

Summary 1: The Management and Development of a Skilled Volunteer Workforce

- 1 Our literature review aims to provide a comprehensive review of current thinking and contextual information about skills and workforce development issues in the third sector and amongst voluntary workers in the UK. This summary outlines key issues explored in the report concerning skills and workforce development amongst the volunteer workforce.

Availability of Information on Volunteers

- 2 The diverse and fluctuating nature of the volunteer workforce means that it may be difficult to collect systematically skills data on volunteers. Volunteers are often seen as a temporary resource. For reasons such as these literature specifically on skills in the third sector workforce tends to focus largely on the paid workforce. Generally speaking, the exact nature of various skills issues amongst volunteers, e.g. the skills they enter with, the skills they develop and how best skills can be utilised, remains underexplored.

Key issues for the management and organisation of volunteers

3 Recruitment and Motivation Issues

- ❖ There is an ongoing need for effective targeting of appropriate groups in the population with messages and benefits that will attract them to volunteering;
- ❖ It is important that recruitment practices enable the effective 'matching' of volunteers' motivations to appropriate roles. Unrealistic expectations may often be reason for leaving volunteering.

4 Skills, Training and Development Issues

Resources for training volunteers (both financial and time) are often scarce. However, evidence from the literature suggests that training can play a crucial role well beyond just the acquisition of skills.

- ❖ Pre-service training of volunteers is needed in order to deliver information on the nature and purpose of the volunteer work, to develop task related skills and set expectations. New volunteers may lack appropriate skills, knowledge and experience and this can cause uncertainty, ambiguity and fear. Training and development practices that provide information to fill gaps in knowledge and support skill development and that support volunteers to manage these feelings will be important for retaining effective volunteers. Such training appears to increase volunteers' job satisfaction, lead to higher levels of retention, help avoid 'burnout' and provide volunteers with the skills necessary to do their jobs competently and effectively;

Do Skills Matter? A Literature Review on Skills and Workforce Development in the Third Sector

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- ❖ In-service training is often crucial to create pride in the organisation, to support volunteers, to create cohesive supportive work teams and to motivate by engaging volunteers in delivering the organisational mission. Such training can also enable volunteers to develop skills to strengthen their relationships with clients and to help volunteers deal with difficulties at the organisational level. Training may also play an important role in helping integrate different types of volunteers into the work group in order that they can perform most effectively. All of these aspects have been suggested to contribute to satisfaction levels, to effective performance and to retention.

5 The Organisation of Volunteer Work

The way work tasks are organised is crucial for volunteer job satisfaction and so for retention. Volunteers who feel that their skills are utilised effectively and that they are given challenging and rewarding tasks with opportunities for intellectual and personal growth and for the gradual accumulation of skills are more likely to feel satisfied with their roles. Mechanisms to achieve this may be:

- ❖ Ensuring variation in work by rotating volunteers' shifts and tasks.
- ❖ Creating opportunities for volunteers to work alongside paid staff so as to learn more about the whole of the organisation's activities and to generate opportunities for interpersonal relationships;
- ❖ Engaging volunteers in problem solving and asking them to draw on their community networks. Assigning volunteers to committees and task forces where they have the opportunity to develop leadership skills.

Conclusion

Existing literature reviewed in the report enhances our understanding of the types of skills that volunteers may need (including soft skills as well as task specific skills). Additionally it is clear that the skills of the managers of volunteers are crucial if they are to be able to assist volunteers to be most effective for longer. Key challenges are to:

- ❖ Ensure that effective HRM methods are used to meet skills needs whilst bringing individuals to the sector who 'match' job roles well;
- ❖ Ensure that effective skills development activities and career planning cover all areas of the workforce, including volunteers;
- ❖ Continue to develop skills for the effective management of volunteers and the organisation of the work of volunteers in such a way that it meets their requirements for personal, intellectual and skills development and will keep volunteers motivated, effective and active within the sector.