



Full Report

Date	Event
22 nd June 2006	GoldStar Regional Conference (West Midlands)
No of Delegates	Location
46	The Custard Factory, Birmingham

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1. GoldStar Interview

Two GoldStar project managers provided a number of insights into how volunteers are recruited and supported:

- Rob Clarke runs Cheetham Hill Advice Centre (CHAC) which recruits, trains, supervises and supports local residents as volunteer advice workers, receptionists and administrators, with a particular focus on the recruitment of volunteers in groups at risk of social exclusion.
- Soo Nevison runs Multiple Choice, which is a community-based drug rehabilitation programme supporting individuals to become and remain drug free, as an alternative to residential rehab. Multiple Choice actively encourages volunteers with previous experience of using services (drugs, mental health, other support)

What did they talk about?

Two key themes were addressed as part of the event, these being **recruitment and selection** and **progression pathways**.

Rob highlighted the ethnically diverse localities in which they operate and how this is reflected in the volunteer base. The local area has an established Asian community but also a more transient population with a high proportion of refugees and asylum seekers.

In relation to **recruitment and selection** he highlighted the extensive recruitment and selection procedures in place to recruit volunteers that are similar to those for recruiting paid staff. These procedures are linked to a structured training programme. Rob emphasised the success of the project in recruiting volunteers, indicating over 100 enquiries result every time a volunteer post is advertised. He also stressed the importance of:



- Signposting those not selected to other organisations, through local networks
- Being very clear about what is involved in volunteering
- Making the selection process accessible to local residents from different backgrounds
- Having a full time post of volunteer development worker

Soo contrasted the profile of the volunteer base within Multiple Choice indicating that it is predominantly White British but diverse in background, from highly educated to those with no qualifications. She also pointed out that the service user profile has changed from about 90% male to about 30% women.

In relation to **recruitment** of volunteers Soo stressed the importance of encouraging ex service users to progress into volunteering (About 75% of volunteers are ex service users). She indicated that Multiple Choice does not go through an advertising process unless it is for specialist volunteering positions and would be inundated with responses if it did. Every person that applies as a volunteer is invited to attend a training session, with interviews held after this has taken place. Soo stressed the importance of potential volunteers understanding the boundaries that have to be maintained as a volunteer, this being a key aspect of the training. She also indicated that help is provided for those not able to fill the application form in. Given the high proportion of ex service users taken on as volunteers, she also stressed the importance of being able to manage people in and out of service.

In response to a question about the **main recruitment avenues** utilised **Rob** highlighted the success of using the Manchester City Council Jobs Update publication, together with posters in community centres, but also stressed the importance of word of mouth. **Soo** pointed out the potential use of CVS monthly newsletters and mail outs through local Volunteer Centres. **Rob** also pointed out that it is not just important where you place adverts but that you need to be clear about who you are trying to reach and what volunteers can get out of volunteering (A qualification for example).

A number of **other issues** were raised by delegates in relation to recruitment and selection including:

- How **the profile of volunteers is likely to reflect the perceptions by local residents** of the organisation. This was highlighted in particular by an advocacy organisation that indicated that their organisation is perceived locally as a 'safe' organisation for BME groups, within the context of a locality with a high level of racial tension and a significant BNP membership. A particular difficulty the organisation has is the recruitment of White working class volunteers. Soo highlighted how the increase in women clients was more to do with accessibility of services and that a lot of women feel 'safe' using Multiple Choice services. This is reflected in a volunteer base, which are now about 50% women.
- The importance of **being careful about the language being used when recruiting volunteers**. One delegate pointed out that they don't use the word 'volunteer', but have used advertising slogan such as '*We want your body*' or '*Good Driver?*' Other terms put forward by another delegate included the term 'supporting' rather than volunteering.



- The **need to develop active advocates** through use of current volunteers or through local networks to encourage volunteering through word of mouth referral. One delegate pointed out the importance of keeping records of organisations that refer volunteers and following up on this. However, the problems of local networks sometimes being clique and therefore limiting access to a greater diversity of volunteers was also highlighted. The importance of using local networks that 'know their patch' was also identified. Soo highlighted a local network established in Leeds (INVOLVE), which goes out to school and colleges to run workshops to heighten awareness of the role of volunteers. Another delegate highlighted a particular campaign targeting parents as volunteers through their children
- The importance of **being honest and open** about the contract with, or what is expected of volunteers and the commitment they will need to make. It was also pointed out that the other side of this is the expectation that volunteers will be honest with the organisation. Rob pointed out that it is important to be clear that a volunteering post is not a paid job and that they have had enquiries in the past from potential applicants assuming this was the case. One delegate pointed out that it is important not to be scared to say '*no you are not suitable*' to those volunteers not meeting the required criteria. However, the issue of how to treat those not successful in a positive manner was also stressed, with one delegate indicating that they provide all candidates with a certificate, even if not recruited. Those not recruited are then signposted elsewhere.
- The importance of **taking local circumstances into consideration**. One delegate pointed out that what works in one place wouldn't work in some other areas.

In relation to **progression pathways**:

- Soo indicated that she was not happy with the term 'progression pathways' and that **personal growth of individuals** would be a better term and that each individual will have different aspirations. Some may want qualifications as a step into other things, but others may wish to stay as volunteers. "*We don't like the term progression pathways. It implies going from x to y to z*".
- It was pointed out that for someone with very low confidence and poor social skills a big progression might be involvement in social activities. Success should be measured in relation to how much a volunteer grows within himself or herself. "*For us the big success is not moving people into employment. We have young people coming to us with low confidence. For us the big issue is getting them into social activities or training. The big success is how much they grow within themselves*". The importance of recording such changes and highlighting this to volunteers at a later stage was stressed in this context.
- The importance of **being clear about what the organisation expects of volunteers and** what the organisation is going to contribute to support volunteer progression was highlighted in relation to factors such as the development of soft skills, confidence and team working. It was also pointed out that this is likely to apply even more to volunteers from socially excluded backgrounds. One delegate commented, that for socially excluded groups "*the journey travelled can be much greater, but it is about being creative about how you measure it*"



- The importance of **mentors getting to know mentees** very well in order to support personal growth was stressed.
- The importance of **recognising that each individual progresses at a different pace** was highlighted and that volunteering is still valuable for those 'not progressing' as measured through conventional terms such as accreditation or employment. An example of someone with learning disabilities who may not 'progress' in three years but may still enjoy the experience of volunteering was highlighted as an example of this. The positive contribution people with learning disabilities who volunteer can make to change people's attitudes was also identified in this context.
- The importance **accreditation** was highlighted as a real carrot for some volunteers
- The need to **understand that individuals undertake volunteering for a wide range of different reasons** was underlined. One delegate commented: *"Sometimes you want to give something back. Some people are in it because they like that (progression) route and might get a job out of it"*. One volunteer present commented *"I want to keep doing this forever"*
- Rob pointed out that they treat volunteers in the same way as paid staff but with clear opportunities to progress, but at the same time, with the caveat not all volunteers want to progress.
- In the context of a discussion over volunteer roles the whole issue of **hierarchies within organisations** was raised. It was stressed that the relationship between paid and unpaid staff needs to be seen as a 'partnership', not a hierarchy, with leadership roles coming from volunteers or paid staff.
- The importance of **appropriately recording volunteer development** over time was also identified as important. One delegate commented: *"You record what they do and show it back to them. Where the progression comes is in the feedback"*. Another delegate highlighted how they are planning to track volunteers over time to find out what they have achieved through their volunteering experience.

In relation to ways of improving current **arrangements for accessing information on volunteering good practice**, (particularly with respect to those at risk from social exclusion) a number of suggestions or issues were highlighted by delegates:

- The need to ensure anything placed on the GoldStar website is not complicated to access
- The usefulness of regional events as mechanisms for dissemination
- The need for more volunteer representation at regional events, with financial support for volunteers to attend
- The need to make the GoldStar volunteer film available on DVD
- Maximise the use of the huge number of local networks by 'cascading' information through these
- Make use of paid staff that are allowed to volunteer with local agencies



2. Workshops: Issues raised and discussed

Delegates were asked to consider with colleagues sitting on their particular table, how they currently recruited volunteers, identify key barriers to recruitment and some lessons learnt in terms of recruitment and selection of volunteers, particularly those at risk from social exclusion. Delegates were also asked to identify key considerations in relation to supporting volunteers' progress

A summary of issues raised during these round table workshops is set out below:

Recruitment methods

A wide range of recruitment methods were identified, including:

- Leaflets (GP surgeries, residential care homes, day services)
- Media (Press releases, Radio WM)
- Run effective adverts such as 'We want your body' or 'Good Driver?'
- Word of mouth (Existing volunteers/friends of staff)
- Magazines/local newsletters (Use volunteers to produce own newsletter)
- Awareness sessions/presentations to voluntary and community organisations, schools, colleges, universities, NHS etc.
- Events (Fun days, stalls at day events)
- Develop and use networks (Community Health Network, Age Concern, PCTs, faith communities)
- Recruit through schools (Use of assemblies and follow ups)
- Recruit from service users
- Offer first hand experience through personal invitations to visit the organisation
- Use of existing websites (Do-it.org)
- Use of paid employees in some organisations that encourage volunteering (NHS, local authorities)
- Recruit at intervals throughout the year

Barriers to recruitment

Specific barriers to volunteer recruitment identified included:

- Financial costs of volunteering
- Transport, particularly in rural areas
- Low self esteem of some potential volunteers
- The negative image of volunteering
- CRB checks and the time taken
- The treatment of expenses such as lunch money by DWP



Key recruitment lessons/considerations

A number of key recruitment lessons and considerations were identified including:

- The importance of matching volunteer opportunities to clear roles and specific needs
- The need for honesty and clarity from the start in terms of roles/timescales etc. Resentment can creep in if volunteers do the work of a paid worker
- Develop clear job descriptions (similar to paid employees)
- Good induction helps to retain volunteers
- Accreditation of training can be an incentive for volunteers
- The importance of signposting volunteers not required to other organisations
- The need to be clear about why different individuals are volunteering - i.e. As a stepping-stone into paid work, an opportunity for training, for responsibility, to gain experience, other reasons.
- The importance of ensuring volunteers understand and sign up to the policies of host organisations, including equal opportunities
- Identify the most appropriate mediums to advertise for volunteers for the organisation concerned
- Raise the profile of the host organisation in as many ways as possible
- Promote a professional image through adoption of standards such as Investors in Volunteers
- Be clear about the application/recruitment process and stages involved
- Make sure volunteer costs are built into the budget
- Share transport/Provide specific transport support
- Involve potential volunteers in work where CRB checks are not needed until CRB approval is received - Induct/shadow until CRB approval - Provide appropriate training in relation to the CRB checking process

Volunteer development/ progression

A number of key issues and lessons were identified in relation to supporting volunteer development and/or progression, including:

- The need for realistic expectations
- Be clear about what volunteers can expect from the organisation and what the organisation expects of the volunteer
- Explore expectations with volunteers on a one to one basis
- Be clear about what possible progression pathways are and recognise there a multiple pathways for volunteers
- The importance of tailoring training to suit volunteer needs (Including a mix of informal and formal training and recognising not everybody wants accredited training)
- Provide an environment for volunteers to gain confidence and self-esteem, which might eventually lead to work
- Focus on personal growth (which may or may not lead to 'formal' progression)
- The importance of using volunteers to help other volunteers progress (i.e. through mentoring)
- The importance of accreditation of training
- The importance of integrating volunteers into the host organisations workforce and treating volunteers and paid staff as equal



- Establish appropriate feedback and follow up support structures – Regular supervision/reviews
- Develop links with other organisations and network opportunities
- Pay volunteer expenses (child care/caring expenses)
- Use certificates and awards to recognise volunteer achievements

Information on current GoldStar Exemplar groups and good practices relating to volunteers from socially excluded groups are continually being uploaded onto this website throughout the GoldStar Dissemination programme.
