

Taunton Deane Council for Voluntary Service

Report on the work of the Supported Volunteers Coordinator

for the period

1 March 2002 - 30 June 2005

Introduction

This report is prepared by Alison Mawhood, the Supported Volunteers Coordinator for the period 1 March 2002 to 30 June 2005, the date on which I will cease this employment. It looks at the work that has been undertaken over a period of 3 years and 3 months – a long period to report on and one during which shorter reports have already been made. However the ongoing nature of this work makes it very difficult and arbitrary to have a meaningful cut off at any point.

Prior to my employment some work had been done within CVS, supporting people with mental health problems into volunteering. However, the restricted size of that project and a long gap between its end and the beginning of this project (due of course to lack of funding) meant there was no follow through.

Funding had been applied for to extend the project to include volunteering for people with physical disabilities as well as mental health problems, but within a very short time of being in post I identified that there was also a need to support people with learning disabilities into volunteering and this area of work has possibly been the most successful. Over the years people with other support needs, such as ex-offenders or drug and alcohol misusers have also come to the project.

Funding

The initial £20,000 funding for this project came from Taunton Deane Council. This lasted for just over one year. Subsequent funding has come from:

Lloyds TSB Charitable Trust, £10,000

South West Foundation £10,000

NHS Partnership (Mental Health Day Resource Centre) £2,000

Somerset County Council Social Services £16,000

The current funding should last to the end of the CVS financial year if managed correctly (see later in report). Action therefore needs to be taken to find funding beyond this date.

The boring bit

For many at least – statistics!

During the period the project has worked with 160 people. Breakdown of this figure into client groups is difficult, as many people have multiple needs (physical disability can lead to mental health needs, learning disability to other health problems and so on). However, for funding purposes it has often been necessary to make this breakdown and this has consistently shown that between 40 and 45% of clients have had mental health problems, 30% physical disability, 20% learning disability and just a view had other support needs as mentioned in the introduction. Of the 160 clients 23 have had long term support (a year or more). Others have slotted into a volunteering post within a few weeks and some have decided not to continue with volunteering. Support is withdrawn only when people are happy in their post without support, or when they decide volunteering is not for them. Recognition is due at this point to Bernice Pick who volunteered on the project for just over a year until February 2005. Without her input far fewer people would have received support.

When it works!

The benefits of volunteering to the self esteem of people who have in some way been excluded from modern society are obvious. Unfortunately the ‘professionalisation’ of the voluntary sector can make it harder for many of these people to feel they can contribute, and indeed it puts many additional barriers in their way. This further excludes the very people that the voluntary sector sets out to help. However, when it works:

The project has given support to a young lady who became ill during her university years and has never worked. She has now volunteered in retail, reception and administrative roles, has gained confidence in her abilities and is considering her options for a future paid career.

A man who became ill in his previous employment has, after a three year break, been able to gently go back into care work through volunteering. He is hoping to increase volunteering now from one to two days and eventually to find paid work again.

A man with learning disabilities and mental health problems, who has never lived independently, now enjoys the social contact he gets from serving tea at a day centre two afternoons a week.

A lady who spent some time looking for the right volunteering opportunities now gets real enjoyment from working with preschool children with disabilities, many of whom have the same issues that she experienced as a child.

Many young men with learning disabilities now volunteer with a gardening project where they receive wonderful support and help improve the lives of elderly and disabled people. At the same time there is a noticeable improvement in the physical health of some of them.

A young man who thought he would never be able to earn his living was incredibly proud when the project he was working on offered to pay him £20 per week (an amount people on incapacity benefit can earn before their benefits are affected).

Another man with a mental illness was secure enough in his volunteering position to tell them when he became more ill and continue to travel 8 miles back to his voluntary work, even when he was readmitted to hospital for a time.

A mum has written a letter of support for our funders stating that volunteering has made a real difference in her son's life. He is more confident, more sociable and more helpful at home.

These successes are due to the open mindedness and accepting attitude of the volunteer organisers in the organisations where the people have been placed. It is unfair to specifically mention individuals, but there are some wonderful, supportive people out there.

Supported volunteering has been most successful and effective with people who have learning disabilities. My observation is that this is because they experience less ups and downs than people with mental health issues or progressive illnesses or disabilities.

Diversity of organisations

My aim has been to make the volunteering experience right for each individual and I have therefore not set up 'nursery style' volunteering opportunities, but have on the whole placed people individually. The main exception to this is at Gardening Care where many young men are now volunteering. Other organisations to have benefited from the work of supported volunteers are:

The majority of charity shops in both Taunton and Wellington

Taunton Deane CVS

Somerset Association for the Blind

Dunkirk House

ABC school

North Town school

Halcon School

Shelter

Social Services (day centres and summer childcare schemes)

RSPB

Red Cross

CAB

Halcon Link Centre

Community Computers

Belvedere Bikes

Monument Tapes

Rosegate Kennels

Cinnamon Trust

St Margaret's Hospice

Mencap

St John's Hospital Library Service

Wellington Stroke Club

TOGS

The Albemarle Centre

There have been people who would have benefited from a group working situation and for about a year we did run a clerical support project from CVS which provided such an opportunity. Brainwave and Mind were the main charities to benefit from this service. We have unsuccessfully applied for funding to extend group volunteering opportunities and this should be looked at again in the future.

Exit work

I have contacted those people who refer clients to me and all clients who I have worked with very recently to let them know that I am leaving this post and to give them contacts in my place. For those clients still requiring support I have ensured that this is available through other support workers. I have familiarised the Volunteer Bureau manager with my files should she need them and so that she can pass them on to future Supported Volunteer Workers.

The future of Supported Volunteering at TDCVS

Over the three and a bit years, the work has changed in nature. Initially there was a large role to promote the project. The project is now very well known and further promotion is not only not necessary, but could increase demand beyond a sustainable level. Much of my time has also been taken up with more generic volunteering issues, which should rightly be passed on to the Volunteer Bureau manager. I have therefore recommended that Jane Morfett should be offered additional hours to take on this work and that the supported volunteers role be reduced to 12 hours per week for a supported volunteers adviser. This would be similar to the role that Bernice ably performed voluntarily, but her feeling after a year was that it is too involved a role to offer on a voluntary basis, and it has proved impossible to replace her. Financially it should be possible to continue on this basis until March 2006 and then further funding needs to be sought to deliver this baseline service. Somerset County Council are unlikely to produce further funds, but should still be approached, as should the NHS Somerset Partnership. Additional funds could also be sought to enhance the service through group work activities. This should be all considered as part of the overall funding strategy for CVS and the Volunteer Bureau.

Other areas of work

In more recent years I have become more involved with the generic work of the Volunteer Bureau. With Peter Cox, former Volunteer Bureau Manager, and Sarah Aston at SCC, I have developed a Volunteering Forum which has now met twice. The members are volunteer coordinators from various organisations and are keen for the forum to continue. Jane Morfett will be continuing this work. She will also take up the contacts made by Peter Cox and then myself with Volunteering England and forge forward with accreditation for the Bureau. This will enable us to use the national branding of a Volunteer Centre, receive free promotional materials and have access to more sources of funding. Volunteering England appears to be a very strong organisation, with plenty of support mechanisms *and* the ear of the Government. We need to be part of this.

Myself, Jo Doyle and Carolyn Marsh were part of the ChangeUp Consortium who prepared the bid for Somerset to GOSW. This was a good bid and the post created in it for volunteering in Somerset is a positive step. Somerset was one of the few counties in the region which managed to secure funding for volunteering. When appointed strong links should be made with the person in this post who should be a great source of support to Jane as she seeks to develop the bureau and specifically undertakes the accreditation process. Connie at Sedgemoor Bureau and Sarah Codd, Volunteering England, are also important sources of support.

A contact has been established with WPA, who give their employees up to two days leave per annum for voluntary work and some of our members have already benefited from redesigned leaflets and websites. Similar projects could be worked on with other businesses if staff could be identified (and possibly funding found) to expand this area of work. Volunteering England would be very helpful with this as they are currently designing a toolkit to use in this work. I was involved in the early stages of design consultation on this.

The remaining role I had taken on with regard to Criminal Record Bureau registration has been picked up by Liz Bines on a voluntary basis, under the management of Jenny Sparks.

Acknowledgments and future contacts

This project has been a model of partnership working. Myself and Bernice have worked with the clients, volunteer organisations, health care and education professionals, statutory bodies and support staff to advise and support clients. Those people with whom there has been a strong contact which should not be lost are:

Sarah Aston, Voluntary Services Officer, Somerset County Council
Dave Thomas, Day Services Manager, Somerset County Council
Gill Kenniston, Advice and Guidance, Adult Learning and Leisure
Sue Horril, ParkGate House, Somerset NHS Partnership
Giles Turner, Workpower
Shirley Hector (and Jean), Manager, Albemarle Centre

This work has also been greatly aided by volunteers at CVS, particularly those in the Volunteer Bureau, the receptionists and Bernice Pick. Thank you all. Thanks are also due to Jenny Sparks who obtained the original funding for the project, has helped me knock on doors and rattle cages for the continuation funding and has given support, encouragement and guidance *whenever* needed and to Jo Doyle who always reminds me why we are in the voluntary sector!