

2001 International Conference on Volunteer Administration

Volunteering in the United Kingdom

Speech given by Barbara Laverty, United Kingdom Director of Volunteer Partners for CSV (Community Service Volunteers)

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak about volunteering in the United Kingdom. I am with you as an imposter! The intended speaker from the UK was to have been the Executive Director of CSV, Mrs. Elisabeth Hoodless who I know is well known to many of you. Unfortunately, Elisabeth was unable to attend this year's conference and asked me to make this presentation on her behalf.

CSV is the leading organisation in the UK providing volunteering opportunities for people of all ages. The things I will talk about under the headings you have given me all relate to CSV, but they are representative of the issues facing all volunteer involving organisations in the UK at this time.

By way of background, some information about CSV. Last year we provided over 4.5 million hours of volunteer input through our eight nationwide programmes. These programmes are: Volunteering Partners (my own programme), Training and Enterprise, CSV Media, RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteering Programme), CSV Environment, CSV Innovations, and CSV Consulting.

CONNECTING GLOBALLY

CSV hosts Volonteurope – the largest social action network in the European Union. This year's conference is to be held in Budapest next week and I have been delighted to meet several delegates here who will be attending. [This conference was held in October 2001.]

CSV is the largest "importer" of volunteers

from Europe through the European Voluntary Service initiative, whereby we place volunteers in full time opportunities away from their homes. The volunteers give six months to one year of their time, and they receive accommodation, food or a food allowance, and weekly pocket money. Three hundred volunteers from six European Union countries have been placed by CSV in the first two years of the programme.

CSV has overseas partnerships with over 20 countries around the world. Volunteers come to the UK from countries as diverse as Japan, Paraguay, the United States, and Turkey. We are also involved in connecting professionals involved in volunteer management around the world and have taken part in international exchanges to promote learning and development.

The UK Government is committed to citizen involvement and supports with funding the systematic involvement of volunteers across areas of public service, including health and social care, education, emergency services (including the police), and the prison service. The government has also demonstrated a commitment to supporting volunteering opportunities for all ages. The Millennium Volunteers programme is a government-funded initiative focused on providing volunteering opportunities for 16 to 24 year olds in the UK. The theme of the programme is to ask young people to "build on what you're in to" in order to help others. Awards are made for 100 and 200 hours of service. The Experience Corps for 40 to 65 year olds has just

been established with government support and will be developed across the UK.

We are particularly proud that the UK government will be introducing citizenship into the National Curriculum in schools for five to six year olds in September 2002 — including practical service. CSV has been promoting citizenship in schools for many years so this national approach is very welcome.

CSV organises Make a Difference Day (MADD) in October each year — a day of action across the UK, funded this year by Barclays Bank (\$291,000 CD) and the Government (\$87,000 CD). This is a wonderful opportunity for people who have no previous volunteering experience to try something out and get started. Research done by the National Centre for Volunteering in the UK tells us that half of the population of the UK (20 million people) currently volunteer and that half of the other half (11 million people) would volunteer if asked. MADD is one way we can ask people to get involved.

DIVERSITY

CSV believes that every individual has something to give their community — no offer of service is turned down. We believe that volunteering can bring about social change through its effect on individuals, organisations and systems. Our policy of non-rejection is very powerful. Many people, particularly youngsters who come to us have already been told that they do not “measure up” to what is required; they do not have the right qualifications or they have been in trouble with the law and are not trustworthy.

We believe it is important to give a positive response to all individuals who put themselves forward to volunteer, and we make a commitment to finding them appropriate volunteering placements. On a daily basis, volunteers demonstrate qualities that are not adequately measured by formal qualifications or that do not seem commensurate with their backgrounds. They tell us that their lives have been transformed through volunteering. We

take very seriously the responsibility of ensuring a good match between volunteer and volunteering opportunity and also our role in challenging preconceptions relating to age, disability, qualifications, and experience.

CSV is tackling social exclusion through tailoring volunteering opportunities for people who have disabilities; have been in prison or in trouble with the law; who have a history of substance misuse; who are from minority ethnic groups, or who live in isolated rural communities. As one example, we have a project providing volunteering opportunities for people with learning disabilities. These people previously felt excluded from community life because each day they travelled a long distance to an Adult Training Centre. Through the volunteering opportunities they now have, they are able to participate in local community life and make a contribution. In fact, they have changed from simply being receivers of care to being caregivers themselves.

TECHNOLOGY

A challenge for us in the UK, and I am sure for you, too, is how to keep up with the “instant” world that is accessible through information technology. We are increasingly using a wide range of media to enable people to have instant access to volunteering opportunities. People can submit their details to CSV via e-mail and can sign up for Make A Difference Day from the web site.

CSV Media has “action desks” in all 36 BBC local radio stations and staffed partnerships with 76 radio and television stations. We are able to provide on-line mentoring services and have established “Mediabridge” as a means of providing support over the internet to people who are keen to develop skills in media related work.

PROFESSIONALISM

CSV contributes to policy formulation and implementation at national, regional, and local levels. CSV has its 40th birthday next year. It has a long history of involving volun-

teers — the knowledge and experience built up within the organisation is shared in the interests of promoting volunteering and community involvement. Across CSV programmes, we are actively involved in training for project supervisors and staff in organisations receiving volunteers.

CSV Consulting is involved in national debates around standards and quality in volunteering and issues such as the development of accreditation for volunteers. CSV Consulting hosts an annual conference in the UK called the Institute for Advanced Volunteer Management. It provides an opportunity for in-depth study and reflection for those who have moved on beyond stage one in volunteer management!

PARTNERSHIP

Partnerships are at the heart of everything we do in CSV. In many situations we act as intermediaries between the volunteer and receiving organisation, therefore, we could not do our job in any other way than through partnerships! It is increasingly the style of service delivery across all sectors in the UK for agencies to be required to demonstrate partnerships working in order to secure funding. In CSV we have significant partnerships with social care services, health services, education, police, libraries, charities, and businesses in order to deliver volunteering opportunities.

CHALLENGES

In being passionate about volunteering, the key challenge for us is how we ensure that the 11 million people in the UK who would volunteer if asked get to hear about something that would appeal to them. We need to be able to adapt quickly to the demand and people want us to take a flexible attitude. They want to be able to volunteer when it suits them and not necessarily on a regular basis. Mass recruitment of volunteers by some organisations in the UK has not worked because there has not been the infrastructure

to deal with huge numbers of requests to volunteer. We know that people want a fast response — very often someone who wants to volunteer wants to start today, not in three or six months time!

Many organisations wish to involve volunteers, but we have a significant challenge in helping them to understand what it means to involve volunteers and provide training so that the experience is positive on both sides. Increasingly, volunteers are being involved in new areas of work, and we need to understand the context and the volunteer role that are required. The possibilities are endless.

In CSV we put a great deal of emphasis on the role of the volunteer manager (what we call Volunteer Director). Understanding and managing risk is a key area of their work and one where we must always be vigilant. The protection of vulnerable people is always a challenge and a high priority whether the vulnerable person is a volunteer or a client in a receiving organisation.

In conclusion, I believe it is an exciting time in the UK to be involved with volunteering. There are many opportunities for us to demonstrate how volunteer involvement can bring a new dimension and a qualitative difference to service delivery. And, we know that volunteering changes lives. I'll leave you with a quote from Adam, a CSV volunteer: "I've become a lot more confident in myself, and I now have a completely different attitude towards people with disabilities. I see them as individuals rather than just a label. Being at CSV has been a life-changing experience, and I'll never forget one bit of it."