



Conference Report

Date	Event
4th July 2006	GoldStar Regional Conference (Yorkshire and Humberside)
No of Delegates	Location
64 Click to view list	The Queens Hotel, Leeds

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1. GoldStar Interview

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

- Soo Nevison is the Development Manager at 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).
- Rowena Holstead and Tilly Rothmell both work for Home-Start Leeds, which is an independently registered charity, which supports parents of young children in providing their children with the very best start in life. Volunteers offer families emotional support, guidance and encouragement, together with some practical help during periods in which they are experiencing difficulties.
- Dr Hailu Hagos manages the Refugee Mentoring Service in East London which aims to enable refugees and migrants to realise their potential in society by providing peer support and positive role models from the refugee community, and support for personal, educational and career development.

What did they talk about?

Two key themes were addressed as part of the event, these being **recruitment and selection** and **looking after volunteers**.

Soo indicated that a high proportion of volunteers had previously been service users either through Multiple Choice or through other drug rehabilitation services and the only pre-requisite to become a volunteer was to be drug free.

In relation to **recruitment** of volunteers Soo indicated the process was a bit 'back to front' in that recruitment interviews happen at the end of a programme of induction. She commented

"We are a bit back to front. A lot of people who get into volunteering, the first thing they need to do is go for an interview. Our interviews appear at the end of our training programme. People can learn...we can get a hold on whether they will adapt. Because it is very different being the receiver of the service compared with the deliverer. What



a lot of our clients don't realise is all that hidden staff that the workers keep hold of and the volunteers keep hold of around boundaries and confidentiality and we don't feel as an organisation you can make the judgement that someone can learn in an interview. So we don't want to turn them down at that point, so we give them the opportunity to learn if they can take it on board".

She also indicated that there is an important step before volunteering, this being participation in a 'service user involvement group'.

In relation to training Soo indicated that this "*never stops really*" and should be seen as a process of personal growth. She commented, "*I don't like using the term professional development because that can be a bit scary, so it is growth. Volunteering is about starting with the individual and allowing an individual to get to where they want to be*". She stressed the importance of being flexible to the needs of individual volunteers and allowing volunteers to go at their own pace.

In relation to support Soo underlined the importance of treating volunteers like staff members. A new volunteer co-ordinator has now been appointed to oversee support and recruitment of volunteers.

Rowena indicated that the most common support volunteers provide to families is to help alleviate isolation. She commented, "*You can be very, very isolated living in quite an intense community....and bringing up children is a hard enough job anyway, if you feel like you are doing it on your own*".

In relation to **recruitment** of volunteers, people are referred to Home Start Leeds from a wide variety of organisations including GPs, social workers, volunteers and others and come from a wide variety of backgrounds. In relation to volunteers recruiting others she commented, "*these are the best resources that you have*". **Tilly** commented that currently, there is no shortage of volunteers with about 30 currently undertaking an induction process. The induction process lasts 40 hours spread over 10-12 weeks. Tilly indicated that quite a lot of people within families supported subsequently become volunteers themselves, "*which is great, because it shows how they have progressed and really come through*".

In relation to 'screening' of potential volunteers Rowena indicated that this involves an initial chat, a home visit, a CRB check and the preparation course, which enables Home Start to "*make sure volunteers are right for us and (Home Start) is right for them.*" If Home-Start has concerns about a volunteer they won't match that individual to a family. On the other hand Rowena also indicated that there is some degree of flexibility with CRB checks, depending on the nature of the issue and the honesty of the volunteer in disclosing this.

Home Start Leeds **achieves quite high levels of retention amongst those volunteers recruited.** Rowena indicated that a lot of volunteers come thinking they will stay for about 6 months but end up staying much longer. The average length of time a volunteer stays is about two years. She commented, "*We get a lot of volunteers that do come in for experience, students, some single parents that are using Home Start as a way of getting back into employment. A lot of people come in thinking I will stay for six months and at the end of it I will have enough experience to get me somewhere else and find that they absolutely love it and feel very passionate about what they do and continue it*".

A structured **support** programme is in place with the potential risks to volunteers of visiting peoples homes covered as part of this preparation, screening of households undertaken and 24 hour back up support via telephone.

Hailu outlined how a programme of accredited mentor training was in place spread over three and a half months. This is a combination of peer assessment and self-assessment. Three training sessions are undertaken before volunteer mentors are matched to mentees. He outlined how in relation to **recruitment** a lot of emphasis is placed on reaching out into different communities through things like lunch groups, but also through creating networks with other organisations. He commented that on average lunch is planned for about 20 people but often 30 turn up and that once one person becomes involved they start to "*spread the word*". He commented, "*It is such a diverse group and it is very difficult to set a standard for these groups. So we are*



flexible and diverse in our activities. What we are proud of is it is a multicultural organisation. The mentors are as diverse as the mentees themselves”.

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

- One delegate asked if Multiple Choice test to see if volunteers are drug free. Soo indicated this was not the case and stressed the importance of basing the relationship with volunteers on the basis of trust from the outset. She also indicated that staff would spot if volunteers were not drug free a mile off. She gave an example of someone who used to be a chaotic user and is now a trainee drug worker, but thinking of applying for a full time post. *“It is about treating equally, taking as many barriers down as possible and maintaining trust”*. However, Soo also indicated that there have been cases in the past where volunteers have had to leave when this bond of trust has been broken, but that this has been rare, with this being the case for only 3 out of about 40–50 volunteers. One delegate involved in a drugs rehabilitation project queried why volunteers needed to be free of drugs, as this was not the case with their own project. Soo indicated that this was the decision made by Multiple Choice for safety reasons and that they want volunteers to act as role models, illustrating to others how they have managed to remain drug free.
- One delegate indicated she was the project manager of a substance misuse project, with a diverse range of volunteers including service users and parents with children who have drug problems. She highlighted how for peer mentors they undertake a very intensive initial 14 hours training with a 3 day follow up, with this all accredited.
- A discussion on the merits of targeting ex offenders took place. One delegate pointed out that offenders may be keen to volunteer when released from prison and *“the prison gate is a prime recruiting ground”*, but there was often nothing out there in terms of support or structured volunteering opportunities, the implication of this being the need for more joined up agency work. It was also pointed out that a number of volunteering opportunities were open to people with crime records but that there were particular barriers to progression on to paid employment. However, another delegate indicated it was important not to be naïve about whom you are working with. The criteria adopted by their own organisation is that an ex offender needs to be out of offending for at least 12 months, before a volunteer placement is possible. In this context it was commented that volunteering is part of the solution not the total solution and that in order to recruit people straight from prison a wide range of support would need to be in place to ensure the *“rest of their lives were stable”*.

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 looking after volunteers.

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:

- Networking (For example inside and outside prison)
- Referrals
- Sharing of information with different organisations/working with other voluntary organisations/visiting and presenting to voluntary organisations
- Attendance at local events



- Posters at local venues such as doctors/supermarkets/on back of loo doors
- Use of the local media (press, local radio, regional T.V)
- Use the Guardian for mentors
- Advertising on buses
- Word of mouth – Volunteer to volunteer
- Use of CVS
- CSV Action Desk – An annual make a difference day is held
- Making use of do-it.org.uk via volunteer centres – It was pointed out that a lot of young people access the website
- Use of Voluntary Action Leeds website and other websites
- Run taster days/themed open days
- Use National Volunteer Week/volunteer fairs
- Making use of university student unions/fresher fairs
- Use students on volunteer placements/Graduate Placement Scheme
- Making use of family Learning Centres to recruit
- Use Millennium Volunteers
- Making use of the Good Practice DVD developed by the Yorkshire Volunteer Centre managers and available in all Volunteer Centres in Yorkshire and Humber
- Identifying 'volunteer champions' to recruit others
- Hold volunteer matching fairs (similar concept to speed dating)
- Targeting specific areas of the city
- Door to door advertising
- Go out into the community (i.e. Organising lunches)
- Using community networks to recruit - 'Concentric circles approach'.
- Build up a good reputation
- Raising awareness of volunteering opportunities in educational settings – Use children to get parents involved in volunteering

Barriers to recruitment

Specific barriers to volunteer recruitment identified included:

- CRB checks working against volunteers, with agencies 'playing safe'
- Language skills (for those whose first language is not English)
- Lack of/difficulties with references for those recently arrived in the UK
- Transport issues, particularly in rural areas
- Red tape
- Funding – It was pointed out that short term funding which may end part way through a volunteer placement is a problem
- Age limits/specifications for some volunteering posts
- The issue of volunteer expenses, in particular the new rule on taxing volunteer lunch expenses

Key recruitment lessons/considerations

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

- The need for flexibility with CRB checks - Encourage honesty amongst those applying and judge on an individual basis
- The need for flexibility during the recruitment process – 'Do all roles need two references?' It was pointed out that volunteers can come from very different backgrounds, so it is important not to be too rigid when recruiting
- The need to deal with volunteers not suitable for particular positions in an appropriate way. Particular issues were raised in this respect included the need to be 'open', the importance of probationary periods, treating volunteers equally and offering alternative volunteering opportunities
- Recognising that the use of targeting can increase or decrease diversity
- The importance of ensuring an appropriate image for the organisation
- Developing volunteering as an attractive product/making it desirable
- The importance of paying expenses to volunteers (although issues were raised about the new DWP guidance for volunteers on benefits)
- Use 3 months or 6-week probationary periods
- Give rewards such as vouchers/meals



- Develop appropriate selection procedures (e.g. Interview, take up references, use CRB checks and an application form)
- The importance of training/induction to inform selection
- The importance of continuity of contact – e.g. The person who interviews subsequently provides support
- The issue of how to handle those volunteers not considered appropriate to place. The advantages and disadvantages of having an appeals process in place was raised in this context
- The importance of developing clear roles for volunteers was recognised but at the same time, it was pointed out, organisations need to be careful not to give volunteer job descriptions that equate to contractual arrangements. An example was given by one delegate of volunteers who have taken the organisation to tribunal on the basis that the volunteer was legally an employee.

Looking after volunteers

A number of key issues and lessons were identified in relation to looking after volunteers, including:

- The need for appropriate supervision including telephone support/group and individual supervision
- Ensure feedback mechanisms are in place including 1-1 and small group feedback sessions
- Ensure structured review procedures are in place (i.e. Annual review, personal development review every 3 months)
- Ensure regular contact with volunteers such as coming into the office each month/regular phone calls
- Help build and develop volunteer portfolios
- The need to make volunteers feel valued
- The need to recognise volunteer achievements through things such as newsletters, events, celebrations, birthdays, coffee mornings, social activities, certificates of attendance – One delegate indicated that their organisation holds a high profile annual recognition ceremony involving the Mayor of Leeds.
- The benefits of away days in order to get volunteer perspectives on how organisations should work in the future.
- The need for good facilities to accommodate volunteers
- The importance of a volunteer forum where volunteers can meet and learn from each other
- The importance of introducing volunteers to volunteer networks
- Ensuring there are progression paths within and outside the organisation – Signposting of volunteers to other opportunities on exit
- The benefits of establishing user/volunteer groups
- Use of individual learning plans with short and long term goals
- The need to pay volunteer expenses
- The value of accreditation of training undertaken (but keeping it optional – It needs to be a choice!)
- Delivering training through appropriate mediums (Such as modular content and appropriate study methods)
- Use of outside bodies/partners to deliver training
- Ensure volunteer access to the training given to paid staff
- Ensure 'proper' experience is provided, reflecting those in paid positions
- Use of volunteer development handbooks
- Ensure formal volunteer policies/statements are in place (i.e. Grievance procedures, inclusivity policy)
- Define volunteer roles and job descriptions
- Overcome prejudice from existing staff
- Ensure confidential support is in place when needed
- Provide internet/e mail access for volunteers on the same basis as staff
- Ensure boundaries between clients and volunteers are clearly understood
- Develop buddying systems to support and mentor volunteers
- The importance of volunteers being clear about whom in the organisation provides what support
- Making volunteers aware of what they have gained from their volunteering experience



- Conduct evaluations with service users to allow feedback to volunteers
- Provide a co-ordinator to support volunteers
- Involve volunteers in every level of the organisation

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.
