



Conference Report

Date	Event
5 th July 2006	GoldStar Regional Conference (North West)
No of Delegates	Location
65 Click to view list	The Lowry, Salford

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1. GoldStar Interview

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

- Jane Farell from The Prince's Trust – Lancashire Area Office. The Prince's Trust, (Lancashire Area) GoldStar Project is called the East Lancashire Community Programme. It began as a mentoring project in Blackburn in 2000 with the purpose of helping to reduce offending behaviour by young people and divert them from engaging in criminal activity. It expanded into Burnley and Pendle and widened its remit to include young people at risk of engaging in offending behaviour.
- Mark Pritchard from Manchester Event Volunteers, which is an established volunteer brokerage service and a legacy of the Commonwealth Games. Following the Games, the volunteer programme attracted further funding to continue its success in attracting disadvantaged individuals into volunteering and providing training and quality volunteering opportunities as a progression route to employment.
- Vicky Corlett from Bolton Lads and Girls Club. The Mentoring Project initially began in April 1997, as a direct result of growing concerns from staff and volunteers within the Club. It had become more and more noticeable that many of the young people that attended the evening youth club were experiencing a wide range of complex issues leading to social disaffection. The Club realised that these youngsters needed some additional support from someone who was credible in terms of being a non-professional. This led to the formation of the Project.
- Alfred Chung from Wai Yin Chinese Women Society. Wai Yin was set up in 1988 by four women volunteers responding to the needs of Chinese women experiencing domestic violence, family breakdown and acute isolation. Over the years the service has expanded to respond to a broad range of needs presented from all members of the Chinese community including men, women, children and the elderly. Wai Yin Chinese Women Society has developed and runs a wide range of services for the Greater Manchester Chinese community, with over 800 people using services each week.



What did they talk about?

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

Vicky indicated that the Bolton Lads and Girls Club Mentoring Project now has about 140 volunteers and are hoping to expand to 185 by the end of the year. She indicated that while it was **not a problem to recruit women it has been much more difficult to recruit men** to provide male role models. This has led to a targeted recruitment aimed at men through places like fire stations and rugby clubs. Vicky described how as a PR stunt they staged a hijacking of a fire engine.

Mark from Manchester Event Volunteers indicated that the project was one of the successful legacies of the Commonwealth Games. He indicated that after the Games a feedback questionnaire was sent out which included a question 'would you like to become a volunteer'. This resulted in **1500 responses and since then a further 1500 volunteers have been recruited**. He indicated that volunteers range from 16 to the eldest one that is 86.

Mark outlined a range of support the organisation provides volunteers, which helps build the confidence of volunteers. He also indicated that before being allowed to go to an event volunteers need to sign up to a code of practice, which outlines everything Manchester Event Volunteers (MEV) expects from a volunteer. The other aspect of this process is that MEV will only work with organisations that can provide quality placements. He commented "*That the way I work is that I wouldn't send a volunteer to a place I wouldn't go myself*".

Jane from the Prince's Trust – Lancashire Area Office highlighted **how the organisation recruit mentors for 1:1 mentoring from some of the hardest to reach groups locally**. She indicated that the project does not struggle to recruit volunteers and has experienced a recent boost through media exposure. A young volunteer covered an interview on TV with Sharon Osbourne. Jane commented that "*with regard to that young lad it has boosted his confidence no end and he is actually in employment now*". As a result of this media exposure 40 volunteers came forward.

Alfred highlighted **how different projects run by Wai Yin need different kinds of volunteers**. Given the history of the project the majority of volunteers are women, with a lot of new immigrants from the Far East. One of the challenges identified is the need to persuade people they can still volunteer without English language skills. He commented "*We still have language barriers in our voluntary scheme. We need a lot of people to tell others, OK you can't speak the language but you can still work. The best way to do this is show someone who is already volunteering*".

In relation **to training** Jane indicated that all volunteers were given training, and the **qualification being implemented was quite flexible**, with volunteers given at least six months to complete and attainment of qualifications optional. She also commented "*Training shouldn't just be an initial training programme, it should be ongoing*".

Alfred underlined the importance of training within Wai Yin and how they work with other voluntary organisations to implement different training courses (e.g. St Johns Ambulance).

Mark indicated MEV provides **a range of different training** including Welcome Host, Health and Safety training and the Volunteer Management Award. He indicated that feedback from volunteers in relation to the Volunteer Management Award is very positive, with more volunteers indicating they would like to undertake this. He commented, "*It is a really good qualification for the volunteers to do*". This has been sourced by MEV for free through an organisation with ESF funding.

Jane indicated that The Princes Trust initially run a **3 day programme of induction training for young people from the local community, run over weekends and evenings, so as to be flexible to local needs**, but indicated that they were also developing training further by putting in place OCN accredited training specifically targeted at hard to reach groups. She stressed the success of the project in helping volunteer's progress, with three volunteers having gone into work in agencies over the



last year and others progressed into training as youth workers. She highlighted the importance of developing good community networks to support and recruit volunteers and the need to link into other agencies and benefit from training already developed locally. She commented, *"We have very good community networks in Burnley, Pendle and Blackburn, so we recruit that way". "I think what is key also is linking in to other agencies, because we don't provide all the training, there is no need to do that and we link our volunteers into that training"*. She also stressed the importance of the volunteer co-ordinator in measuring when volunteers are ready for training and administering the induction process.

Vicky highlighted how Bolton Lads and Girls Club **have developed OCN accredited training and that this was beneficial to volunteers and could be used as a 'carrot'**. However, she also indicated that this was quite expensive and complicated to administer involving a lot of time and a drain on staff resources. She commented, *"You need a lot of time to be able to apply for it". "It is a big drain on staff resources"*. However, she also highlighted the benefits of adopting this approach; *"We have volunteers that maybe haven't achieved anything at school, got to do some voluntary work, really enjoyed it and been able to get a qualification out of it"*.

One delegate stressed that **training that was not accredited was also important**. Jane agreed that it was not a good idea to involve all volunteers in accredited training. The importance of both accredited and unaccredited training was stressed.

There was a further discussion on how to encourage volunteers to train. One delegate pointed out the benefits of not calling this training and sometimes development work with volunteers undertaken on a one to one basis was a way of delivering 'disguised' training. *"We have disguised the training sometimes and put it on a one to one basis"*. However, it was also pointed out that while there was a need to adapt to individuals needs it was always very important that volunteers know what the organisations policies and procedures are in relation to issues such as health and safety and child protection.

A discussion as to **how to deal with those volunteers not suitable for the organisation concerned and in particular how to deal with CRB checks** in the case of those with particular past convictions/issues took place. Vicky indicated that selection of volunteers involves an integrated process of an interview, references, CRB check and working with individuals to gain further insights of any issues of concern. She indicated that individuals not suitable were often directed elsewhere, but this was relatively rare (3-4 times in the last 5 years).

Mark indicated that in the case of MEV, mentors tend to be assessed informally. At present MEV do not take up references, but this is currently being examined. He indicated that the onus is put on host agencies to do checks. If the CRB check is unfavourable MEV have a uniform policy of not considering the individual involved.

Alfred indicated that in the case of Wai Yin an individual that fails a CRB check can't in general volunteer, but this is not a hard and fast rule and individuals can also be sign posted elsewhere.

The issue of **funding for training** was discussed. It was pointed out that FE colleges are not always as responsive to local training needs as they could be. One delegate from a local CVS highlighted how they had developed a partnership with a local training college for a mentoring project and act as a broker for free mentor training and that this training currently has a waiting list. However, she also stressed that they had made a point of talking to the college and getting directly involved with them. It was also pointed out that Manchester Event Volunteers work with Manchester Education Service through the Widening Participation Unit, which allows access to free training for volunteers.

Another delegate pointed out that **organisations often do not build in an adequate budget for training and associated overheads**. A key lesson identified was the need to ensure a separate budget for training and associated overheads in bid applications.

The **importance of having someone in place and funded to co-ordinate management support, training and supervision of volunteers** was stressed by



one delegate and the resource implications of this. It was pointed out that Volunteer England are running a campaign 'volunteering is freely given but not cost free'.

Two delegates from the Community United Project (CUP), a GoldStar funded project focussed in deprived areas of north & south Kirklees provided some insights into how they recruit and support volunteers. The project works with local residents particularly those with enforced leisure time, to provide sustainable community led youth activities in disadvantaged areas, engaging young people in positive activities. CUP provides time & equipment to enable adult residents, working in a volunteer capacity to set up and promote constructive opportunities for young people aged 8 to 16 years. It was pointed out that because **CUP work on local estates using local facilities local people know about the project. Recruitment is very informal and people 'get reeled in'**. A number of agencies refer service users to the project, which is a common way of recruiting volunteers. These groups include ex offenders, homeless men and those recovering from substance misuse. It was commented that the project *"makes them feel part of society"*. The project also works in the Pakistani community, mainly with male Pakistani residents, although an Asian girls football team has also been established with about 40 Asian girls participating.

One delegate described how her organisation has **developed a relationship with a well known PR agency** with the voluntary organisation benefiting from PR expertise and the PR company getting a sense of reward from participating.

The **importance of offering volunteers opportunities to progress** was identified, but one delegate pointed out that not all people move on, but it is important that they see this as a possibility and that alternative avenues and options are identified.

The importance of **recognising the contribution of volunteers** was stressed. One delegate pointed out that a large part of volunteering is about making friends, so it is important to ensure social events take place. The organisation has just finished a DVD managed by volunteers. All participants went out for a meal when it was completed.

It was pointed out by Mark from MEV that they ensure volunteers develop portfolios of work and receive thank-you letters from people they have helped, which is all part of strengthening CVs. They also receive e cards.

Another delegate pointed out that it is sometimes volunteers that run organisations and manage paid staff, and this should not be forgotten.

A clear message emerged from discussions in relation to the **need for more flexibility with current benefits arrangements**, particularly with respect to New Deal, JSA and disability benefit rules regarding volunteering and participation in training.

It was also pointed out that there was a **need for training of Jobcentre staff** in order that a consistent approach towards volunteering is adopted. At present it was felt that some staff are very supportive but not others.

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.

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:



- Recruit from people who have applied for paid work, but do not have relevant experience
- Use local media (radio, adverts in local press, letters page, free ads in Guardian), community channels, BACP journal
- Attend community events/ Talk to groups in the community
- Hold open information sessions
- Make a film about your project
- Contact colleges (Volunteering services)/universities
- Publicity stunts (Example of fire engine 'hijack')
- 'Get out there on all fronts'
- Get referrals from agencies
- Focus publicity on the issue or activity (don't mention the word volunteer) e.g. for a gardening project - 'have you got green fingers'
- Use volunteers as ambassadors
- Engage with agencies delivering services and use as a recruitment mechanism/Encourage service users to become volunteers
- Recruit from Volunteer Centres, colleges, schools, businesses who are interested in contributing to the community, libraries, GPs, word of mouth
- www.do-it.org
- BBC Action Teams can promote volunteering services for free
- Use professionally produced leaflets that have a freepost reply
- Promote pre-volunteer courses to attract volunteers
- Advertise on buses/trams

Barriers to recruitment

Specific barriers to volunteer recruitment identified included:

- Stereotypes of volunteering held by some people e.g. Volunteering is mainly undertaken by older women – Men don't want to work just with ladies
- CRB checks – Costs, time involved and negative attitudes to past convictions
- Getting references
- Costs involved in training
- Travel expenses for people, particularly in rural areas
- Accessing funding to support people with disabilities (e.g. equipment for visual/hearing impairment)
- Lack of funding to support volunteers more generally
- Inflexibility of the benefits system (e.g. JSA, New deal)

Key recruitment lessons/considerations

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

- Use volunteers to get free marketing for the organisation
- Being realistic about what the host organisation can offer volunteers
- Being clear from the beginning about what is expected
- Having clearly structured recruitment and selection processes
- Build on networks/community links already in place/Develop partnerships with community based organisations
- Present opportunities in a fun and enticing manner
- Make the benefits of volunteering known
- Access other voluntary groups
- Recognise that focussing on labels of social exclusion can reinforce that exclusion
- Target recruitment on need at the point of delivery to ensure the most effective service delivery
- Each geographical area has specific needs from volunteers and recruitment needs to reflect the specific needs of that area
- The volunteer recruitment process needs to be seen in the wider context of building communities capacity to develop themselves and feel part of the wider community
- Encourage a 'win win' mentality in volunteer recruitment and involvement – There's something in it for everybody



- The need to break the cycle of the 1980's generation, generally not interested in volunteering
- Make sure service providers/professionals respect volunteers as much as paid workers

Volunteer support

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

- Pay expenses but be aware of tax implications
- Ensure benefit allowances are not compromised
- Undertake volunteer collections when individuals leave (as is the case for paid staff)
- Develop separate volunteer policies (i.e. Don't expect volunteers to work towards stressful deadlines)
- Understand grievance procedures and reporting problems
- Empower volunteers, but don't overload with information
- Ensure volunteers have the right to say no, if they are not comfortable with particular tasks
- Ensure you listen to volunteers and understand why they volunteered. Ensure they are fully engaged and their skills fully utilised
- Have a named person for volunteers to speak to and provide regular contact and support
- Establish monthly appraisal meetings
- If a particular placement is not working out for a volunteer don't let them drift, but signpost to another placement.
- Involve volunteers in decision-making
- Treat volunteers as employees – Involve in meetings and ensure they are aware of things going on – They 'need to feel part of the organisation'.
- Celebrate/recognise volunteer achievements through award ceremonies/community events/open days, birthday cards, e cards, badges of achievement and consult with volunteers about this. Say thank you! Give them a mug! Hold away days
- Encourage volunteers to develop portfolios
- Make volunteers feel valued
- Recognise milestones
- Include volunteers in networking meetings/conferences
- Pay travel and parking expenses
- Invite volunteers to GoldStar events
- Pay attention to the detail of volunteers day to day work (Be specific and put it in writing where possible)
- Monitor the amount of time expected of each volunteer – Don't expect too much
- During introductory training make clear what is expected of volunteers/time commitments and level of difficulty in particular volunteer roles
- Provide a phone line/contact point for out of hours working by mentors/volunteers
- Ensure motivation is kept high
- Ensure volunteers are placed in appropriate placements
- Train staff to respect volunteers – Don't expect them to make tea and coffee
- Treat volunteers as if they were a member of staff (Including training, day to day management and the possibility of suspension)
- Place volunteers where they are comfortable (i.e. in local community)
- Ensure a high level of support for 'vulnerable' volunteers such as recovered substance misusers
- Recruit older people as mentors to support younger volunteers
- Provide adequate training and allocate time for the staff team, particularly those with direct responsibility for managing volunteers
- Provide support and advice for personal issues in-house or signpost to other services
- Provide tailor made support
- Undertake 1: 1 and group supervision sessions
- Give regular feedback
- Identify further development opportunities for volunteers



- Implement review supervision meetings – Establish if volunteers want to progress
- Adopt a train the trainer model. Develop community and volunteer skills to enable peer support and development
- Respect volunteers/Don't patronise volunteers
- Involve staff, trustees, partners and volunteers in developing work plans and future strategy
- Don't be led by funding. Put the organisation and its people ahead of chasing money.
- Develop progression routes via training and experience for those volunteers who wish to follow this route.
- Ensure there is continuity and sustainability which can survive staff changes
- Develop individual learning plans for volunteers
- Don't forget volunteering is fun
- Be mindful that volunteers are doing this for free and have time constraints in their lives. Try to accommodate this when involving volunteers in decision-making and meetings
- Agree achievable targets and milestones
- Make clear roles, responsibilities and boundaries – Paid staff can feel threatened by a volunteer doing a job a paid worker is doing
- Provide accredited training for those volunteers that would benefit from this
- Establish volunteer forums
- Ensure volunteer representation on management committees

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.
