

volunteering by unemployed people

a route to OPPORTUNITY

Filiz Niyazi

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national
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volunteering

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FOREWORD

A route to opportunity

This series of booklets is based on a year-long research study carried out by The National Centre for Volunteering with funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The aim was to identify organisations that had succeeded in involving volunteers from one of five groups traditionally under-represented in formal volunteering, and to examine the reasons for their success.

The five groups are young people, older people, unemployed people, disabled people and people of black and ethnic minority communities. National surveys have shown that members of all these groups are disadvantaged when it comes to access into volunteering. Where black people are concerned, however, this under-representation only applies to 'mainstream' organisations; volunteering is a widespread and vital feature of black community life in Britain.

The organisations we studied were chosen with a view to providing a representative sample in terms of geography and field of activity (social welfare, education, environment and so on). For each of the five groups, we also tried to find an organisation that because of its interests might be thought unlikely to succeed in recruiting volunteers from the under-represented group – a youth group involving older people, for example – but this search met with only limited success.

We are not suggesting that the organisations we chose are the best at recruiting particular types of volunteer, or that because they have managed to recruit from one group, they will necessarily be successful with the other four. What they have in common, however, is that they have each tried in their own way to make volunteering accessible to people who have not traditionally been involved.

Who are the booklets aimed at? At every organisation that currently involves volunteers (as well as those who don't do so yet but would like to) and wishes to explore new ways of reaching out to potential recruits. The booklets also contain useful lessons for those who make

public policy – and of course, for the volunteers and would-be volunteers themselves.

The series is intended to be read as a whole. Although some organisations may, because of their circumstances, be drawn to one booklet in particular, we hope they will eventually be led on to read the others as well. In fact, although the booklets are presented as separate texts in their own right, and can of course be read as such, the many common themes that emerge across the five can best be understood by a thorough reading of the whole series.

I would like to thank the following for their assistance to this project: Derek Williams of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, who chaired the steering group; the steering group members; Alan Dingle, who edited the booklets; Jean Foster, who did the desk research including the identification of organisations to take part in the research; and the volunteers and staff of The National Centre for Volunteering. But my greatest debt is to the staff and volunteers of the organisations who participated; without their willingness to share their experiences, there could have been no booklets. However, the author takes sole responsibility for the information and views expressed in these booklets.

Filiz Niyazi

Where are the jobless volunteers?

Volunteering has in the past few decades become a major social movement in Britain. Each year around 23 million people now do voluntary work for organisations.

But this new enthusiasm for volunteering has not spread to everyone: certain social groups still seem reluctant to get involved. Among these groups are unemployed people. True, there are thought to be approximately one million unemployed volunteers – but that still leaves about another two million jobless people who *don't* volunteer.

So this book will be seeking the answers to two key questions: Why don't unemployed people volunteer as much as they could? And how can volunteering be made more attractive to them?

Breaking the isolation

Unemployment has a doubly pernicious effect on its victims: it does not merely impoverish them, it also isolates them. We live in a world that measures the status of people by the jobs they do. At social gatherings, almost the first question we ask each other is, 'What do you do?' For many people, the workplace is also where they make their friends, as well as the acquaintances who can be useful to them in their career.

Being jobless cuts an individual off from these social and career opportunities. It pushes them to the margins of life, in the same way as retirement can affect older people. Yet, because unemployment tends to hit people earlier in life, this marginalisation is likely to last much longer.

However robust their personality, if someone remains unemployed for too long, their lives will be robbed of the purpose they once had and they will start to feel unwanted. Quite apart from the psychological damage this does to individuals, long-term unemployment is creating an 'underclass' – a development that could in time threaten the very cohesion of society.

Although volunteering can never take the place of paid work, it has

much to offer to people in this predicament. If it can enable them to contribute something useful to society, and to do so in the company of others, it may make them feel wanted again.

Almost like work

Voluntary work allows unemployed people to use their existing skills or to acquire new ones, thus making them more 'marketable' to prospective employers. In a very real sense, volunteering can bridge the gap between unemployment and employment. But as we have seen, it will never be a *substitute* for employment; for most jobless people, voluntary work will always take second place to the search for paid work.

This is perhaps a suitable place to point out that government schemes to give work experience to unemployed people – even though they may involve, under the heading of 'community service', the same kind of tasks as volunteers do – are *not* volunteering. Under the new Project Work initiative, for example, people who have been unemployed for more than two years must engage in an intensive thirteen-week job search or have their benefits cut; this is followed by thirteen weeks of work experience. Participants will receive an extra £10 on top of their benefit payment. For its part, the Labour Party proposes to offer young people aged 18 to 24 four options after only six months of unemployment: further education, a training course, work experience in the community or on environmental projects.

Neither initiative meets The Volunteer Centre's definition of volunteering – 'time given *freely* [our italics] without regard for personal gain' – although it has, for example, been argued that participants in schemes who receive £10 on top of their benefit payment are only getting what many volunteers receive in expenses anyway.

Apathy and vulnerability

Unemployment can breed apathy. The longer a person has been without a job, the narrower their world becomes and the harder it becomes for them to stir themselves to do something new. If organisations are to succeed in recruiting jobless people, they must try to overcome this apathy by reaching out and offering work that is genuinely appealing.

This task is not made easier by the poor public image of volunteering: in the most recent *National Survey of Voluntary Activity in the UK*, 69 per cent of active volunteers said that their volunteering could be better organised, 33 per cent were bored, and 31 per cent agreed

with the proposition that 'you can't always cope with the things you get asked to do.' Unemployed people may well be sceptical about trying yet another well-meaning route towards employment or social reintegration. So in order to recruit them as volunteers, organisations will have to deliver what they promise.

But it will be worthwhile for organisations to make the effort, as jobless people have a lot to offer:

- **Time.** Most unemployed people have, through no fault of their own, a great deal of time on their hands.
- **Skills.** Jobless people have a variety of skills that can be made immediately available to help tackle problems such as homelessness, poverty and isolation.
- **Motivation.** If they can be convinced that volunteering will reduce their isolation and perhaps even help them towards paid work, unemployed people have nothing to lose and everything to gain by giving it a try.

In the exclusion zone

As we have seen, one major disadvantage of unemployment is that it makes you poor. And if you are poor, you are less likely to be able to afford the out-of-pocket expenses inseparable from volunteering: the bus fares, the lunches, the special clothing, and sometimes even accommodation. So if voluntary organisations really want to encourage unemployed people to volunteer, they must find some way of reimbursing these expenses.

These days, all types of people can find themselves unemployed: young and old, male and female, black and white, disabled and able-bodied. So if they run up against the widespread misconception – disastrous for recruitment – that volunteering is mainly something that middle-class white women do, they are quite likely to conclude that volunteering is not for them. Many organisations have yet to succeed in convincing the public otherwise; so to get (for example) unemployed people involved, they will need to resort to carefully-targeted recruitment strategies.

A matter of interpretation

For jobless people, yet another disincentive to volunteering in recent years has been the threat it can sometimes pose to their welfare

benefits. The Department of Social Security's guidance is that unemployed people can do voluntary work and still continue to receive benefits. Most local benefits agencies interpret this correctly, but there is still a minority who seem to think that volunteers are ineligible for benefit because they are not immediately 'available for work'.

This problem should, however, disappear with the new Jobseekers Allowance, which replaces unemployment benefit and income support in October 1996. For the first time, its regulations state in so many words that unemployed people can do voluntary work of any kind and for any length of time without affecting their eligibility; but they must be able to show that they are looking for paid work, and if offered a job, they must be available to start within 48 hours. This is cause for cautious optimism: for the first time, social security regulations explicitly acknowledge that voluntary work can improve the employment prospects of a jobless person.

The big issues

In practice, then, anyone trying to persuade unemployed people to volunteer will need to address four main issues:

1. **Unemployed people may not know about the personal and career benefits volunteering can bring them.** Organisations have been too slow to point out that volunteering is not simply a matter of 'doing your duty to society' but also an activity that brings personal benefits, such as the chance to learn new skills, to acquire self-confidence and even to gain qualifications – all invaluable in the search for paid employment.
2. **Jobless people must be offered challenging work and proper support.** It is essential to make voluntary work attractive by offering a choice of tasks and a chance of personal responsibility. It is equally important not to exploit the vulnerability of unemployed people by depriving them of the training and support they need to volunteer effectively.
3. **Volunteering is not seen to be accessible to all.** Unemployed people usually cannot afford to pay the out-of-pocket expenses inseparable from volunteering. And in addition to being unemployed, they are quite likely to belong to another of the groups traditionally under-represented as volunteers, such as young people, old people, black people or disabled people. So to make their volunteering truly accessible to all jobless people, organisations will need to follow

more innovative recruitment strategies and make sure that they pay the expenses of volunteers.

4. **Unemployed volunteers need protection from officials who would deprive them of their welfare benefits.** This issue will go away eventually, but official prejudice dies hard, and organisations must be on their guard against it.

The pathfinders

In this booklet we shall be looking at the experiences of five organisations that in their different ways have succeeded in tackling these problems:

- **Birmingham Women's Advice and Information Centre (BWAIC)** is an information, support and referral service for women. It currently involves three volunteers and has applied for funding to train three more.
- The **Family Project (FP)**, part of Southampton Council of Community Services, works with the parents of children under five who have social, emotional and health needs. FP specifically recruits unemployed volunteers and now involves 12 of them across its eight projects.
- **Dudley Peoples Centre (DPC)** in North Tyneside is a local authority funded self-help initiative that supports local community groups, especially those catering for young women, unemployed people and older people. Its TUC affiliation and its strong interest in campaigning for full employment mean that most of its core of 20 volunteer activists are unemployed.
- **Merseyside Aids Support Group (MASG)** is a voluntary agency, part-funded by the Consortium on Opportunities for Volunteering, that provides information and support for people living with or concerned about HIV/AIDS. It currently involves 98 volunteers, 40 of them unemployed.
- The **National Trust (NT)** is a charity for preserving places of historic interest or natural beauty for everyone. It is Europe's largest environmental and conservation NGO (non-governmental organisation), and it has 30,000 volunteers at any one time.

All these organisations have successfully recruited unemployed volunteers. We shall now look at their strategies and how they can provide a model for other organisations.

A way back into society

At the time we wrote this booklet, unemployment in Britain was still unacceptably high. It was still very difficult for many people to gain a foothold in paid work: to acquire the skills and self-confidence on which to base a career. Unemployed people know this, and it's probably why many of them have turned to volunteering.

Voluntary work is the nearest thing to paid work currently available to most unemployed people. With the exception of a wage, it offers many of the same benefits: the chance to develop existing skills and acquire new ones, to make decisions and take on responsibilities, to regain the self-esteem lost when unemployment struck. On top of this, volunteering provides the personal satisfaction of helping others: seeing their efforts appreciated by service users and the community does wonders for the battered confidence of unemployed people.

So why aren't more of them volunteering? Some unemployed people may well reject volunteering because they see it as a form of job substitution, but a large part of the answer must be that voluntary organisations do not take the various factors that motivate jobless people sufficiently into account when trying to recruit them. In his recent study entitled *Quality through Volunteers*, John Neate points out that although people who volunteer are always to some extent motivated by altruism, there is an admixture of self-interest too: they want something in return – appreciation from others, perhaps, or job satisfaction (very important if you are not receiving a wage). Neate says that organisations must take far more account of this complexity of motivation when recruiting.

To reach unemployed people, the personal and career advantages that volunteering can bring should be put over loud and clear. But before organisations start promising these advantages in their advertising, they should be absolutely sure that they can deliver.

Checking out a career

In all five of the organisations we studied there were unemployed people who had volunteered to improve their career prospects. Indeed, NT, FP and MASG specifically emphasise this advantage of volunteering in the recruitment literature they distribute to colleges, universities, Job Centres, job clubs, volunteer bureaux and so on.

The NT has the largest proportion of jobless people among its volunteers. Maggie Burton, co-ordinator of long-term volunteers, explains that many of these are unemployed graduates interested in the conservation of land or buildings. The NT has formed links with universities and colleges all over the country to publicise the kind of work experience volunteering can provide. Maggie told us, 'Students now know that the Trust offers them an opportunity to gain the practical skills they need to progress into paid work in their chosen profession.' NT volunteer Andrew Case confirmed this: 'I wanted to volunteer for the Trust because I heard about them at college and through friends. I was studying and wanted to take a year out, to get some skills and see how I liked the work.'

Some of the unemployed people with FP had volunteered specifically to find out if they were suited to a career in childcare. As Geoffrey Ferris put it, 'I had no training in child care – I've been unemployed for four years. I told the Job Centre it was the only thing I thought I wanted to do. Now I volunteer and I love it.'

Volunteers know that FP will give them a reference to support their future job applications, and that any paid positions within the Project itself will be advertised internally. Nin Williams, FP's volunteer co-ordinator, was herself a volunteer for eight months. She then progressed to the position of playworker before finally becoming a co-ordinator.

Similarly, several of the unemployed people who volunteer with MASG said they were investigating the possibility of a career in community work with special emphasis on challenging discrimination. They knew that training in HIV issues could give them the specialised skills they needed: skills that could also be transferred to other areas of discrimination such as sex, class or race. One MASG volunteer told us she was interested in HIV counselling because her ambition was to get a paid job as a counsellor. Another said, 'There are so many avenues into a career. The varied skills we have learned here will surely help me decide my future direction.'

Acquiring useful skills

When meeting potential volunteers, the volunteer co-ordinators of all five organisations always make a point of explaining that they will be trained in useful skills. This information is conveyed in a variety of ways: during an informal chat, an interview or a phone conversation, or printed on a leaflet, poster, press release or application form.

To recruit new volunteers, BWAIC advertises free training in women's issues, covering topics such as ageism, sexism, racism, counselling and confidence-building. This practice arose when centre co-ordinator Carol Harte tried to organise training for the six original volunteers, but found that the group was too small for the training to be effective. By opening up the group to people from neighbouring organisations, the centre soon acquired a good reputation for training its recruits.



Joan Wheeler, volunteer from Birmingham Women's Advice and Information Centre

One of those recruits was volunteer Joan Wheeler: 'The training was so good that I knew I wanted to volunteer for this organisation. I have learnt so much already, and I know I will be in a position to learn even more through work experience and further training.' Another BWAIC volunteer, Chris Conboy, even gave up her university course in women's studies because she felt that the experience and training she would receive at BWAIC would be more beneficial. 'This is more worthwhile than waiting for a degree,' she says.

The NT also offers opportunities for unemployed people who are not recent graduates. The Trust's largest single source of long-term volunteers is unemployed people who are on their European Social Fund scheme or on schemes such as Community Action or Skills Plus. Alan Reeves, head warden of Dyrham Park, told us that he is happy for any unemployed person who enjoys the work to stay on as a volunteer after their spell on a training scheme is finished; in fact, of the 40 volunteers on schemes at the park, about a quarter choose to stay on. As Alan explains, 'Regardless of how they come to us, all our volunteers receive training. If you can offer them something they are interested in, they will feel much better about doing the work. They can see they are working towards something.'

After being unemployed for several months, Sarah Flippance was interviewed for the ESF scheme and expressed a wish to work outdoors. The following day she found herself working for the NT at Dyrham. Sarah said, 'I was dreading starting on my own as the only female at the Park, but when I learned that I could study for a NVQ it made all the difference. I knew it was a practical qualification that could lead to a job.'

Finally, a volunteer from FP told us, 'What attracted me was knowing that I would get training and a chance to put theory into practice with children. I had just finished a degree, but had no real work experience to make me employable.'

Satisfied customers

For jobless people, volunteering can be much more than just a way back into paid work. It is a chance to fight isolation by meeting people and forming relationships; it is about gaining satisfaction from a job well done, as well as earning the appreciation of clients, paid colleagues and the community as a whole. This is particularly important for people who have been unemployed for a long time and whose self-confidence is suffering as a result.

All the organisations we studied took care to publicise these particular attractions of volunteering in all their recruitment literature, as well as by word of mouth.

Clearly, these advantages are genuine ones. The DPC and FP volunteers all told us that they felt really positive about volunteering for the good of their local communities. Dealing with families and children meant that they could see what changes their contributions had made to people's lives.

DPC staff and volunteers try to create an environment of warmth and belonging around all new recruits. 'Everyone is welcome,' says centre co-ordinator Chris Bishop. 'It's the people's Centre, it's what we stand for.' One of the volunteers added, 'That's why so many of us who first came to the Centre to a class have ended up doing all the voluntary work we do now: it's the satisfaction of knowing that we're doing some good and that we're appreciated.' DPC volunteers help paid staff with fundraising, running the crèche, tutoring, organising meetings, and campaigning against cuts in the centre's funding.

A volunteer from FP told us that he got involved after being unemployed for four years: 'I volunteered to meet an emotional need in me to work with children. After volunteering, I felt so fulfilled.' Other

FP volunteers told us that they were genuinely appreciated by the Project, and not made to feel any different from paid staff.

Volunteers from BWAIC agree: 'It's the thought that you're contributing something to the common good. This is what gives you a sense of purpose when you're fighting discrimination.' Joan Wheeler from BWAIC added, 'I love my work. I look upon it as a real job. I'm 54 and can't see myself being employed for money, but I'm very satisfied. I get more out of this than I put in.'

Volunteers from MASG reported that they had acquired new confidence. Oadeth Gorden from Bermuda told us that when she volunteered she was new to this country and rather homesick. 'I was surprised to feel so appreciated and part of a team,' she said. Volunteer co-ordinator Cath Turner said, 'It is the ethos of the organisation to appreciate the rights and efforts of users, staff and volunteers while not being patronising.' As another volunteer said, 'It's not as if the staff spend all day thanking us – we just know we're appreciated from the way we are treated as their equals.'

The NT volunteers at Dyrham Park said that although they had principally volunteered to help the environment, they also wanted to meet people from different backgrounds and have some fun. So they organise various social events, including an annual jazz weekend. As Ben Cross, one of the volunteers, explained: 'We all worked really hard for it, but had such a laugh meeting loads of people.'

Ben has an HND in Forestry and several years practical experience. He needs neither qualifications nor work experience – but while he is waiting for his big break into paid employment, he continues to volunteer with the NT. 'I might as well do what I love doing, paid or unpaid,' says Ben. 'It's the social contact, meeting different people, and doing a good job that keeps me volunteering.'

Richard and Tim, NT volunteers who had been previously been long-term unemployed, said that they really enjoyed the routine: getting up in the morning, keeping fit, working outside and meeting people. Tim, who has been volunteering at Dyrham since 1986, said, 'It means getting out of the house and not watching *Neighbours* every day!'

Meeting expectations

Few people volunteer for One Big Reason; most do so for a mixture of motives. As we saw in the previous chapter, career ambitions often go hand in hand with a desire to meet people and obtain job satisfaction. None of these motivations is mutually exclusive.

For organisations, devising voluntary work that can satisfy these various needs is a challenging but essential task, especially where unemployed people are concerned. Such people may well be sceptical about the claims of a so-called 'route back into employment' that doesn't directly offer academic qualifications or paid work. Or they could simply be too lacking in self-confidence, too apathetic, to believe that they are capable of acquiring new skills.

Our five organisations have coped with this complexity of motivations by following one general rule: to empower the volunteer. Providing genuinely challenging work is fundamental to the culture of these organisations. Their aim is to give volunteers a chance to experience a variety of activities within a career structure similar to that enjoyed by paid workers. More importantly, these organisations work explicitly to ensure that volunteers really do enjoy the benefits that motivated them to get involved in the first place.

Tools of the trade

All five organisations believe it is essential to offer good-quality training to their volunteers. This enables the volunteers to become more professional and to take on ever more fulfilling work. Paid staff see themselves as facilitators, enabling the volunteers to realise their potential both as individuals and as members of a team.

MASG, however, is the only one of the organisations that gives its volunteers training before they are formally recruited. Over three weekends, candidates are trained to carry out two tasks: staffing telephone helplines and 'buddying' people with HIV/AIDS. The course

involves experiential learning, acquiring listening skills, absorbing technical information about HIV/AIDS and its transmission, and group discussion of themes such as prejudice, race, gender and drugs. Potential buddies are given training in the personal care of clients with HIV/AIDS: this covers feeding, lifting and domestic tasks, as well as the rights and responsibilities of volunteering in MASG. A variety of ongoing training courses is provided.

Cath Turner told us that this initial training is the real litmus test for would-be volunteers. After the course is over, participants are interviewed to find out whether volunteering with MASG is still for them. Only after this will MASG and the new volunteer sign a volunteer agreement for at least one year – although a longer commitment is welcomed. MASG volunteers confirmed that this initial training had answered their questions about HIV/AIDS: 'The trainers and group coordinators got the best out of people and brought everyone together.' Another said, 'It felt OK to make mistakes and discuss them.'

FP also offers basic training to all its volunteers, whether they have academic qualifications or not. The training provided by the local authority's under-fives worker covers basic play. 'It builds the confidence of all the volunteers,' says Nin Williams. 'It either confirms what skills a volunteer already has or gives them the basic foundations on which to build future training and work experience.' Other training offered includes first aid, children with special needs, child protection laws, teamwork, play skills, anger management, communication skills and dealing with conflicts within teams.

After their basic training, FP volunteers are given the opportunity of the same in-house and external training as is offered to paid staff. The Project will pay for volunteers to train for certificates such as those offered by the Pre-School Learning Alliance; these are a great help in finding paid employment. FP will also pay for volunteers and staff alike to go on short courses in subjects such as assertiveness and advanced first aid. Former volunteers David and Anita told us that this had made all the difference in enabling them to get paid jobs with FP.

DPC organises classes in computer skills, writing and woodwork that are open to all unemployed people. 'I came to get my O Levels,' explained one volunteer. 'The DPC offered classes in an atmosphere that was relaxed. It was not like school – it wasn't judgmental. Once I gained confidence through passing my exams, I got interested in becoming a volunteer activist.'

DPC volunteers who want to be activists receive training that equips them to sit on committees and deal with the press; essential skills when

campaigning against poverty. As centre co-ordinator Chris Bishop explains, 'We use role-play as a fun way of showing volunteers how a committee works. They take parts such as Chairperson, Labour Councillor, Secretary, Voluntary Youth Worker, Treasurer and Pensioners' Representative.' The one-day course entitled 'Have We Got News For You!' looked at issues such as who owns the newspapers and how news is reported in the press and on television; participants acquired practical skills in presenting their case to the media.

The NT offers many unemployed volunteers the chance to study for an NVQ whether they are on a government training scheme or not. There are four levels of NVQ, involving intensive training in skills such as erecting fencing, identifying trees, using pesticides, driving tractors and using chainsaws. All volunteers on the Trust's ESF scheme will be registered for an NVQ level II to start with. NT volunteer Sarah Flippance said, 'As the only woman at Dyrham, this has been a challenge for me. I really did have to work a bit harder than the men to prove I could pass the NVQ. But I was encouraged by the staff and the male volunteers - they were all so pleased when I passed.'



Andrew Case and Sarah Flippance, volunteers for the National Trust at Dyrham Park

Volunteers not studying for NVQs receive on-the-job training in skills such as building stone walls, clearing paths and planting trees. For Richard, who before volunteering had been one of the long-term

unemployed, this was the chance to learn something new: 'It's better than being stuck at home doing nothing. I'm picking up new skills.'

Delivering the goods

Once volunteers have acquired the necessary skills, they must be given an opportunity to use them. This should preferably be in a role that carries some responsibility for making decisions, such as tutor or co-ordinator.

Joe Jackson has been a volunteer buddy with MASG for three years, and has recently been elected as co-ordinator responsible for a group of 50 buddies. His duties include organising peer support for the group's members and providing support for them himself. Joe's ultimate ambition is to become a trainer, and he is just about to start the necessary training. 'I am pleased about the self-development process I've been able to go through,' he says.

Training and support have also helped BWAIC volunteers to become more employable. The management committee is almost entirely made up of ex-volunteers. All the directors, including the company secretary, are ex-volunteers. And at least five volunteers have found paid work as a direct result of the skills they acquired whilst volunteering. Volunteer co-ordinator Carol Harte also told us that three volunteers have been accepted for degree and diploma courses in women's studies on the strength of their experience in voluntary work. 'We also encourage our volunteers, once qualified, to apply for our paid posts,' said Carol. As we have seen, FP volunteers are entitled to receive the same training as paid staff. This means that there are always volunteers qualified to apply for paid positions within the Project. In 1996 two out of the eight volunteers recruited became paid FP employees and four went on to further education. Nin Williams also points to the people who are still volunteering but have gained considerably in self-confidence. Before volunteering, Geoffrey Ferris had been unemployed for four years, and thought of himself as lazy because he did not want to work. But after becoming a volunteer playworker he said, 'If there's one kind of paid work I could do, it's working with children. I enjoy it so much.'

After their training, DPC's volunteer activists have gone from strength to strength, taking up highly responsible roles. People with no previous experience of public speaking have addressed rallies all over the country and organised marches for full employment. Other volunteers have set up a credit union (a powerful anti-poverty strategy

that enables people to borrow money at almost zero interest). Volunteers chair the meetings, take the minutes and balance the books; three others sit on the consultation committee, which discusses poverty and the local community; and representatives from the credit union and the consultation committee sit on the overall DPC management committee. In this way, volunteers help to make the democratic decisions that influence the Centre's direction. Volunteer Tina Wigham told us, 'Since the committee training, I've been confident enough to get involved in the credit union and also in the consultation committee.'

NT volunteers have been well rewarded for their loyalty; the culture of the Trust is very much one of staying for years and working your way up through the ranks. Alan Reeves, warden of Dyrham Park, first came to the NT on a government scheme; he was promoted to supervisor and now holds the position of Head Warden. Some of the unemployed people who volunteer for the NT nation-wide end up working for the Trust, and some find employment elsewhere. Volunteers who stay with the NT have the opportunity to become members of the management committee; many of the 52 nominated and elected members of the committee started out as unemployed people who volunteered.

Solid support

Rightly or wrongly, volunteering has something of a reputation for being disorganised. This is unlikely to make it appealing to unemployed people: having already, as they see it, been rejected by society, they urgently need access to a well-organised alternative to paid work before apathy or bitterness sets in.

The five organisations we studied know that it is vital to be able to adapt to the changing needs of unemployed volunteers. This requirement can be met by a well-organised system for supporting and managing the volunteers. Although each organisation does this in a different way, depending upon its culture and history, all agree on the three basic essentials: a volunteer co-ordinator, an induction procedure, and a system of support.

First contact

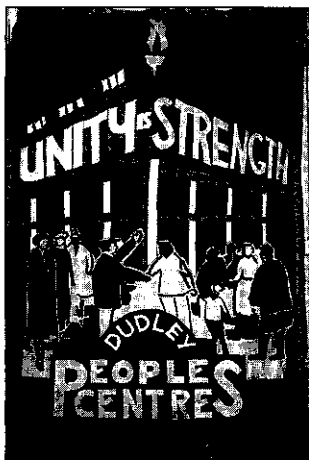
If it is true that first impressions count, organisations need to give some thought to how they handle their first contact with would-be volunteers. The organisations we studied believe that this should be made as easy and unthreatening a process as possible, whether it takes the form of a telephone conversation, an informal one-to-one chat, a formal interview or even an 'information day'.

BWAIC recruits in a variety of ways, but all of them tend to be informal. Joan Wheeler, for example, was volunteering for another organisation when she happened to come along to a BWAIC training course; she was so impressed by the standard of BWAIC's training and the emphasis on hands-on work that she changed her allegiance. 'I found my previous voluntary work too bureaucratic by comparison,' she told us. 'It was so easy to be recruited by Carol, and the work is both unbureaucratic and effective.'

But Chris Conboy, a more recent BWAIC volunteer, was recruited in a completely different way: 'It was all so easy. I made a phone call, then

came in for what seemed more like a chat than a interview. I never needed any qualifications – just interest and commitment, which I had.’ When we spoke to her, Chris had served her probationary period of three months, and had learned so much that she and Carol had decided she could go straight on to high-level training.

DPC makes initial contact with most of its volunteers through the leaflets it distributes to every house in the neighbourhood. Of course,



since it is volunteers who are delivering the leaflets there is always an opportunity for some word-of-mouth persuasion; this combination is much more effective than leafleting alone, especially in a small community.

DPC co-ordinator Chris Bishop feels that the Centre should be open at all times so that members of the public can come in and have a chat. He told us that most of the Centre’s current volunteers came initially ‘just to get out of the house’ or to join one of the classes on offer during the day. Chris then encouraged these visitors to find out what else is going on at the

centre and how they can help. ‘When I see that they’re interested, I introduce them to others who are active – and from then on, they’re on board with us. There’s no real formal structure.’ As one volunteer told us, ‘It was Chris’s friendliness and the way the tutors in the classes I attended never patronised me that made me want to stay around and get involved.’

The recruitment processes of FP and MASG are more formal, but none the less welcoming. The set procedure is a phone call, an application form, an induction day, an interview, then compulsory training. Both organisations take phone enquiries and send out application forms as quickly as possible to prevent the caller’s enthusiasm from waning. Owing to the nature of FP’s work, its application form asks for details of any previous convictions. But as Nin Williams told us, this is never a cut-and-dried matter. On one occasion, for example, FP recruited a volunteer who turned out to be excellent at his job, but they later found out he had omitted to mention a non-violent conviction when filling in his application form. Social Services wanted to dismiss him, but FP argued that he had merely misunderstood the form. The man kept his voluntary job.

For the NT, the first contact with volunteers takes place in a variety of ways: it can be through a Regional Volunteer Co-ordinator, through the Volunteers Office or through direct application to a Trust property.

The interview

Organisations should try to make their first face-to-face meeting with a potential volunteer as relaxed and enjoyable as possible. This is especially important for unemployed people, who may feel rejected as a consequence of their fruitless search for paid work and see volunteering as their last hope.

'When I interview someone, I don't ask for all their personal details,' Nin Williams of FP told us. 'What I want to know about is their motivation to volunteer, their commitment to working with families.' Nin gives an overview of the eight projects volunteers can become involved in, so the interviewee can choose the one that appeals to them most. This is better than confusing the volunteer by sending them to see all the project leaders in turn, each of whom will naturally try to convince the volunteer that their project is the most suitable for them. All the FP volunteers were happy about their first contact with the organisation: 'I found the whole process, right from the first interview and throughout the induction, to be very open, friendly and organised,' said one.

Prospective volunteers for MASG are interviewed after they have attended an Introduction Day. This gives them a chance to get a realistic picture of the whole organisation and of the commitment required from them.

Getting to grips with the organisation

A thorough induction is equally essential, as it gives volunteers a chance to get to grips with the culture, objectives and working procedures of the organisation.

FP gives a one-to-one induction lasting up to two hours. 'I go through the basic procedures,' says Nin Williams, 'but I try not to get bogged down in the details of our policies at this stage - I simply make the volunteers aware of their existence.'

MASG also offers a one-to-one induction, during which the volunteers can choose where they want to get involved and identify their needs as new members.

Both FP and MASG try to achieve the same objectives in their induction:

- to build up the volunteer's confidence
- to tell them about the culture and aims of the organisation
- to elicit the volunteer's personal motivations
- to inform them of the rights and responsibilities of volunteers
- to discuss practical matters such as expenses, insurance and grievance procedures
- to describe the links the organisations has with other agencies.

Nin feels that following this procedure is useful because it gives the volunteer a chance to share any anxieties they may have with the co-ordinator in private. For example, volunteers with HIV/AIDS can use the occasion to tell the co-ordinator, and anyone who needs extra help with building up their confidence can be given support at the start of their volunteering, before problems set in. At the end of their induction, FP volunteers are asked to sign an agreement.

There is a formal induction procedure for NT volunteers likewise. They also have a very useful induction pack, to which Maggie Burton, co-ordinator of long-term volunteers, has recently added general information about long-term volunteering. The complete pack informs the volunteer about:

- other staff and their duties
- the terms and conditions of volunteering
- health and safety procedures
- training opportunities
- job descriptions
- claiming expenses
- support available for job-searching
- preparing portfolios

On top of this, wardens will usually spend time explaining the details of the estate and the job for which the volunteer has been recruited.

Support where it counts

Support, both practical and psychological, is as important for volunteers as training. The organisations we studied provide this support in a variety of ways:

1. Paying out-of-pocket expenses. For obvious reasons, the reimbursement of travel and subsistence expenses is absolutely crucial for

unemployed people. To avoid possible embarrassment, however, the volunteer co-ordinators of all five organisations make a point of telling volunteers that it is their *right* to claim expenses. This message cannot be put over too early in the recruitment process: ideally, posters and leaflets should carry it, to reassure people who are attracted to volunteering but worried about the likely cost – or failing that, at the telephone conversation or interview stage. It is particularly important to pay the travelling costs of volunteers going to interviews and the overnight subsistence expenses of those attending training courses.

The NT, for example, pays mileage rates for volunteers who drive cars. 'We understand that many volunteers would be unable to work for us otherwise,' says Maggie Burton. Where volunteers do not possess cars and public transport is unavailable, the co-ordinators or wardens will organise transport from the nearest town. In some NT regions, volunteers with cars pick up fellow volunteers in return for the reimbursement of their expenses. Volunteers at Dyrham Park told us that getting picked up was a real plus, because it meant no bus fares and no waiting around for unreliable public transport.

Similarly, the volunteers at BWAIC told us how much they appreciated having their fares and lunch money reimbursed. 'I love volunteering,' said Chris Conboy, 'but because I'm on unemployment benefit and have two children to support, I can't afford to be out of pocket.'

2. Encouraging peer support. MASG volunteers who do the same job are encouraged to meet and discuss their work, thus giving each other support, praise and, if necessary, a shoulder to cry on. To encourage this to happen, one volunteer was appointed buddy co-ordinator. The buddies told us how much they valued these meetings: 'Only another buddy can understand how we feel or give us helpful advice.'

3. Being accessible to volunteers who want to discuss problems. The BWAIC volunteers told us how much they appreciated the fact that the two experienced paid staff made time to chat informally about hypothetical case studies. Chris, for example, was able to discuss what she should be saying about domestic violence in her role as advice worker: 'I feel as if I'm really learning all the time. The staff and our more experienced volunteer Joan are so approachable.'

4. Encouraging the career development of volunteers. This can be done by sharing the organisation's resources: volunteers should be given access to the same training and development opportunities that

paid staff enjoy. These opportunities could relate to their current volunteering or to their long-term career goals; they could, for example, take the form of information about child protection law for FP volunteers, about HIV epidemiology for MASG volunteers, or about environmental issues for NT volunteers.

5. Praising good performance and valuing the volunteer contribution. Volunteers like to feel appreciated. So organisations should aim to oblige, both verbally and in writing. FP volunteers David and Anita, for example, were nominated for the Volunteer Certificate awarded by the local Council of Community Service to volunteers who had completed 100 hours' service. David and Anita attended the award ceremony and met the mayor; but more importantly, perhaps, they were both able to put the Volunteer Certificate on their curriculum vitae.

6. Holding regular meetings between staff and volunteers. This helps with team-building and avoids an 'us and them' situation developing. FP has one staff member at each meeting who is responsible for encouraging the volunteers to contribute; this was done to stop the volunteers feeling as if they were intruding on a meeting that was really only for the benefit of staff. Since adopting this idea, FP has noticed that volunteers have become much more vocal.

7. Providing a one-to-one support and supervisory session with the volunteer co-ordinator or project leader. Nin Williams of FP uses these sessions to discuss any personal or professional problems the volunteers might be experiencing. One volunteer, for example, felt uncomfortable at the prospect of working alongside a large team of adults. So Nin offered her the chance to work in a small team first and then, as her confidence grew, to move to a larger group with a member of staff responsible for supporting her. This volunteer was unlikely to have said anything in a group support session with other volunteers.

8. Supporting unemployed volunteers who are worried about their benefits. The NT recognises the need for organisations to provide clear written guidelines for volunteers. It is vital for unemployed volunteers to know that they can seek advice at any time – a facility much appreciated in all the five organisations we studied.

Equal access

The rapid expansion of volunteering in recent years has put paid to the notion that it is exclusively for middle-class, middle-aged women who don't have to work. But the misconception lingers stubbornly on, persuading people who don't conform to the stereotype – people who, for example, are male, unemployed and black – that volunteering is not for them.

The organisations we studied have explicitly challenged the misconception by making it clear that volunteering is open to *everyone*.

Enhancing your aims

One of the more insidious problems is that certain sections of the population seem to identify with certain types of volunteering: environmental organisations, for example, tend to attract young, educated people – employed and unemployed alike – who worry about the future of the planet, whereas community groups such as DPC attract local working-class volunteers (including many black, disabled and older people) who want to 'help their own kind'. The challenge for both types of organisation is to go beyond these traditional practices and recruit people who will push forward the frontiers of their work.

FP, for example, wants to recruit more men, so that the children who use their services can meet positive male role models. There are two problems here: first, most men still tend to regard voluntary work with children as 'women's work', and second, because of the vulnerability of the children recruitment procedures have to be watertight. But this does not deter FP: as Nin Williams told us, her organisation takes a low-key approach, developing good relationships with local voluntary organisations and other promising sources of suitable volunteers, rather than resorting to high-profile recruiting campaigns.

Nin told us. 'We make it clear to the staff there that *all* volunteers are welcome, but we emphasise that we would particularly like to encourage men. So far, this strategy has been successful: volunteer bureau staff are giving positive encouragement to men, and they are coming to us and becoming volunteers.' As Geoffrey Ferris said, 'Because I have never married or had children, I never thought I would be able to work with very young children. I was so pleased when I was told I could become a volunteer.'

Recruiting through community links

The other four organisations we studied advertise much more widely than FP, and have tried to target at least one group of people who are under-represented among their volunteers.

MASG has targeted women and black people, groups that do not usually identify with the HIV/AIDS issue. In all its press advertisements, the organisation positively encourages black people and women to volunteer. Developing relationships with black groups and women's groups has been even more successful; MASG has links with the trade union Unison, which gave them access to its networks.



Diane Levette, Merseyside Aids Support Group buddy

MASG plans to hold a race awareness day, introducing measures to encourage black people to volunteer; these include recruiting black trainers, changing the current training venue, and referring to HIV in terms better understood by black communities. To attract more women, MASG offers practical help: it pays the childcare costs of any women who attend the three compulsory weekend training courses for volunteers.

The NT is well aware that it is perceived as a white, middle-class, able-bodied organisation. To counteract this, the Trust's advertising is careful to include images of black and disabled volunteers. However, conscious that more than this needs to be done, NT is now making links with inner-city schools and communities and managed to recruit young black students as volunteers, but it has still to attract significant numbers of unemployed black people. The Trust has also formed relationships with centres for people with learning difficulties and

physical disabilities who are unemployed: they have also taken their commitment to involving people with disabilities one step further, as we shall see below.

Positive action

These public relations measures are all very well, but if an organisation really wants to ensure that a marginalised group volunteers, it needs to take positive action. The first step is to change attitudes: all five organisations we studied have provided training to make existing staff and volunteers aware that some groups need a special encouragement and support to become a volunteer.

The NT decided to involve people with physical disabilities in conservation work. After consultation with Valerie Wenham, the Trust's adviser on disability, the Touchwood project was born. The NT established links with places such as the Bow Neighbourhood Trust, a day centre for people with special needs. Six users of the centre, each with a similar type of disability, were invited to come on a working holiday. To ensure that they could cope with the workload, six able-bodied volunteers were also invited. Led by a volunteer with a background in care, the Touchwood programme was a success.

Bryll Kapp from Bow Neighbourhood Trust told us, "The project was a excellent way for people with special needs to experience conservation, and to meet able-bodied people and make lasting friendships." As Richard, one of the volunteers, put it, "It's like paradise here."

Since then the NT has contacted many other centres, and as a result people with a wide range of physical and learning disabilities or with mental health problems have been able to volunteer in conservation.

DPC takes positive action to attract women by advertising women-only classes. The woodwork course, for example, gives women a chance to acquire skills in an area many still view as a male preserve, but without having to worry about competing with men; the tutor is also a woman. As a result, the course has been very popular.

The men who attend DPC's men-only woodwork class have also had a learning experience – and not just about woodwork. Their tutor is female, which seriously challenges their ideas of what women can and cannot do.

For its part, BWAIC takes positive action in favour of women. This is because the organisation exists to provide confidential advice and support to women suffering domestic violence from men. Women without academic qualifications are especially encouraged to apply,

as BWAIC feels that people who have not had further education should be given a chance, through their volunteering, to study.

BWAIC's volunteer co-ordinator Carol Harte is conscious of the need to recruit a varied team of volunteers and paid staff who can identify with all the different kinds of women who seek advice. To achieve this, she advertises in newspapers and journals aimed at ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, as well as making contact with groups containing women from a range of backgrounds. BWAIC is currently recruiting volunteers who speak Punjabi and Urdu so that it can extend its services even further. Older, younger and disabled volunteers are also being targeted for recruitment over time.

CHAPTER SIX

Fighting for the right to volunteer

The official mind sometimes has a problem with reconciling the concepts of unemployment and volunteering. Although, as we have seen, Department of Employment guidance states quite clearly that, subject to certain conditions, jobless people *can* volunteer, many benefits agency officials seem to be unaware of the fact. As a result, volunteers are still being threatened with withdrawal of their benefits.

For example, two long-term volunteers at the NT's Studland Estate in Dorset who had started on the Trust's European Social Fund scheme (described below) were at the time of writing experiencing problems with the Wareham Job Centre. Under the ESF scheme – which is approved by the Department for Education and Employment – they are eligible to continue to claim benefits: the scheme criteria state that they must undertake three days of voluntary work, one day of training and one day of job search, and that they must be 'available for work' at all times.

However, the Wareham Job Centre refused to allow the two volunteers to register as unemployed, and therefore to claim benefits, because it regarded the work experience they were gaining during the three days of voluntary work as 'training'; added to the one day of training per week, this took them over the current 21-hour rule. Despite repeated phone calls from the NT warden, the co-ordinator of the ESF scheme and the partner organisation, Wareham Job Centre was at the time of writing still refusing to recognise the voluntary element of this scheme and insisting that it should be treated as a formal training programme, as at a college.

Consultation and confrontation

On the whole, however, it is better for an organisation to stay on good terms with the benefits agency, as this can make all the difference between keeping volunteers and losing them. As Nin Williams and Ted

Crawford know only too well, it is the only way to avoid the mistakes that can lead to benefit cuts.

Nin Williams represents FP on the Benefits Agency Committee, whose task it is to inform local offices about any problems over volunteers who are currently claiming benefits. As Nin explains, 'There are a lot of inconsistencies in what people are told about their benefits, and this committee is one way of clearing them up.' It is also a way of pressurising benefits agency managers into training their staff in the correct interpretation of the rules on unemployment and volunteering.

The NT also told us of numerous occasions when volunteers have been given contradictory information about their right to volunteer. Warden Alan Reeves from Dyrham Park invited the local Job Centre manager to the estate to show him what unemployed people are doing. 'If you can show the benefits agency that people are not just volunteering but doing a course, it quietens the situation down,' explains Alan.

FP and NT are used to defending the right of unemployed people to volunteer while signing on. The organisations write to the benefits office, describing the nature of the voluntary work and training, and explaining that volunteers can give 48 hours' notice to take up paid employment.

DPC, by contrast, takes a much bolder approach. An organisation of the Left that works in conjunction with the Trades Union Congress, it regularly campaigns for the rights of unemployed people: for example, DPC volunteers recently distributed to local households a leaflet explaining the implications of the new Jobseekers Allowance. All unemployed people who volunteer with DPC receive a booklet entitled *Helping you back to work? Your survival guide*, which explains in plain English how to volunteer and what the rights of claimants are.

But despite recent concessions, there is still official pressure on unemployed people to take up paid work of any kind; this may force them out of long-term volunteering. The NT volunteers whose benefits were being withheld will probably have to give up volunteering because their local Job Centre refuses to recognise what is after all a DfEE-approved scheme. Volunteers are losing a chance to pursue their long-term career goals and are being forced to enter any low-paid, short-term work that happens to be available.

Genuine volunteers?

When it comes to recruiting unemployed people from government training schemes, FP and NT each have a very different tale to tell.

In the case of FP, it is a cautionary tale. Volunteer co-ordinator Nin Williams told us what happened when she recruited people from the Community Action scheme: 'For the first six months it was fine. Those on the scheme really wanted to volunteer with us. But for the whole of the next year, things got progressively worse.'

FP found that many of the people sent to them were interested neither in volunteering nor in the project's objective of empowering families in need. Clearly, they were not genuine volunteers: they had not been given an opportunity to choose the kind of work that appealed to them, and the local Community Action staff had failed to vet them properly. Nin added, 'Many of them only volunteered because they thought they would lose their benefits otherwise.'

So after eighteen months FP decided to stop working with Community Action, because they felt it had not taken into consideration the needs of unemployed people or the needs of FP as an organisation.

The NT, however, tells a happier story. It recruits many of its volunteers from schemes such as Community Action, Skills Plus and Employment Training. The Trust also runs, in partnership with industry training organisations, two highly successful European Social Fund Objective 3 schemes specifically aimed, under the auspices of 'Pathways to Work', at unemployed people and involving long-term, full-time volunteering. Candidates must be able to show that they are keen on becoming part of a team doing physical work in the open air. The recruitment procedures are thorough: would-be volunteers are interviewed by NT wardens and volunteer co-ordinators, then briefed on the work expected of them.

The NT offers all its unemployed volunteers the chance to work towards a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). Those on Community Action schemes were offered transfers to the ESF schemes (see above) so that they could do an NVQ; this would give them the opportunity of a real qualification as well as some work experience. A chart on the wall at Dyrham Park shows just how many of the volunteers who achieved NVQs went on to find paid employment. As Paul Convery of the Independent Employment Unit says, 'Coercing young people into training doesn't work unless they know that the training is going to lead to qualifications or to work.'

As a result of the formal training it offers, the NT has been able to recruit unemployed people who are genuinely willing volunteers. 'Offering NVQs has proved to be a valuable incentive,' says Ted Crawford. 'It allows flexibility and appropriate training for all those involved.'

The lessons for organisations

Compared with some of the other groups described in this series of booklets, unemployed people can suffer from quite serious exclusion. Older people, for example, usually have something positive – a satisfying working life, perhaps, or a happy family life – to look back on; and young people have much to look forward to. But jobless people of any age are excluded from the mainstream of society, usually through no fault of their own, and in today's economic climate they often feel powerless to do anything about their predicament.

One activity that can demonstrably restore hope to this marginalised group is volunteering. But as this booklet has shown, organisations that wish to recruit unemployed people will need to address the following issues:

- **A sense of achievement**

In a society that classifies people according to their jobs, those who have no job feel that they count for nothing. Voluntary work that provides unemployed people with a challenge – and hence gives them a sense of achievement when they have met that challenge – can do wonders for their self-esteem.

- **A way back into society**

Their colleagues at the workplace are, for most people, one of the most significant of the social groups they belong to: a group from which unemployed people are excluded. But volunteering as part of a team can provide an equally rewarding substitute.

- **A way back into work**

Being out of work means losing the habit of work, which makes the search for paid employment even harder. To reintroduce jobless people to the habit, organisations should try to make the volunteering they offer as close to 'real' work as possible: the volunteers should be able to make decisions, acquire skills, have a career.

- **Improving accessibility**

Two of the biggest practical obstacles to unemployed people volunteering are the ill-informed attitudes of benefits office staff and the lack of money to pay out-of-pocket expenses. Organisations should therefore aim to reimburse their volunteers' expenses and to try to explain the advantages of volunteering to benefits office staff.

Unemployed people could be forgiven for thinking that society has declared them surplus to requirements. So perhaps the most important thing an organisation can do for its unemployed volunteers is to give them real, practical help – and at the same time to campaign actively in support of their right to volunteer.

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