool to suit the needs of the situation.

While provision has been made for communication between the information volunteers and the interviewing volunteers, new interviewing volunteers are not invariably introduced to the mechanisms of communication during their initial training, or not enough emphasisis placed on it. Not all voluntary workers attend the monthly meetings, an important occasion for communication. Those who do not attend, miss opportunities for communication with other volunteers and for continuing training.

The ISAR system of the PCAB is not managed in a disciplined manner, but allowed simply to grow in accordance with ideas of information-naive volunteers for the processing and storage of information. The multiplicity of information retrieval tools which have grown through a process of accretion and are still being added to in an unplanned fashion, needs to be reduced. Interviewing volunteers are expected to look for information in too many places. This leads to them forgetting to look in all the possible places, thus missing useful information. Alternatively, they simply ignore resources that seem too onerous to consult. The resources need to be rationalised to

provide interviewing volunteers with one point of entry, from which the structure of the ISAR will lead them to the information they require. The system should be transparent to the volunteers.

8.2.2.3 Uneven case load

The case load is uneven, in that an overwhelming number of clients approach the PCAB on some days, while on other days work is quite slack. On days when many clients attend, the pressure on interviewing volunteers to assist all the clients becomes a problem. Moreover, attending to one client may demand considerably more time than helping another. A volunteer assisting a client with a complex or drawn-out problem or set of problems, or one who has to wait repeatedly for telephone calls to be answered, may experience a sense of frustration and stress, because she has little control over the helping process. At times of high case load, such as 1992 to 1994, the stress may have proved too much for some of the interviewing volunteers, so that they dropped out of this activity.

8.2.2.4 Social aspects

Some of the comments from interviews quoted in section 7.5.2 point to feelings of guilt in some of the interviewing volunteers, who indicate their awareness of information which may be available in the PCAB, but which they do not exploit. This does not mean that these interviewing volunteers actually *know* of useful information in the ISAR tools, but rather that they suspect there may be information that could be useful. A specific question on the use of the pamphlet file, elicited the following response from an interviewing volunteer:

> "There's not enough time. I think I used it only once, right at the beginning. Perhaps I'm at fault, because I don't know enough about it."

In section 7.3.2 it was mentioned that the information volunteer who maintains the

pamphlet file may not be wholly in touch with the needs of clients as experienced by interviewing volunteers. However, the interviewing volunteers do not criticise the fact that out-of-date material is retained, possibly out of reluctance to upset the responsible information volunteer. This sensitivity to the feelings of a colleague may not have operated so strongly in a situation where paid workers are employed. The volunteers treat one another with kid gloves, the more so as the PCAB experiences constant problems in recruiting enough volunteers.

8.3 CONCLUSIONS

In this section we take a look at the findings achieved in this study in answer to the six questions posed under the problem statement in section 1.2. They have direct implications for the PCAB. A number of recommendations that follow from the findings are formulated in section 8.6.1.

8.3.1 Question 1

The question was how untrained voluntary workers carry out the activities of collecting, organising and presenting information for users. This has been treated as a straightforward matter for observation and note taking to supply data on which to base the more theoretical aspects of the study.

The description in Chapter 4 of tools created in the PCAB, illustrates how untrained voluntary workers carry out the activities of collecting and organising information for users. In section 5.3 it is shown how information-naive voluntary workers carry out the activities of retrieving and using information from the ISAR tools to assist the clients of the PCAB.

8.3.2 Question 2

With reference to the question, how the procedures and activities in the PCAB differ from those applied by trained information workers, an overview was given in Chapter 6 of the procedures used in professional ISAR. In sections 7.2 to 7.5 these were compared with the procedures and activities used by untrained voluntary workers and a discussion appears in section 8.2. It was shown that the ISAR tools in the PCAB, while superficially similar to such tools used in professional ISAR, are not as easy to use as they need to be, given a work force of information naive volunteers. The difficulties of access to the ISAR tools came about because the tools were also developed by information naive volunteers. One might have expected that people with a naive approach would create tools that are simple to operate. This is not so, presumably because naive information workers do not realise how complex, and therefore difficult to handle, information is. They make *ad hoc* decisions and build ISAR tools in an incremental fashion. This can be seen in the card index in the PCAB, where an attempt at grouping together like information has become a problem, because the information volunteers tend to want to classify without understanding the rudiments of classification.

8.3.3 Question 3

The third question in the problem statement asks what knowledge from their general background voluntary workers use in designing and operating information handling systems and activities. The data collected in the interviews have been set out in section 5.4.2. The question covers designing systems *and* operating them.

8.3.3.1 Design and maintenance

The people involved at the PCAB in the design of systems and the maintenance of input have over the years mostly been people with education and experience as clerks, with skills in office methods, rather than more sophisticated information

handling skills. Among the recollections of long-serving voluntary workers voiced in interviews, mention was made of volunteers in the past who were librarians. Whether they were trained librarians, that is, people with formal training in information skills, or simply people with some experience of work in a library, could not be established, as those people could not be traced to be interviewed, and laypersons often refer to anyone who works in a library as a "librarian". The one person interviewed who had had some information skills training, held an intermediate diploma of the South African Library Association, which is regarded as a para-professional qualification. However, she had never been involved in the activities of systems design and information input at the PCAB, because she wanted to work with the clients

8.3.3.2 Operating

Possibly the most important prior knowledge brought to the PCAB by prospective interviewing volunteers are interviewing and communicating skills. Nevertheless, this, rather than other information handling skills, is the area which is emphasised in the training of new volunteers. While the ability to establish contact with the clients and to convince them to impart necessary information, and the ability to write up their case histories so that other interviewing volunteers can carry on with the cases, are very valuable skills, it would seem desirable that the emphasis of initial and continuing training of the volunteers in the PCAB should be shifted towards other information handling skills, such as indexing, even for interviewing volunteers.

A wide variety of cognitive skills are present in and used by interviewing volunteers in assisting the clients. Knowledge of such things as labour laws, the structures of various organisations, such as government departments, and banking practice, derive mainly from occupational experience. However, the usefulness of the knowledge of an individual depends much on the coincidence of a specific interviewing volunteer being confronted with a particular problem by a client.

8.3.4 Question 4

Question four asks what assumptions are reflected by the information handling systems and activities. The assumptions identified are:

*   that grouping cards in the card index together under broad headings will make the information they contain more accessible than if concepts of smaller extent are arranged in alphabetical order, and

*   that users of the ISAR system will, in the course of helping a client or answering a telephone enquiry, readily use a multiplicity of sources to find relevant information.

These assumptions have been dealt with in sections 7.3.1.1 and 8.2.1 respectively.

8.3.5 Question 5

Question five in the problem statement requires an examination of information handling skills exhibited by and lacking in untrained voluntary information workers. To answer this question, we will return to the definition adopted in section 1.5, namely:

> *Information (handling) skills*: Information skills are those abilities which enable a person to handle information effectively. They include the following: recognizing when a problem could be solved with relevant information and being motivated to solve it; identifying what information is needed for a solution; moulding a strategy to find the information and knowing where to find it; carrying through the search strategy to locate the information; selecting the required information; analyzing, interpreting and synthesizing it; organizing the synthesized information; utilizing it in order to solve the problem; assessing the effectiveness of the strategy in solving the problem; storing the synthesized information for future use; and communicating the solution of the problem to others if necessary (Behrens 1992:25).

The definition was framed against the background of an educational problem, therefore one could argue that all the aspects mentioned need not apply with the same emphasis to the situation of untrained voluntary workers in a caregiving organisation such as the PCAB. However, after due consideration, it can be seen that all the aspects mentioned come into play at some stage of the helping procedure, if not in all cases handled.

8.3.5.1 Skills present

As shown in section 8.3.3.2, most of the people who volunteer to interview clients in the PCAB exhibit adequate interviewing skills, that is, they communicate sufficiently well with clients to find out what their problems are and therefore are able to identify what information may be needed to solve the problems. They are generally capable of interpreting the retrieved information and communicating the solution(s) to the clients. In writing up the case histories, which most interviewing volunteers do quite competently, they select the pertinent information, organise it and store it for future use by recording it in narrative form.

8.3.5.2 Skills lacking

Among the skills mentioned in the definition which are generally lacking when people first volunteer to interview clients at the PCAB, are moulding a strategy to find the required information and knowing where to find it. The information naive volunteers are generally unable to formulate and carry through a search strategy to locate information and they generally do not know where to find it. Exceptions are present in volunteers who from occupational experience come to their voluntary service with a knowledge of certain laws and organisational structures. However, their background knowledge may lead them simply to rely on memory, not to formulate a search strategy and follow it through. Interviewing volunteers generally need training and private study to prepare them for these activities.

The information volunteers lack skills which are not explicitly expressed in the definition, but are implicit in it. They lack an understanding of indexing languages and a knowledge of systems and devices for storing information with a view to its later retrieval. They also lack the ability to abstract or excerpt the content of information bearing entities in such a way that interviewing volunteers do not have to wade through full text versions of laws and similar documents to find required information.

8.3.6 Question 6

Question six required that the strengths and weaknesses of running an operation with voluntary information providers be examined. These came out in section 8.2 and are briefly summarised here.

8.3.6.1 Strengths

The low cost of running an information agency with unpaid workers can be regarded as a strength. In recent times a number of organisations which employ paid workers for the type of work carried out at the PCAB, for instance the Black Sash, have had to reduce their services, because of lack of funds to pay their workers.

The variety of background and experience brought to their service in the PCAB by the volunteers, can also be seen as a strength.

Generally speaking the voluntary workers exhibit a considerable level of common sense, which is a strength in dealing with people from the disadvantaged, poorly educated sector of society.

The fact that the volunteers offer their services without remuneration argues a level of dedication to the cause, that must be seen as a strength.

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8.3.6.2 Weaknesses

Because the volunteers are mature individuals from varied backgrounds and with a variety of education and occupational experience, they tend to want to follow their own inclination in certain respects. This leads to a certain lack of discipline, which is particularly evident in the structure of the ISAR tools developed by people who are naive in respect of information skills. The evolutionary, incremental development of the ISAR tools and the fact that no use was made of standardised codes, for instance in the choice of headings for the index, that is, the lack of a theoretical base for these activities, which can also be blamed on the employment of information-naive volunteers, is a weakness. This is particularly serious, because the PCAB does not receive any assistance from a central organisation in the collection and processing of information. It is necessary to make the volunteers understand the importance of applying standard practices, for instance in the choice of headings for the index and keeping records of the interviews with clients.

8.3.7 Summary of conclusions: a grounded theory

What emerges, is that the behaviour of the information volunteers in the PCAB is essentially rational. What they do is influenced by their lack of theoretical background and the lack of continuity described in section 8.2.2.2. There is a mismatch between the input and output (compare figure 6.2) in that the information volunteers design and maintain ISAR tools according to their own assumptions and insights. On the other hand, the interviewing volunteers, in using the ISAR tools, have needs of which the information volunteers are left in ignorance because of inadequate communication between these two groups, also discussed in section 8.2.2.2.

Untrained voluntary information workers are not primarily interested in the information they handle. They are interested in the purpose for which they are collecting, organising and retrieving the information.

Volunteers searching for information make the same kind of demands of the information storage and retrieval systems they use as do professional and scientific information users, in that they want direct access to as much relevant information in one place as possible. They want information repackaged in a manner to suit their purpose. See the parallel with medical practitioners, cited in section 7.5.2. Their reluctance to use information that has to be searched for in a variety of ISAR tools supports Mooers' law, cited in section 8.2.1.

The characteristics of the ISAR tools created by untrained information volunteers in the PCAB indicate that their lack of a theoretical background in information handling limits these workers in the development and maintenance of information storage and retrieval tools. This has led to the conclusion that employing information naive voluntary workers to develop and maintain an ISAR system, will tend to cause the creation of a multiplicity of inefficient information retrieval tools, which users will be reluctant to consult.

8.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BROADER ENVIRONMENT

Organisations providing survival information to individuals, such as the Citizens' Advice Bureaux and similar agencies, can play an important part in the reconstruction and development of South Africa. Depending mainly on the services of volunteers, their role should in particular be seen as complementing the services provided by public libraries, as outlined by Lor (1996:147). The services of such organisations can but be enhanced by the provision of more varied and better organised information than is at present the case.

The literature survey has shown that there are foreign countries where services for providing information to the broad population about their day-to-day problems are organised on a country-wide or state-wide basis. This is true at least for the collection and organisation of information that is likely to be of use to all the service

points, be they CABx or community information centres or public libraries. While isolated service points like the PCAB are doing sterling work, there is no centralised infrastructure in South Africa for the collection and organisation of information to such service points. There is also no countrywide infrastructure for non-government organisations (NGOs), many of which provide information services. At this stage the Government is doing nothing to make its own output of information bearing material easily accessible to organisations such as CABx, the Black Sash and other community information centres, which are often staffed by information-naive volunteers rather than trained professionals. Such organisations have to struggle individually to set up their ISAR systems and find out how to computerise them. It would be much more efficient if a system applicable in most situations could be designed and developed centrally and made available, together with the necessary training, to units throughout the country. The present study has contributed insights into the *modus operandi* of information naive workers that could be valuable in the design of a suitable system.

In a survey of national bibliographic services in the country, Behrens (1996:41-43) proposed the creation of a grassroots index with the aim of providing access to information resources "which may have relevance for developing communities, school pupils and development issues in general" (Behrens 1996:41). She proposes coverage of resources emanating from the subregion, the continent, and even from developing countries world wide. Among the features such an index should have, she sees subject searching capability as paramount, and states that the "access language should be simple/basic, probably based on hybrid vocabulary" (Behrens 1996:41). Behrens considered only bibliographic resources, but such an index may be beneficial to a survival information service provided by information naive workers, such as in the PCAB, to suggest published sources of information unknown to the untrained information workers, and which may augment their knowledge and the service they can provide. A recommendation arising from this is made in section 8.6.2.

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The present study has shown that there is a need for training in the development and maintenance of simple ISAR systems to meet the needs of organisations employing mainly volunteers. It is also desirable to create an awareness among professional library and information workers of the existence of a large sector of the population which is unable to use the traditional library and information services and therefore need adaptations to suit their needs. Recommendations regarding the education of voluntary and professional information workers are made in section 8.6.3.

8.5 THEORETICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The survey of the literature has revealed that writings on organisations employing voluntary information providers deal with the motivation for creating such services and describe the services rendered. They do not concern themselves with the "how?" and "why?" of the collection, organisation and use of information by the volunteers in the provision of the services. These questions are the focus of the present study. As far as could be determined, this is the first study undertaken of the way in which information-naive laypersons, volunteering to help people with problems threatening their survival, handle the information they collect, store and retrieve to assist their clients.

It is useful for information scientists to know how people who lack training manage the collection, organisation and retrieval of information. Moreover, information scientists should consider whether the social factors that came out in this study should be taken into consideration in the design of ISAR systems for operation by naive information providers.

This study has shown that voluntary information providers, as defined in section 1.4, and in their nature as naive information workers, need simple, straightforward information storage and retrieval tools, which are transparent to users and provide easy access to alternative terms from those thought of by persons creating such

tools. Voluntary information providers need as much relevant information as possible within a single tool.

Through observation and interviews it has been learnt that voluntary information providers who have no prior training in information handling skills have rationales for what they do with the information, though those rationales may be muddled. Information Science can make a contribution, by clarifying the rationales. The theory evolved through many decades of thought, research and practice on aspects of information collection, organisation and retrieval, if taught to voluntary information providers at a basic level and in a simplified form, can assist them to develop ISAR systems that are accessible to their fellow naive information workers.

8.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Various recommendations flow from the study described in this thesis. They are put forward and discussed in this section.

8.6.1 Recommendations to the PCAB

From the findings summarised in sections 8.3.1 to 8.3.6, the following recommendations for improving the service of the PCAB are proposed:

8.6.1.1 Training in general information skills

It is recommended that potential volunteers should be given more rigorous training than at present in information skills such as formulating information searches and moulding strategies for finding the required information. It is further recommended that initial and continuing training for volunteers should contain a grounding in the principles underlying indexing languages and basic information handling skills, such as filing. To make this possible, a suitable trainer should be chosen from the present

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team of volunteers or through targeted recruitment: a person who has received formal education in library and information science. This trainer could handle all training or only the training in information handling skills.

8.6.1.2 Training in abstracting and excerpting

It is recommended that selected voluntary workers should receive training in abstracting and excerpting to enable them to abstract or excerpt relevant material from lengthy information-bearing entities. This training is recommended for selected voluntary workers, as they would be working on the input into the system, not interviewing clients. It is to some extent work for which the chosen volunteers have to be temperamentally suited. The trainer proposed under point 1 could also handle this aspect.

8.6.1.3 List of headings

It is recommended that a generally approved list of subject headings, such as *Sears list of subject headings*, be used to standardise the allocation of headings in the index, to assist information volunteers in the formation of new headings and to assist interviewing volunteers in identifying headings under which they may find relevant information. *Sears list* is suggested, as it is a general list of headings which contains useful rules and good instructions for the adaptation of the list to local needs. The aim of this recommendation is to bring control to the allocation of subject headings and make the process more objective than it is at present.

8.6.1.4 Disciplined approach

It is recommended that potential recruits should be made aware that a disciplined approach to the creation of ISAR tools and their maintenance is part of the privilege of working in the PCAB. The researcher is of the opinion that more volunteers may possibly be attracted to work in the PCAB if a stronger degree of discipline is

brought to bear on the activities of the Bureau.

8.6.1.5 Attendance at meetings

It is further recommended that greater emphasis be placed on the importance of attendance at the monthly meetings of voluntary workers so that more effective communication between interviewing and information volunteers can be maintained.

8.6.1.6 Computerisation

To create an ISAR tool that permits one-step search and to solve the problems experienced in particular with the up-dating of the card index in the PCAB, it is recommended that the ISAR tools of the PCAB should be converted to a computerised system. The Bureau can now afford the hardware and software necessary to run an information storage and retrieval system which will at once be more sophisticated and more up to date than the card system, which has, in effect, broken down. During the last year or two more and more new volunteers have come to the PCAB already computer literate and suggesting that a computerised system be installed. At the Annual General Meetings, questions have been asked suggesting the use of computers. The climate therefore seems to be right for the conversion of the ISAR system.

8.6.2 Recommendations affecting the wider environment

The study gave rise to some recommendations that can assist reconstruction and development in the wider environment.

8.6.2.1 Creation of a database

To complement a grassroots index concentrating on bibliographic resources as proposed by Behrens (1996) and described in section 8.4, it is recommended that

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community information agencies such as the CABx, public libraries, community information centres and other NGOs should form a coalition to set up a community information database that can be made accessible to all organisations requiring community information. Legoabe (1997:126) refers in broad terms to "development, maintenance and update of the information needs database". It seems obvious that the kind of community information service for which she proposes a model, could make good use of a centralised community information database.

It is desirable that such a centralised operation for the creation of a database should be initiated and maintained by the Government. However, in view of the Government's apparent lack of interest in library and information services, it may be advisable for organisations at present providing survival information services to get together to plan a proposal for the creation of a centralised database. Private sector and even foreign funding could be solicited to launch and support the proposed database. If such an endeavour could be achieved, it would have the added benefit of being independent of Government and political influences.

Much can be learnt in this respect from models in other parts of the world. The work done by NACAB in the UK, to prepare and distribute information and maintain a database for use by CABx throughout the country (National Association 1996), can serve as example to be emulated in South Africa. The Victorian Association of Community Information Centres (Vacic) in Australia is another service from which useful lessons may be learnt (Victorian Association 1997).

While lessons can be learnt from such services in foreign countries, the particular characteristics of the South African population should be kept in mind, for instance the high level of illiteracy and the consequent need to be able to explain complex subjects to people at grassroots level in very simple language. Another factor to be remembered, is the large number of people in the country who only speak and understand one of the indigenous languages with any ease. Where they exist, parallel texts of information bearing entities available in more than one language could be

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entered into the system, to be printed out in a chosen language according to need.

8.6.2.2 Simple indexing language

The development of a simple indexing language for use by community information services could be investigated. To avoid reinventing the wheel, cognisance should be taken of the work of Community Information Victoria (until recently the Victorian Association for Community Information Services), based on the *Thesaurus for indexing community services and resources*, compiled by B McIntyre (3rd edition. Melbourne, Dept of Community Welfare:1983). It is understood that an up-dated version will soon be available on CD-ROM (Young 1998).

8.6.2.3 Software package

It is recommended that a software package be developed for a computerised ISAR system that is suitable for use by community information services, and that can be made available at cost.

8.6.3 Recommendations concerning education in library and information science

The findings of the study also has implications for education in library and information science.

8.6.3.1 Professional education

Students of library and information science in South Africa and other developing countries should be sensitised to grassroots community needs and the way laypersons organise and use information, and not prepared only for work in sophisticated library and information services, related to developed economies. This sensitisation could take the form of required visits to and even sitting in on sessions by students

at organisations such as the PCAB to observe the kind of service rendered.

8.6.3.2 *Courses for volunteers and other laypersons*

Courses to prepare students for developing simple information storage and retrieval tools should be offered. The one-year certificate courses offered by the University of South Africa in various disciplines, could be used as prototypes. Voluntary workers and other laypersons employed in situations where they transfer information to people at grassroots level could be encouraged to take such courses. If completed, the courses may be accepted as credits towards further study in information science, should a person wish to move on to a formal qualification.

8.7 CLOSURE

This study has achieved the aims with which it commenced, and which were set out in section 1.3. Insights have been gained into the distinctive manner in which untrained laypersons handle information. Following from this, some recommendations have been developed on how information should be handled in information-providing agencies staffed by volunteers, with particular reference to the Pretoria Citizens' Advice Bureau. Furthermore, recommendations have been put forward on the provision of information for use by organisations making available survival information to the community at grassroots level and concerning the teaching of information science.

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INTERVIEW GUIDE for use in interviewing VOLUNTEER WORKERS

Name of volunteer:.....................................
Place of interview:....................................
Date:...
[Explain the purpose of the study; that all information provided will be regarded as confidential; that no individual will be identified in the thesis. Ask permission to use tape-recorder. Reassure interviewee that interviewer is the only one who will listen to tapes.]

1. Age group: under 40
                    40 - 50
                    50 - 60
                    60 - 70
                    70 +

2. What is the highest educational qualification you obtained?
    [Explain once again that the information provided will be regarded as confidential.]

3. Have you ever been gainfully employed?
    If yes, doing what?
    Are you still gainfully employed?

4. How did you get involved in working as volunteer for the [name of organisation, e.g.CAB]?

5. What training have you received for the work as volunteer?

6. Have you found any aspects of your training particularly useful in your voluntary work for this organisation?
    If yes, which aspects?

7. Have you found any aspects of your formal education particularly useful in your voluntary work for this organisation?
    If yes, which?

8. Have you found any aspects of the paid work you have done particularly useful in the voluntary work for this organisation?
    If yes, which aspects?

9. Do you remember how this voluntary work affected you when you first began to do it? Try to describe.

10. Which of the information tools employed for this voluntary work do you find most useful?

11. How did using the index strike you? Did you find it easy/complicated?
    Do you turn to the index immediately when a query arises?

12. Did you at first find the other sources of information easy/difficult to use? If difficult, has it become easier?

13. When trying to find information, would you prefer to make a telephone enquiry, or to use a printed source of information?

Questions for Information Section, Pretoria CAB

14. How do you go about collecting information for the index/filing cabinet of CAB?

15. How is a decision reached on making new headings for the index?

16. What do you think of the way in which the index is arranged?

17. Do you think adequate provision is made for cross-indexing?

18. What are your personal feelings about the contents of the filing cabinet?

18.1 Is it up-dated often enough?

18.2 Is the effort that goes into maintaining it justified by the use that is made of it?

19. At the Johannesburg CAB volunteers are expected to take turns at interviewing and at work on the index. How do you feel about that kind of arrangement?

INTERVIEW GUIDE for use in interviewing
VOLUNTARY INFORMATION PROVIDERS

Name of organization:......................................

Name of respondent:......................................

Position in organisation:.................................

Place of interview:......................................

Date: ....

1.   Who are your clients?

2.   What services do you offer them?

3.   How many queries does your service handle?

4.   When is the service available?
4.1   Which days?
4.2   What hours?

5.   How is the service financed?

6.   Do you liaise or work together with other organisations?
     If so, which?

7.   Where is the service point situated?
7.1   Is it easily accessible?

8.   Who assists your clients?
8.1   Volunteers?
8.2   Paid helpers?

8.3   With what educational background?

8.4   From what socio-economic background?

9.   What training do the helpers receive?

10.   How is the information collected on which assistance is
       based?

10.1   By whom?

10.2   From which sources?

10.3   What are the main categories of information that is
        collected?

11.   How do the helpers of enquirers notify the collector(s)
       of information that they have become aware of new
       information requirements?

12.   How is the collected information organised?

12.1   Indexed?

12.1.1   List of terms?

12.2   Medium?

12.2.1   Cards?

12.2.2   Computer?

12.2.3   Other? Specify

13.   Who organises the information?

13.1   What qualifications does organiser have for doing
        so?

14.   How are the documents containing information stored?

Pretoria CAB
Total number of cases handled

Thousands
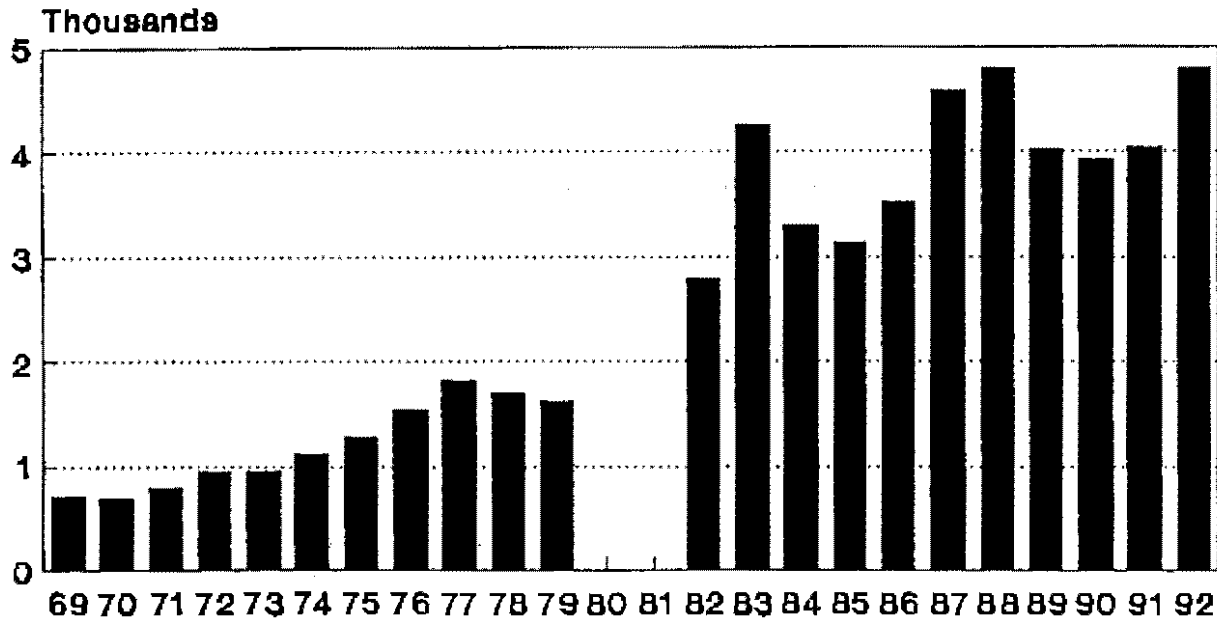
The annual reports for 1969 to 1979 reflect the calendar year. The report

for 1980/81 covers the period from January 1980 to 31 March 1981, that is

15 months. It has been left out of the above graph. From 1981-1982 the

annual reports reflect the period from 1 April until 31 March of the

following year. They are shown in the table in their respective years of

publication.

Pretoria CAB

Total number of cases handled

Year in which annual report was published
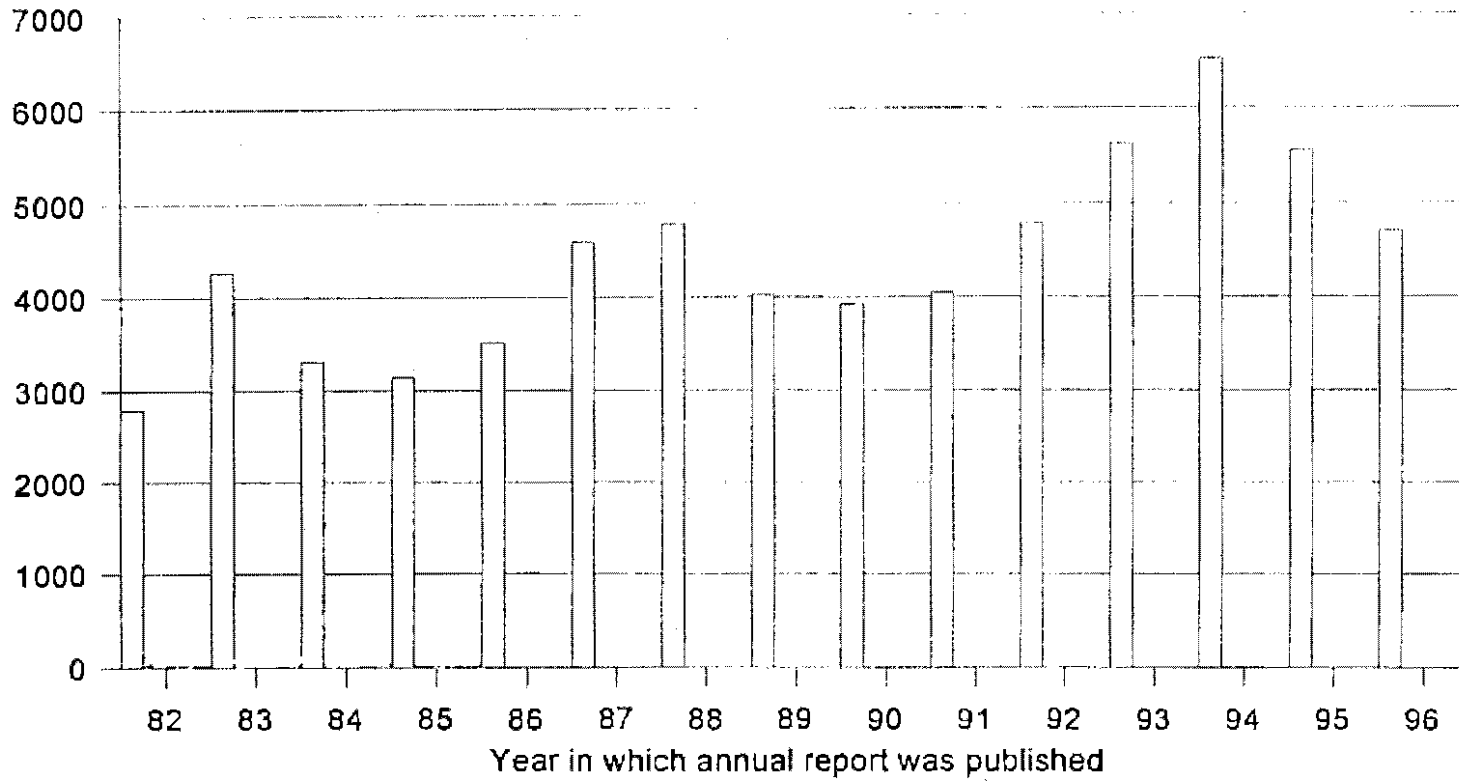
Example of a yellow main card behind which related subtopics are grouped together

CHILD/CHILDREN   SEE PAMPHLET FILE   1/91
    1. Child Abuse
    2. Child Care Clinics
    3. Child & Family Care Society (Child=Welfar
    4. Child & Family Care Shops
    5. Children - Gifted
    6. Child Guidance Clinics
    7. Childrens' Homes
    8. Child Minders
    9. Children - Minors
   10. Children - Missing

Reverse of the above card

    11. Child/Parent Communication
    12. Child Referral Centre
    13. Children in Prison
    14. Children - Twilight
    15. Childrens' Villages Association
    16. Child Rehabilitation Centre
    17. Child Line
    18. Child Information Centre
    19. Multi-racial Creches + PLAY GROUPS.
    20. Child Maintenance - Blacks
    21. Video for children of broken homes
    22. Adolescent Psychiatric Clinic

Continuation of the above card

PAGE 2
CHILD/CHILDREN   See pamphlet file

    23. Child's alimony after divorced
    24. Children in Crisis
    25. Youth Development Centre - First aid
    26 Fun gymnastics & Muscular Development (Aqua Dynamic
    27 NEEDS special educational facilities.
    28. SA Assoc. for Early Childhood Educare
    29. Mentally Handicapped.
    30. Kinder-leiding Instituut
    31. Hospital Classes for sick children
    32. Nelson Mandels Children's Fund
    33. Montessori Pre-School

CATEGORY..........   CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU   REF...........

DATE..............   I.D.s..

SURNAME.................................GIVEN NAMES...........................

POSTAL ADDRESS..

TEL.................RELIGION......................SENT BY................

PROBLEM..

EMPLOYMENT DETAILS......

EMPLOYER'S NAME...

EMPLOYMENT ADDRESS...TEL ....

JOB DESCRIPTION...

DATE OF EMPLOYMENT....................DATE OF DISCHARGE.................

RATE OF PAY.........................HOURS/DAYS OF WORK.................

EMPLOYEE/PAY NUMBER.................CLAIM NUMBER........................

PENSION NUMBER......................NAME OF FUND........................

REASON FOR DISCHARGE..

Categories of enquiries

Enquiries are divided into categories according to the subject(s) they deal with. The division is used in specifying the services rendered in the annual report. This is useful in establishing in which subject areas most of the enquiries are concentrated. The categories are:

A   Employment

        (1) jobs wanted and offered

        (2) wage disputes, including holidays, pay, notice and compensation

        (3) unemployment insurance and pensions

B   Property and housing

C   Family problems

D   Financial (e.g. loans, insurance)

E   Registration (e.g. birth, death)

F   Aged

G   Legal

H   Education and training

I   Social and leisure activities

J   Appeals for help

K   Miscellaneous

L   Police and prison

M   Psychiatric problems

N   Consumer, trade and manufacture

O   Offers of help (e.g. transport, befriending)

P   Health and medical

PCAB business card

CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

237 SCHOEMAN STREET   MON - FRI
PRETORIA   9.30 am - 1.00 pm
0002

TEL: (012) 322-6630   THURS
                           9.30 am - 3.30 pm

NO:

Client index card

Case file number

SURNAME   ID number
Given names

Address

Date of opening file

Sample page from desk diary (reduced)

1996 October

Tuesday 8
Day (28 -84)

Anna Louw 08:20 -

NEW	REPEAT	CAT.		Gov	Let	Tel	Per
✓	7G97	A2				✓	
✓ NCS		G1	I H ─ (290-3058) wanted to know where he could get limited legal advice. He does not qualify for the University legal Centres. I gave him two telephone numbers from our Legal Advisers Cards.				
						✓	
✓	SK130	G1					
✓	5H60	A4					
NCS		G1	Mrs R (46-4299) wants advice about legal help for domestic who wants to get married				
							✓
✓ NCS	7G63	C3					
		M1	L vd W (015) 501-0481 wanted telephone no of our AIDS organisation to whom she can talk about establishing a refuge for AIDS sufferers in a rural area. I gave her some numbers from Jhb telephone directory when the one on our card proved inoperative.				
						✓	✓
✓ 7G101	5T84	A2					✓
		A2					
✓	S185	G1					✓
	7E71	D4					
✓ NCS		F2	Tiny woman - 542 4200 - wanted tel. no. of Pension office for making OAP application for mother. Gave from Concessions data & card & card looks etc.) 323 4026 + 218655 respectively. Also gave Care of Aged no 328 6045 as she'd like to help them!		✓	✓	
✓ NCW		A2	Lady wanted an address for labour problem consultation			✓	

PRETORIA CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU

Voluntary Workers' Meeting 24-07-1996

A G E N D A

WELCOME AND PRAYER

1.   Present
2.   Apologies
3.   Confirmation of Minutes
4.   Matters arising from the Minutes
     a) Roster
     b) Case Count
     c) Information
     d) Checking
     e) Publicity
     f) Funding
     g) New Voluntary Workers

5.   Annual General Meeting : 28 August 1996

6.   Interesting cases
     Voluntary Workers are invited to share
     cases they found particularly interesting

7.   General

8.   Next Meeting - 25 September 1996

-oOo-

flow chart of
helping procedure
at PCAB.

Pretoria Citizens' Advice Bureau
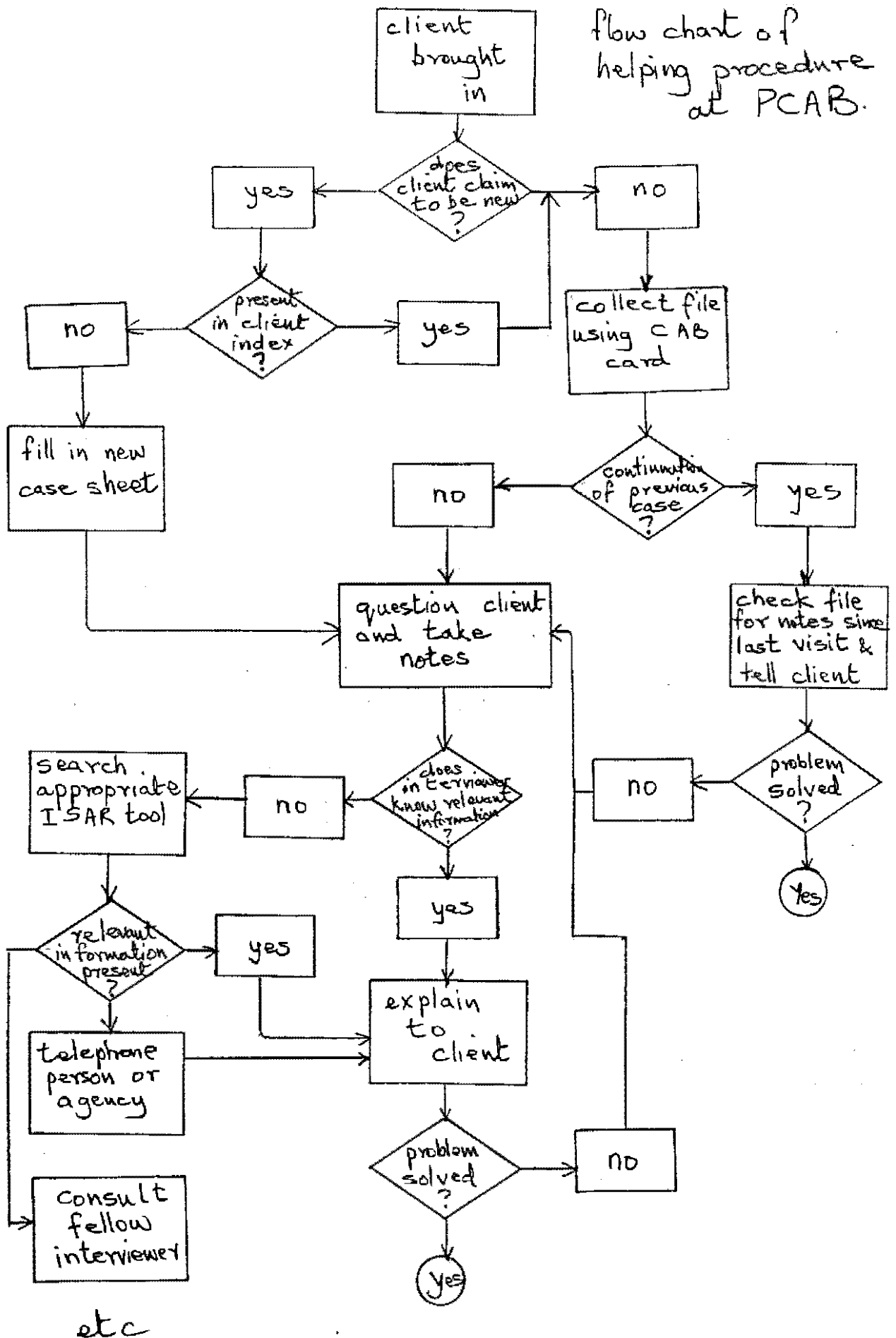
Preamble to procedure for voluntary workers

"The Citizens' Advice Bureau is a centre of care and concern for any person with any problem or query. People asking for help, whether they come into the office or whether they phone in, need to know that they are really being heard; that you accept them for what they are and that you are willing to help them find a solution to their problem".

Procedure for Voluntary Workers

Since the CAB is operated by voluntary workers, each of whom usually works a half-day shift at a time, a detailed system of documentation provides the communication links between voluntary workers from one day to the next and between the volunteers, the Administrative Secretary and the co-ordinator.

Documentation

Diary: Each desk carries a large diary (A4 size) with a page for each day. Messages about cases to be followed up from the previous day are noted at the top of the page. The voluntary worker on duty writes his/her name at the top of the page for the day. The main space is ruled in columns in which the voluntary worker notes details of the cases handled during the day. There are columns for: (1) New case numbers; (2) Old case numbers, i.e. repeat calls; (3) Category; (4) Remarks on N.C.S.*; (5) Tick if client was sent by a Government Department; (6) if source of query was a letter; (7) if source of query was a telephone call; (8) if client came in for an interview.

* N.C.S. = No Case Sheet: If the volunteer feels that it is unnecessary to fill in a case sheet, N.C.S. is written in the first column, the category in column 3 and brief details in column 4; columns 5, 7 and 8 are ticked as applicable.

Black notebook: The black notebook is the means of internal communication among voluntary workers and between the Administrative Secretary and voluntary workers. Each voluntary worker has to read it when reporting for duty, to collect general messages.

Letter box: Notes from the Administrative Secretary to volunteers and from volunteers to one another are left in a box, in a specified drawer, that has to be checked for notes when the volunteer reports for duty.

Office box: The office box is kept in a locked drawer. Cheques and documents received for clients are marked with the clients' case numbers and kept in the office box until such time as the clients come to collect them.

Individual notebook: Each volunteer keeps a "reporter's notebook" in which she notes every case handled and any details/comments about it; particulars of telephone conversations, etc.

Case files: When a client calls for the first time, a case sheet is opened for him. Blank case sheets are numbered (top right hand corner) in sequence beforehand and laid ready in a file cover for use when new cases present themselves. Details are filled in on the case sheet from the client's identity document: full name (underlining the first name by which the person is generally known); identity number (also old ID number {pass no.}, if available, as some agencies may still use it, and it is useful for double-checking on identity); address and telephone number; employer's name, address and telephone number; problem; and the date on which the case is opened.

The volunteer writes the client's story on the case sheet and codes the case with the category in which the problem falls, e.g. employment, health, etc. The category is marked in the top left corner of the case sheet. [See heading *Categories of enquiries*].

When s/he has written down the case, the volunteer signs the entry. Carbon copies (on yellow paper) of full-size letters written in connection with the case are kept in the file cover behind the case sheet. The case number is always noted on such letters. When a client is given a note on a compliments slip of the Bureau, a carbon copy is kept on the case sheet.

When further information is received, e.g. by telephone, in reaction to a letter sent or a call made in connection with a case, the information is written on the case sheet. This may be done by a different volunteer, who again dates and signs the end of her note.

If a cheque or other document is received for a client, this is noted on the case file and the case number is written on the envelope containing the cheque. It is then kept in the *Office Box* towards the time when the client comes in to claim the cheque. The client is notified by post that s/he should visit the office. If a letter is received, it is filed behind the case sheet.

Follow-on pages of an existing case are filed chronologically, and care is taken to write the case number in the top right hand corner of each new page. Correspondence relating to the case is filed in reverse chronological order after the case sheets for that client, so that the latest case sheet and the latest correspondence are always close to each other.

Cases are filed in reverse numerical order, i.e. the latest case is in front.

Small card: The client is given a CAB business card on which the telephone number and address of the Bureau appear, and on which the case number is recorded. The volunteer explains the importance of the card and the case number: that the client should present the card when returning to the Bureau, that s/he may use the telephone number for enquiries about his/her case, and that the case number should always be quoted.

Index cards of clients: A 5"x3" index card is completed for each new client. The card contains the client's surname, first names, ID number(s), case file number, home address and the date of first reporting. These cards are filed in alphabetical order of the clients' surnames, for reference in cases where clients have lost their case numbers. Clients sometimes say they have not been to the Bureau before, because they present with a new problem or they had been long ago.

Categories of enquiries: Enquiries are divided into categories according to the subject(s) they deal with. The division is used in specifying the services rendered in the annual report. This is useful in establishing in which subject areas most of the enquiries are concentrated. The categories are:

A   Employment

        (1) jobs wanted and offered

        (2) wage disputes, including holidays, pay, notice and compensation

        (3) unemployment insurance and pensions

B   Property and housing

C   Family problems

D   Financial (e.g. loans, insurance)

E   Registration (e.g. birth, death)

F   Aged

G   Legal

H   Education and training

I   Social and leisure activities

J   Appeals for help

K   Miscellaneous

L   Police and prison

M   Psychiatric problems

N   Consumer, trade and manufacture

O   Offers of help (e.g. transport, befriending)

P   Health and medical

Knowledge from their general background brought to PCAB by voluntary workers

Knowledge	Background
Interviewing skills	occupational therapist personnel officers university studies (BA with Psychology) agricultural extension officer university lecturer
Communicating skills - talking - writing	civil servants managers clerks diplomat university lecturer
Typing and filing skills	secretaries/clerks typists
Knowledge of information retrieval (from tertiary education)	engineers medical practitioner
Knowledge of labour laws	managers personnel officers wife of attorney
Knowledge of organisational structure	managers clerks diplomat

Knowledge of the structure of government departments	civil servants war service (WWII) secretary of political party
Knowledge of church structures and related bodies	congregants
Knowledge of banking procedures	bank clerk accountancy studies
Contact with people of other cultures	organiser for flour milling compnay
Domestic management	homemakers

Examples of cards for subtopics under CHILD/CHILDREN

1. CHILD/CHILDREN
   CHILD ABUSE   Pamphlet File   6/89

                                               3/95

   see BABY BATTERING

   ...see BRAMLEY CHILDREN'S HOME - Family Care Centre No.3
   1. Child Protection Unit - Police Pretoria

                          tel. 328 6960 / 329 6970

   2. Crisis Line - tel. Life Line 460666' ask for Child
                                                   Line

   3. KC Childline - All races and languages. Trained
      counsellor will return child's call.082 990 1479

   4. Tollfree Child Welfare Unit 0800 12 3321

   5. Psychologist Ms. Eunice van Deventer Tel: 331 1637 pm.
      At Trans Oranjeskool 386 6072 am.

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2. CHILD/CHILDREN   8/88

   CHILD CARE CLINICS

   See pamphlet file CLINICS - Pretoria City
   Council municipal services

   Clinics - Places and times

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3. CHILD/CHILDREN   Pamphlet File   5/96

   PRETORIA CHILD &FAMILY CARE SOCIETY Tel: 806 7045

   Bramley Childrens' Homes, 246 Schroeder St. Groenkloof
   P.O. Box 503, Pretoria Tel: 469236-9 Main Office
   Branch Office. (Mrs Dreyer) Tel: 322 9296 Sher Court
   cnr. Andries & Skinner Sts.

   Atteridgeville - Komani St. Tel: 373 8131

   Eersterus - 238 Willie Swart St Tel: 806 7045

   Mamelodi - 7846 Block T. Tel: 805 4334

   Pretoria Indian Child Welfare Society Social Worker
   Tel: 374 4873. Hajee Joosub Creche Tel: 45 4028