



Conference Report

Date	Event
6th July 2006	GoldStar Regional Conference (North East)
No of Delegates	Location
59 Click to view list	Centre for Life, Newcastle

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1. GoldStar Interview

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

- Ian Hutchinson from Age Concern Gateshead. Since 1972 Age Concern Gateshead has developed the provision of a varied range of services and activities for older people throughout Gateshead. The GoldStar volunteering project was a response to the growing need to recruit more volunteers and to reduce the burden on the managers of the individual projects run by Age Concern Gateshead who had previously had to do their own recruitment and training. The GoldStar Volunteering Project is effectively an in-house recruitment and training service provider. Its aims are to recruit, train and support a team of motivated and committed volunteers to enable the services and activities that are provided to continue and grow.
- Julia Bracknall from The Junction, which is a registered charity based at Redcar in the Borough of Redcar & Cleveland. It provides a range of information and support services to around 400 young people a year up to the age of 25 who are vulnerable and/or disadvantaged as a result of their life circumstances, and who are in difficulty due to problems ranging from homelessness and substance misuse to physical or mental abuse. It aims to help by providing a range of free and confidential information and practical support services to enable the young people to make informed decisions for themselves. The charity develops and trains a support network of volunteers to work with young people and to further their personal development. Julia commented "*Young people actually came up with that name (The Junction) after a kind of referendum*".
- Lana Kirkup from Barnardos North East, which is a registered charity covering the area of Northumberland, Tyneside, Wearside, Durham and Teeside. Its aim is to help the most vulnerable children and young people to transform their lives and fulfil their potential. Help is offered when a child or young person's future is at risk from threats such as homelessness, drugs, sexual abuse, disability, unemployment, prejudice, or emotional problems. The GoldStar Project is called The Party. The idea for The Party came from a young person who had been a service user and had moved on to become a volunteer. Having developed skills and experience through volunteering, she wanted to ensure that others could do the same. The resulting Project aims to bring together young volunteers, some of who will also have been service users, to enable them to participate in the development of volunteering opportunities, policies and practices within Barnardos.



What did they talk about?

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

Ian underlined the importance of the induction process for new volunteers. He commented, *"You can't just open the door and throw them in and say get on with it"*. He indicated that matching up with an appropriate 'buddy' works well. He commented, *"A buddy system is a very good way of introducing people and matching people up with a key volunteer..... I think it is quite intimidating for people to go into a daycentre or become a befriender. You can't just assume they have the skills and the knowledge and they know what to do"*. He also indicated that training is an ongoing process, some of which is undertaken out of hours. He underlined the importance of ensuring that each volunteer benefits from their experience and commented, *"Don't forget the volunteer, it is not just about giving, the volunteer has to get something back"*. The organisation runs a number of projects. Ian commented, *"We try to give the volunteers a wide variety of experiences"*. He emphasised the importance of flexibility in catering for the individual needs of potential volunteers. He commented, *"You can't afford to lose volunteers. They are so important, so you have to, where possible meet their needs. To be flexible is so important for them"*.

Julia also underlined the importance of training. She described the experience of one volunteer who had very low confidence. She had brought up a family but had no real work history. Through training at The Junction she attained her first qualification and is now one of the paid staff on the Project, working 20 hours a week. However, Julia pointed out that this process has taken three years. Julia commented, *"She came really unwillingly in the beginning, because she didn't have any confidence...she had worked part time in a shop but really didn't feel she had anything to offer. By her being able to be involved in some training that was at her pace, that she felt comfortable with, this was her first qualification of any kind and that was about her getting something back that she could use, not just with us, but elsewhere"*.

She also stressed that the importance of the terminology used. For example, training, particularly in the early stages can often be about removing fears relating to past learning experiences such as failing at school, so learning undertaken is not always referred to as training.

"We don't call it training. I think in the first instance that is probably the first key thing. Not to talk about training".

In terms of the role of volunteers within the project and the need to ensure volunteering is a useful and rewarding experience Julia indicated that a good question to pose is *"would you come here if you weren't paid"*. She also stressed the importance of knowing why particular individuals who may have become volunteers do not return to the organisation after making contact and amongst existing volunteers, the importance of keeping abreast of any concerns through 1:1 contact.

Larna indicated that within Barnardos the recruitment process involves a registration form; take up of references and CRB checking. Support given to new volunteers depends upon the service they are going to provide and varies between 1:1 support and specific training as a group. However, she indicated that all new volunteers need to undertake an induction process. If not considered suitable for a particular position Barnados attempts to place the individual in another position within the organisation or refer to other agencies. She commented, *"You have to be honest with them"*.

One delegate dealing with a number of volunteers with past convictions for crimes highlighted the potential of many of these individuals if given the chance to volunteer, indicating that such people can often be the best role models. However, she also indicated that many organisations don't accept that people can change. It was commented, *"There is still that issue that people don't accept that if you have a criminal record you can change and that still holds on to you. It is so unacceptable. The thing is, the best example or role model someone can have is someone who has been there and changed"*. Gracia from Chance UK (another GoldStar exemplar project) reinforced this message, commenting, *"Who knows better how to get over a difficult period in your life than someone who has got over a difficult period in their*



life". Ian indicated that within Age Concern Gateshead they adopt a flexible approach based on each individual assessment. He highlighted the example of one volunteer who had a long list of past convictions but had put this behind him. He is working in a project where he is not alone and is supervised, but has the chance to progress. Ian commented, *"He had put it behind him, he had turned around....And there has been a transformation in his life, and he has got so much to offer. Some people when they looked at that list (of past convictions) might have said, no way, but, I think it is very important to give them a chance"*.

Julia indicated that they have taken volunteers on that are coming to the end of a prison sentence and that what is required is to put the appropriate support in place.

Larna indicated that in the case of Barnados the decision would be based on an assessment of each individual's record, although the organisation would not consider someone with past convictions for sexual offences. Convictions for drug and alcohol related offences would be considered on an individual basis. Larna indicated that where people do have issues in the past they use a buddying system to provide the volunteer with support and mentoring. She commented, *"Really what you have got is someone who will talk through things and you will have had a bit of contact with that person for a while, before you get to the process of going on any training"*

Another delegate indicated that all organisations that use CRB checks have to have a policy about how to deal with ex offenders. She indicated that CRB checks should be treated as just one piece of 'armoury', together with training people, references, and trusting your "gut instincts".

Julie Earl representing Gateshead Access Panel indicated that they do not consider references, although they do undertake a CRB check. The Project's main aim is to give disabled people as volunteers and users of services the confidence, knowledge and skills to become informed advisors on disability issues to service providers. She indicated the reason for not considering references was linked to the nature of the client group, many of whom may have been excluded from work or volunteering within other organisations and thus would not have references. She commented, *"We don't take references and the reasons why we don't take references is that the client group have been predominantly socially excluded. Some others have been with other organisations and have challenging behaviour have excluded themselves for these organisations. So if I was to try and see references they would just not get in"*.

A further issue was raised by one delegate as to how it is possible to keep individuals interested while the results of CRB checks are awaited. In this context it was pointed out it is possible to involve potential volunteers in events, undertake induction, send them newsletters to keep in contact. This time period can also be used for both parties to get to know each other.

It was also pointed out that the results of CRB checks need to be handled with caution and in a sensitive manner and it is vital to translate what is said on CRB forms. In other words a crude description of a past offence may not provide enough detail to assess potential risks.

On this issue, the availability of good reference material was also highlighted with a booklet on recruiting people with criminal convictions available through the CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development) and training courses available through organisations such as NACRO.

Andy Wragg from Nottinghamshire County Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) provided an insight into a particular project in Nottinghamshire, by showing a short video. The aim of the project is to support former drug and alcohol misusers into employment. The project has been highly successful in achieving this goal. Out of nine volunteers seven have successfully entered employment. The video vividly portrays the transformation of particular individuals with the message to the wider business sector *"Don't judge a book by its cover, people with skills, people with potential, embrace them"*.

The particular issues relating to volunteering in rural areas of Northumberland were raised by a number of delegates. One delegate from the Volunteer Centre Northumberland commented, *"The real challenges are people with mental illnesses, Black and Minority Ethnic groups – the only one in the village syndrome"*.



It was also commented *"part of the key is getting out there - We have been lucky enough to get a Volunteering England Rural Information Point in one of our communities in the foothills of the Cheviots. It is getting out to where these organisations are, because for voluntary organisations it is far easier to be based in big towns"*.

Another representative from a rural community commented *"The logistics of getting people everywhere and getting things joined up and everyone supported is very, very hard in a rural area"*.

In relation to a young carers project in Durham with volunteers from the surrounding rural areas it was commented, "If you want people to volunteer you often have to go and pick them up, so they can actually just get somewhere".

By contrast, a representative from a Volunteer Centre in Gateshead provided an insight into the relatively integrated working practices in relation to volunteer organisations in Gateshead. She commented, *"We have a strong network of volunteer centre managers in Gateshead who work very, very closely together. We have a forum that we use to share good practice. We do joint events"*.

The issue of the variable numbers of volunteers at different times throughout the year was also highlighted. In this context it was commented, *"The thing I find difficult is that we are quite a small project in quite a small building...Sometimes, a number of volunteers come through the door and I haven't got anything for them to do. (The issue is) trying to keep them motivated, linking them up with other people if we can't provide (placements)"*.

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:

- Word of mouth
- Publicity material – leaflets, posters, websites
- Open days/taster days
- Contact with local universities/colleges, training, community education providers and schools
- Use of media (Radio, newspapers)
- Involving local celebrities
- Vacancy addendums
- Recruiting through conferences and networking
- Use of CVS – volunteer recruitment agencies
- The Internet
- Approaching larger companies (Interest older people approaching retirement)
- Using local 'champions' in the community
- Targeting community hot sport – Schools, churches, probation service, drug services, Mental Health Teams
- Targeting service users
- Use the local volunteer bureau
- Use of referrals from other organisations/networking with other organisations



Barriers to recruitment

Specific barriers to volunteer recruitment identified included:

- Unrealistic expectations of the profile of volunteers expected by volunteer coordinators
- Lack of understanding and general awareness of funding opportunities and how to access these
- A fragmented level of understanding of volunteering amongst key statutory services, such as JobCentre Plus
- Limitations of volunteer co-ordinators in terms of ability to deal with issues such as drug/alcohol problems, mental health issues etc.
- Weaknesses in the assessment procedures of agencies who take volunteer referrals
- CRB checks (The time taken and inadequacies of the process etc.)
- Feelings of job insecurity felt by paid staff
- Lack of understanding of what benefits volunteers can bring
- Lack of toleration/willingness to accommodate volunteers amongst some services

Selection

Some tips in terms of selection of volunteers included:

- Use volunteer handbooks
- Use informal interviews
- Use information evenings and sessions
- CRB checks for volunteers
- Take up volunteer references
- Use one to one discussions to clarify needs and aspirations
- Make use of trial periods
- Use clients to assess volunteers
- Use job fairs/student placements to encourage potential volunteers to gain confidence and experience

Key recruitment lessons/considerations

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

- The importance of undertaking widespread advertising through a variety of means
- Building in the real costs of volunteering to families, carers and communities in order to make initial engagement work. (E.g. Child care expenses, transport etc.)
- The advantages of accessing regular 'community' hot spots
- Ensure an established induction process is in place
- Ensuring induction, training and support meets both the volunteers and the organisations needs
- Ensure training sessions are located and organised to meet the particular needs of volunteers participating
- Being able to deal with time delays associated with the recruitment process, including taking up references and implementing CRB checks - Ensure volunteers are kept motivated during the recruitment process
- Ensure recruiting organisations are flexible and respond to volunteer requirements
- Ensure recruitment activity and information is accessible – Use a variety of formats
- Develop relationships/partnerships with other agencies that are mutually beneficial. In other words it is not just about voluntary organisations accessing volunteers but these organisations also giving something back to partners
- The recruitment process needs to be 'holistic' and 'person centred'
- The need to balance both the needs of the volunteer and the needs of the recruiting agency



- The particular importance of support to volunteers in the first few weeks/months
- One delegate advocated interviewing by two people and then presenting the case for selection or not to the rest of the team
- Ensure appropriate language is used during the recruitment process – Use of different terms and language are likely to attract different groups

Looking after volunteers

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

- The importance of providing peer support
- Keeping volunteers informed
- Paying expenses – Encourage volunteers to claim, ensure the claims are dealt with quickly, and ensure these payments are funded appropriately
- Recognising volunteers through awards/service badges/certificates/gift vouchers
- Holding volunteer events. E.g. 'Peer picnics'
- Ensure volunteers are thanked by staff
- Treat volunteers in the same way as employees
- Ensuring volunteer representation on management committee/trustees
- Involve volunteers in decision-making (through team meetings etc.)
- Alert volunteers to job adverts/training opportunities
- Ensuring appropriate induction takes place
- Hold one to one supervisions
- Ensure regular contact with volunteers (via phone, e mail, post, newsletters)
- Ensure volunteers work to an agreed timetable
- Be aware of individual volunteers circumstances (Home life, hobbies, problems)
- Implement Personal Development Plans in a similar way to paid staff
- Build on the skills of each individual
- Tailor support and supervision to individual needs
- Ensure levels of contact are geared to different needs. I.e. Daily contact may be needed for some with a high level of need
- Help volunteers that need this, gain skills to function in the 'real world'. For example, skills to be able to get and keep a job. Ensure volunteers understand what is acceptable behaviour and use of language (For example racist/sexist banter is not acceptable)
- Involve volunteers in gathering feedback, ideas, knowledge and experience to develop the volunteer programme
- Respond to negative feedback
- Implement follow up contact with volunteers through telephone meetings, questionnaires etc
- Review ongoing training and support
- Be honest with volunteers
- Encourage personal development through both formal and informal means
- Understand what motivates different volunteers
- Ensure a 'safe' environment for volunteers to operate within
- Ensure volunteers have clear roles and role descriptions
- Ensure there are ways for volunteers to progress within the organisations
- Ensure a 'sense of belonging' within the host organisation
- The importance of promoting good practice in relation to recruiting and supporting volunteers

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.
