



Conference Report

Date	Event
23 rd June 2006	GoldStar Regional Conference (East Midlands)
No of Delegates	Location
34 Click to view list	Walkers Stadium, Leicester

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1. GoldStar Interview

One of the GoldStar project managers provided a number of insights into how volunteers are recruited and supported. He was:

- Rob Clarke from 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.

What did they talk about?

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

Rob indicated that Cheetham Hill Advice Centre recruits about 15-20 volunteers a year. Training undertaken by volunteers is accredited.

Rob highlighted the ethnically diverse localities in which they operate, with about 20 different languages spoken locally. This presents particular challenges, with a significant amount spent on interpreters. However, he underlined that it was far better to have volunteers who speak different languages to fulfil this role. He emphasised how the Advice Centre has worked very hard to reach those communities represented locally.

In relation to **looking after volunteers** Rob highlighted the importance of supervision, with each volunteer having a supervisor each day that they work. He emphasised the holistic nature of support provided, with the role of a full time development worker being to provide ongoing support. Support provided may relate to the tasks being undertaken as a volunteer but equally may relate to issues volunteers are facing outside their volunteer role.

In relation to **recruitment** of volunteers, Rob commented, *"Because we are training them to be volunteers we have quite a long recruitment process in terms of making sure what we offer is right for that person and then once they start, they are on a training course to begin with and also coming into the centre to put what they are learning into practice"*.



The length of time courses can take and the commitment this can involve was identified as an issue, with one organisation indicating volunteers used to undertake seven and a half days training, but this has now been reduced, which has helped to attract more volunteers. One delegate indicated that within their own advice agency, training is spread over 9 months, costs over £2000, with an average attrition rate of 50%.

The issue of the image of different volunteer roles was also raised, with one delegate indicating that within their own organisation an image problem exists in relation to administrative volunteer roles. He indicated that this is an issue that needs to be addressed as, *"all volunteers are valuable. If you take away administrative volunteers the whole system collapses"*.

Rob indicated that within Cheetham Hill Advice Centre it used to be the case that administrative tasks were given to those not ready for advice, but this approach has now been changed to a policy of recruiting volunteers who specifically want to undertake administrative roles.

The issue of CRB checks was raised by one delegate. Rob indicated that Cheetham Hill Advice Centre do not CRB check volunteers, but do ask to declare any past issues. He indicated that although they rely on voluntary disclosure they can control some of the risk through other mechanisms such as references. It was pointed out that CRB checks should not be used as a substitute for good volunteer management.

A number of other issues were raised during the course of the event in relation to **recruitment and selection**, including:

- The particular difficulties now faced by people with mental health disabilities, who have had an 'unjust' bad press and the need to educate people on the potential contribution of this group
- The importance of language skills and the challenges posed by those not speaking English. One delegate pointed out that it is only possible for their organisation to support those volunteers that speak English, as the whole application process is in English. If this was not the case it was pointed out that it would be necessary to have trainers in different languages. Another delegate commented that in relation to their own organisation volunteers need to be able to function in English
- The importance of being specific about what you want each volunteer to do was underlined. One delegate commented, *"One of the things that works well is if you are more specific about what you want in terms of volunteering. So if you make a specific offer, instead of saying would you like to volunteer to do anything"*
- The issue of funding detracting from an organisations ability to recruit and retain volunteers was also raised. One delegate commented, *"If funding was targeted properly there would be far more volunteers in our sector"*

The issue of how to deal with those potential volunteers considered unsuitable for particular roles was discussed with differences of opinion as to how this issue should be resolved emerging. While one delegate indicated that within their own organisation it was not the policy to turn down applicants, while another delegate pointed out that if you say no, it could be quite hurtful, but if you say yes, this can be even more problematic.

A wide range of examples of particular recruitment methods were identified by delegates. These are outlined more fully in the following section relating to workshops – Issues raised and discussed. However, two particular examples highlighted were:

- One project that managed to get a slot on Woman's Hour and got many more volunteers than it could deal with
- Another project that managed to borrow a community bus to help recruit in a particular area in order to establish a befriending scheme. The delegate commented that the exercise worked really well and resulted in 12 people registering to become befrienders

In relation to **looking after volunteers** other issues raised included:



- The high levels of duplication of training relating to volunteers and the advantages of economies of scale. A delegate from Cambridgeshire CAB highlighted how they run advice training for volunteers from other organisations
- Problems meeting the high expectations of volunteers and the challenges posed in terms of meeting the support needs of those volunteers with intensive support needs
- The importance of regular reviews of volunteers. One delegate, whose organisation undertakes six monthly volunteer reviews commented, *"It is mainly to check the volunteer is OK, but also to pick up whether they would like to move on, if they would like training, but it is partly to check I am doing my job correctly"*
- The advantages of funding a staff member to co-ordinate volunteer support. It was commented, *"You need funding for a paid staff member to support volunteers. It is not fair to put this on unpaid staff"*
- The idea of a 'what if' card, which can be given to volunteers and has basic procedures in response to particular situations outlined on the back
- In relation to volunteers claiming expenses one delegate pointed out that if volunteers don't want to claim expenses it is possible to set up procedures for this to be received by the host organisation in the form of gift aid
- The importance of recognising the contribution of volunteers. In this context, one delegate commented, *"volunteers give so much, so we always have a special Christmas event...It is just to say than-you to the people that have helped us deliver"*

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:

- Use of a community bus
- Attendance at information events, taking existing volunteers with you
- Adverts through universities
- Working in groups when targeting in the community
- Word of mouth – Through existing/previous volunteers and through other organisations
- Radio – On air appeals - Best done by real volunteers, not actors
- Targeting faith groups
- Developing links with PCTS. Encourage GPs to signpost volunteers to projects

Barriers to recruitment

Specific barriers to volunteer recruitment identified included:

- Peoples views of particular groups – It takes time to educate people on the value of volunteers from particular backgrounds e.g. people at risk of exclusion, asylum seekers



- There are too many hoops to jump through e.g. LSC criteria, Lottery Funding criteria, regulations relating to claiming state benefits etc

Key recruitment lessons/considerations

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

- The value of working in partnership with other organisations
- Being clear and realistic about what volunteering opportunities entail and what is needed from volunteers
- Recognising not everyone is suitable and the need to manage expectations – Different organisations clearly have different policies on this
- The importance of properly assessing the needs of volunteers and provide appropriate mentoring/coaching
- Recognising that the concept of volunteering varies in different communities
- Confidence building is crucial for hard to reach groups, but retention rates can be affected if too much is provided (i.e. volunteers may do the training and leave)
- It is important to find appropriate opportunities suiting the skills and abilities of all volunteers
- The importance of signposting volunteers to suitable opportunities in other organisations
- Ensuring the organisation can cope with volunteers generated by recruitment campaigns

Looking after volunteers

A number of key issues and lessons were identified in relation to supporting volunteers including:

- Have an 'open door' policy with one to one line management
- Establish an environment such that volunteers feel they can approach managers
- Provide references for volunteers
- Offer the same level of support as paid staff
- Set clear objectives
- Have clear terms and conditions
- Implement buddying to support volunteers
- Pay travel and other expenses
- Establish a programme of social activities
- Keep a log of all visits that can be reviewed with the appropriate volunteer manager
- Arrange work placements to enhance CVs
- Provide residential conferences
- Recognise volunteer contributions through things such as volunteer of the month, put volunteer achievements on the website, praise and give thanks
- Send a newsletter to volunteers – Include updates of activities, opportunities for paid employment etc
- Provide peer support/peer led training
- Introduce volunteers to lone working slowly
- Implement a probationary period
- Let volunteers observe others
- Assess work loads daily
- Ensure there is room for both formal and informal support
- Ensure support is accessible
- Ensure supervision is appropriate for particular volunteer activities/roles – Some need intensive support and supervision, others may need less
- Ensure clear task/volunteer role descriptions are in place
- Ensure the organisation has the capacity to supervise/support
- Get to know your volunteers
- Have regular contact with volunteers and encourage feedback
- Be sensitive to specific issues affecting different volunteers
- Implement training plans and volunteer plans
- Use of a handbook outlining support available



- Assess the risk of different volunteering opportunities
- Ensure adequate support is in place for lone working or out of hours support
- Ensure clear guidelines are in place on 'accepted' contact (i.e. in relation to home visits, sharing of personal details) and ensure volunteers understand why guidelines are in place (Case studies and or role play might help with this)
- Stagger training to make information intake manageable – Do not overload volunteers with information at the beginning
- Provide a What If card – This is of credit card size with different what if situations and support – This is portable with the volunteers ID on the flip side
- Establish a volunteer forum
- Keep running logs of activity
- Encourage people to claim expenses or claim and give back as a donation
- Recognise particular capacity issues relating to supporting those with additional needs
- Use the Open College Network (OCN) to accredit courses
- The nature of support/supervision needed depends on the role of volunteers – This can vary from an individual 1 to 1 sessions through to telephone contact
- Shut down once a quarter and have a day out
- Adapt supervision procedures that you have for paid staff
- Write to volunteers that you have not heard of for a while
- Provide refresher training (with lunch and a volunteer meeting)
- Make use of Volunteering England Adult Mentoring training (£250 per day) for volunteer managers

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.
