

**Volunteer Centre Brighton and Hove
Final Report**

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Executive Summary

The research project was carried out collaboratively between the University of Brighton (UoB) and the Volunteer Centre Brighton & Hove (VC) in the Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) at the Health & Social Policy Research Centre (HSPRC). The project was carried out between April 2006 and September 2006. The aim of the project was to evaluate the work of the Volunteer Centre in helping 'vulnerable' members of the local community find non-paid work as research suggests that at least twenty five percent of individuals seeking volunteering are 'vulnerable' due to mental illness, isolation or substance misuse or disability. Volunteering saves very considerable expenditure on a range of statutory budgets and attempts are now being made to evaluate this saving at a national scale. This report continues the investigation into the contribution of volunteering to the local economy.

Review of the literature

The character of volunteering

The literature would suggest that volunteering is understood differently according to the circumstances that surround one's lived existence. Age has a particularly significant impact upon one's conceptualisation of volunteering (Hustinx, 2001; Reeder et al, 2001; Rehberg, 2005). Rehberg (2005) undertook a study with students of volunteerism and noted how they depicted a shift in the emphasis upon volunteering from "old," "classical," or "traditional" to "new" or "modern" volunteering. "Old" volunteering is closely connected to certain social *milieux* such as religious or political communities, it involves a long-term and often membership-based commitment, and for altruistic motivations play a key role for the involvement of individuals. "New" volunteering on the other hand is more project oriented and volunteers have specific expectations as to form, time, and content of their involvement. Hustinx (2001) has found evidence for "new" volunteering among young participants in international work camps: young volunteers are not particularly loyal to organizations, tend to be rather choosy about what they do and expect some personal benefit from their volunteering. Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) have argued that social transformations fundamentally affect the social bases of volunteer action, and more specifically the biographical frame of reference for volunteers.

Theories of a "second," "late," or "reflexive" modernization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1996) propose the emergence of self-reflexive biographical forms which at the same time increase individual freedom of choice and place the individuals in uncertain and risky situations. Such self-reflexive biographical forms coexist and have, to a certain extent, replaced more collective biographical forms that tend to involve more stable and taken-for-granted life trajectories. In Hustinx and Lammertyn's (2003) view, the accounts of "traditional" and "modern" forms of volunteering reflect the fact that contemporary individuals oscillate between collective and reflexive biographical sources of determination. Motives for "collective" volunteer efforts are rooted in a communal orientation with a strong sense of duty to a local community (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003). These motives frequently stem from a religious tradition of altruism or are inspired by coordinating ideology or meaning systems. Through devoted community service, the "collective" volunteer achieves biographical stability and is relieved from reflexive

autonomous identity and biography construction. For the “reflexive” volunteer, motivation for volunteering arises from experiences of biographical discontinuity caused by life crises or self-chosen biographical reorientation. A pluralization of motives occurs among reflexive volunteers who combine self-directed or instrumental motives with a sense of compassion or duty. A form of “altruistic individualism” (Beck, 1997) is characteristic of the motivational basis of the reflective volunteer.

Research has also been carried out with older individuals who have recognised the benefits of volunteering as a ‘social activity’ to the overall health of the individual. The relationship between activity and wellbeing in later life has long preoccupied social gerontologists. Engagement in activity was among the first identified correlates of successful ageing (Havighurst and Albrecht 1953) and persists as a major wellbeing predictor in recent gerontological thought (Rowe and Kahn 1997). In fact, participation in activities was a central requirement in one of the first major gerontological theories of ‘successful ageing’ (Lemon, Bengtson and Peterson 1972; Litwin, & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2006). Empirical analyses over the years have variously partially verified and partly refuted the ‘activity theory of ageing’ (Chen 2001; Hout et al. 1980; Reitzes, Mutran and Verrill 1995). Nonetheless, the notion that activity is good for older people continues to guide a wide range of welfare practitioners who work with or advise older people (Reich, Zautra and Hill 1987). Given this background, it is timely to ask: what is it that really matters in the association between activity and wellbeing in later life?

The influence of social relationships on wellbeing in later life has been widely studied. Relationships can impact upon older people’s wellbeing in several ways, by their number, diversity, frequency and intensity, in other words, by their structural and interactional characteristics (House and Kahn 1985; Litwin 1996; Mitchell 1969). Relationships may also promote wellbeing through the benefits that they create, particularly through the exchange of social support (Antonucci and Akiyama 1987; Cohen and Syme 1985; Ell 1984; Keyes 2002). Finally, relationships can affect wellbeing to the extent that they are meaningful to the persons who engage in them (Fung, Carstensen and Lang 2001).

Motivations

Previous empirical studies have focused on the motivations of hospital volunteers (Zweigenhaft *et al.*, 1996), AIDS volunteers (Murrant and Strathdee, 1995; Omoto and Snyder, 1995; Reeder *et al.*, 2001), or older volunteers in general (Okun *et al.*, 1998; Pushkar *et al.*, 2001). Investigations into the motivation underlying young adults' volunteering have concentrated primarily on university students' motives to get involved in domestic voluntary efforts (Switzer *et al.*, 1999; Fletcher and Major, 2004). To date—perhaps with the exception of Hustinx's (2001) study of participants in international work camps—an empirical investigation of the motivations of young adults, who intend to volunteer internationally, has not been carried out.

Qualitative studies on volunteer motivation (Chambr'e, 1995; Brooks, 2002; Yeung, 2004) have developed intriguing typologies of motives and new theoretical insights from a relatively small sample of strategically or conveniently chosen informants. Yeung (2004), for example, used text data from conversations with 18 church volunteers to construct a model of volunteer motivation within a phenomenological framework.

Rehberg (2005) undertook a study consisting of a sample of 116 people and broadly characterised them into three groups based on their motivation for undertaking voluntary work. 77% of the sampling population was motivated by factors associated with the first group; “achieving something positive for others” – helping, giving, doing something good. 75% motivated by “a quest for the new” – a group characterised by a cultural exchange, doing something different and meeting new people; and 67% were motivated by “a quest for oneself” – professional development.

Health Benefits

The Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London¹ are conducting an on-going project that aims to explore the characteristics and circumstances of volunteers undertaking placements within seven boroughs of London. Of the sixty people interviewed, only two were in paid employment, both working part-time, and 98% were in receipt of state

¹ Interim report available at http://www.capitalvolunteering.co.uk/db/files/iop_interim_research_report_final_399.pdf

benefits. Less than half the participants (48%) considered their health to be good, with 84% considering emotional and physical problems to have impacted detrimentally upon them in the previous four weeks. The most frequent reasons for choosing a particular volunteering placement concerned the opportunity for work experience and improving skills (22%), opportunity to socialize (20%), as a means of getting well (15%), or simply getting out of the house (15%)².

Benefits to the local economy

Recent work undertaken for H M Treasury's cross-cutting review of the community and voluntary sector³ helps to explain why the sector's contribution is seen as being so important. Voluntary organisations are described⁴ as being cost-effective, innovative, flexible and pioneering. However, there is debate about how issues like service quality and cost-effectiveness can be tested and quantified.

More locally, a recent audit by the Brighton & Hove Dialogue 50/50 Group⁵ identified that over ten thousand people work in the community and voluntary sector in Brighton & Hove, of whom 6300 work as volunteers. The total amount of hours volunteered, as identified by the 50/50 group was 38,000 – which constituted to the local economy a saving of approximately £18 million per year.

This report aims to build on the 50/50 audit by accounting for the total amount of hours undertaken by those participating within the study.

Overall:

Overall volunteering has been theorized to be one of the cornerstones of the social capital of societies: individuals who undertake volunteer placements show stronger pro-

² These characteristics concur directly with the results of this project – as discussed within this piece.

³ H M Treasury (2002) *The Role of the Community and Voluntary Sector in Service Delivery: A Cross-Cutting Review*

⁴ Wolfenden Committee (1978) *The Future of Voluntary Organisations*, Croom Helm, London quoted in H M Treasury (2002), op. cit

⁵ Full report available at [http://www.cvsectorforum.org.uk/org/BH_EconAudit_full.pdf] Accessed: 24/08/06

social attitudes and identify themselves as connected with their local community to a greater extent than individuals who do not volunteer (Meyer and Budowski, 1993; Rehberg, 2005; Wilson, 2000). The importance that this places on the 'self-esteem' and feelings of 'worth' cannot be overstated. This explains, in part, the importance and grounding for this empirical review into the area. The study has the following aims;

- What are the health benefits and cost savings of volunteering?
- What is the effectiveness of volunteering?
- How far does the Volunteer Centre currently meets volunteers' support needs?
- What are the outcomes for the volunteers?
- What is the incidence of successful placements?
- What are the primary reasons for placement failure?

The Volunteer Centre – The organization

This next section looks at the organisation of the VC in some detail. The Centre is an infrastructure organisation promoting individual volunteering across the city, working with community groups and voluntary organisations recruiting volunteers to meet their needs, and promotes Good Practice in Working with Volunteers with organisations and groups recruiting through the centre.

The Centre promotes volunteering through

- The volunteer centre website,
- The Centre's Newsletter, which goes out quarterly to circa 1000 community groups and voluntary organisations.
- Promotional activities during National Volunteers Week.
- Using access to community and voluntary organisation promotional posters,
- The centre's postcards and leaflets,
- Specific local volunteer recruitment events throughout the year, i.e. Brighton Pride and the Brunswick Festival,
- Frequent press releases to the various media in Brighton & Hove.

The Centre participates in a series of events to recruit and promote, as well as to celebrate volunteering in the city.

The Centre sits centrally within the county of Sussex. Both West and East Sussex have VDA groups and Brighton is represented on in the person of the manager. In the last year West Sussex has had 2 volunteer centres close, in Bognor and Littlehampton, and the Adur Centre, situated a couple of miles from Brighton, has recently lost its funding for the manager so reducing opening times to one morning a week, which is covered by a volunteer.

The Brighton & Hove Volunteer Centre aims continuously to raise the profile of volunteering across the city, engage individuals in volunteering, and increase the number of community groups and voluntary organisations recruiting volunteers through the Centre. It works to ensure that volunteering is accessible to all areas of the community and to promote good practice in working with volunteers.

The Centre has a drop in service on Mondays to Wednesdays from 10 am – 3 pm and an appointment service on Thursday afternoons between 4 pm – 6.30 pm, primarily to meet members of the public enquiring about volunteering opportunities in the area of Brighton and Hove.

Volunteer Centre Brighton and Hove seeks to improve the quality of life of local people and develop opportunities for people to help others and, in the process, develop their own skills and potential through volunteering. The Volunteer Centre mission is to promote best practice in volunteering and to support not-for-profit voluntary organisations, charities and community groups and to assist people into a voluntary opportunity of their choice

The Project's Background

The Brighton and Hove Volunteer Centre is a project of Brighton and Hove Community Partnership (BHCP) a registered charity and company limited by guarantee and is currently situated at Interger House 65/67 Western Road Hove BN3 2JQ

The Centre has been the lead agency for promoting quality volunteering in Brighton and Hove for several decades. The centre has been at its current premises, located centrally within the City, since 2005.

The Centre has an active steering group, which meets quarterly, to advise and support the work of the centre. The steering group is made up from representatives from other infrastructure organisations, a BHCP Trustee, B&H Age Concern, disability awareness group and B&H Primary Care Trust, one of the Centre's funders.

Staffing

The Centre was previously run by a part time worker who covered the drop in service and a part time development worker. The work of the centre has grown and it dealt with 3500 enquiries in 2005/6.

*Unfortunately due to a loss in funding the staffing levels have been reduced and the previously full time manager (working 35 hours per week) now works only 19 hours per week. The Centre has also lost the part time worker that covered the 15 hours drop in service. Thankfully the Centre still has a dedicated team of volunteers who on average work 20 hours per week. Due to the loss of staff Centre staff have not been able to attend any outside events etc.

Description of Current Activities

- Drop in - The Centre's primary function is to match both individuals and groups interested in volunteering with appropriate opportunities in the local community. The Centre holds information on a comprehensive range of opportunities. They offer potential volunteers support and advice matching their motivation to volunteer with appropriate volunteering opportunities.
- VBase and internet – easy improved access to information via the Centre's website, which is linked to the national Do-it website. There has been a high increase of enquiries via the internet to over 800 since 2003. To meet this demand it is essential that staff and volunteers are trained in the use of Vbase, a database programme specially written for volunteer centres. The database is updated weekly so information on all volunteering opportunities is as up to date as possible.
- Support and coordination of the volunteer coordinators' group - The Centre works with volunteer co-ordinators from registered organisations in advising on the recruitment and support of their volunteers. This has been identified as an area in which the Centre can expand and, in partnership with WTP and other training providers, deliver training and accreditation for potential volunteers and volunteer co-ordinators.
- Best practice CD - The Centre promotes good practice in working with volunteers to all volunteer involving organisations. In partnership with The Working Together Project it has produced a Good Practice Guide available on CD and on its website.
- Outreach service – the Centre's Outreach service is a SRB6 funded project which ends in March 2006. The Outreach project's aim was to raise awareness of volunteering and of the many volunteering opportunities that exist across

Brighton and Hove to six identified areas of interest, to offer advice and information on all aspects of volunteering to organisations, community groups, neighbourhoods and individuals and to increase diversity, involvement and participation in the local community. An evaluation of that service will hopefully show the need for an ongoing outreach service covering the whole of the B&H area.

- To be a signpost for the citizens of Brighton & Hove to have access to volunteering
- To reach out to communities of interest and hard to reach groups to ensure volunteering is inclusive to all
- To feed back from the organisations we work with.
- To remain flexible and adaptable
- To be a member of Volunteering England
- To recognise the skills of older people and changing attitudes towards their contributions

Stakeholders

- Users
- Voluntary and Community Sector
- Funders – Brighton and Hove City Council and Brighton and Hove Primary Care Trust
- Volunteering England

Evidence of Need

- The numbers of enquiries to the centre has grown from 2659 in 2003/4 to 3768 in 2004/5. The increase of enquiries has been mainly through the use of the Centre's website and access to the Do-it website, a national website that all volunteer centres that are members of Volunteering England are linked to. On average we receive 10-15 email requests daily asking for information on the opportunities registered.

- The verbal and written feedback through our feedback questionnaires, thank you cards, letters etc and comments received during our opening times and from members of the public when the centre attends outside events.
- The number of new organisations that use us and the continued use by organisations already registered, approximately 279. There are 900 voluntary organisations within Brighton and Hove. An average of 2-3 new organisations are coming in weekly.

Volunteering can be seen as changing the shape of employment patterns and has been identified by job centres and employment agencies as a way of improving the potential of long term unemployed people through access to training, gaining skills / knowledge, references etc.

The changing views on volunteering

The Centre plays an important role in enabling people to gain experience that will open access to work for them. A broad range of people, from graduates wanting to start a career to those in middle age wanting to change career, use volunteering to build C.V.s and to gain relevant experience for the area of work they want to move into. This is particularly important in the area of social care where, quite often, employers demand a level of experience to demonstrate motivation and aptitude. Volunteering also enables people to try out an area of work before committing themselves to paid employment, thereby seeing whether it matches their expectations. Childcare is a good example of this.

Strategic Aims

1. To enable people to access volunteering opportunities through the Volunteer Centre
2. To enable community groups and voluntary organisations to access volunteers to meet the needs of their groups and organisations

3. To promote Good Practice in working with volunteers to ensure that volunteering is a positive experience and to minimise the drop out of volunteers.
4. To ensure that staff development needs are met to implement the Volunteer Centre's Business Strategic Business Plan.
5. To continue the outreach programme to engage identified neighbourhoods and communities of interest that traditionally have not been engaged in volunteering.
6. To develop a Fundraising Strategy to meet the development needs of the Volunteer Centre

How the study was conducted

In-depth qualitative interviews were carried out with ten individuals, all of whom had accessed the VC within the last twelve months. The research population constituted individuals who were willing to be interviewed and whose contact details on the VC database were accurate. It was considered inappropriate to specify the amount of volunteering, measured in hours, an individual would have had to undergo to be eligible to be considered for this report, as an important aspect of this evaluation is the manner participants conceptualise their success or failure in securing a volunteer placement, in relation to their wider health. If participants were able to undertake volunteering, the longer term impact this had upon them was also an avenue for exploration.

In accordance with the University of Brighton's ethical guidelines for confidentiality and anonymity; pseudonyms have been used throughout this report.

Of these people

- Six were male and four female
- The ages varied between twenty-six and seventy eight
- None of the sampling population was currently in any form of employment
 - three were retired
 - one was a full-time student
 - six were unemployed due to ill-health – (ill-health constituted either a physical disability or mental ill-health – both of which prevents employment)

All interviews were carried out at the VC. The facilities made available to the project allowed a secure room where interviews could be carried out in private. All interviews were taped and transcribed. All interviewees who had traveled by public transport were offered reimbursement for the cost of their fares.

Context

'Vulnerability'

It is appropriate to clarify the use of the term 'vulnerable' in the context of this report. 'Vulnerability' was generally discussed within the interviews as the participant's inability to remain connected to wider society, the risks and dangers of which are associated with becoming isolated. This was particularly damaging for many within this study. Employment is a principal mechanism through which the majority of the population is able to remain attached to society. None of our sampling population was in employment at the time of the research⁶. This was a real problem for many of those interviewed and had a detrimental effect on their health.

With the minimum wage being legal now people don't want to employ people with learning difficulties (Interview 10).

To this end, what was interesting was the manner in which the participants discussed the need for volunteering in multiple and contrasting ways. Significantly all centred their argument on the importance that volunteering can have for offering opportunity to enhance skills and tackle the issue of isolation. Physical and mental ill-health were the main elements of 'vulnerability'. For example, one of the participants was unable to work due to physical disability and five participants were registered as disabled due to mental ill-health which ranged from schizophrenia to depression. Those not diagnosed with a mental or physical disability, but also without paid employment (for example the retired) also self-defined their need for volunteering to be about 'staying busy' and 'getting out of the house and seeing people'. Where the participants were unable to secure employment, due to age or disability, volunteering was therefore fundamental to their state of physical and mental good health.

Volunteering as a social activity

This project sought to investigate

- the multiple ways that participants discussed their experiences of volunteering
- if they had been successful in gaining a voluntary opportunity
- what they understood to have been the successful elements of their volunteering placement

⁶ A characteristic of the sampling population verified (shared) by the Institute of Psychiatry research report.

- how the VC facilitated their placement
- what, if any, failures they experienced within their placement or in the work of the VC
- how the participants came to conceptualise the benefits of volunteering in relation to their wider life and
- what, if any, health implications this had.

The intention of this report was to link our empirical data – six from ten of our sampling population being ‘vulnerable’ (unable to work due to mental or physical ill-health) – with literature that suggests that volunteering can be beneficial to the health of individuals.

Analysis

1) Volunteer Experiences

What is Volunteering?

Volunteering as a social activity is a culturally grounded practice. How individuals come to conceptualise volunteering and the meaning they attach to volunteering would appear to be linked to their sense of 'self-esteem' and feelings of 'connection' to their community. This is of particular importance for this report for two broad reasons. First, how individuals, particularly those considered 'vulnerable' or in need of social support, define volunteering as an activity beneficial to their sense of 'self' will allow this report to make recommendations for future social policy and to address and support vulnerable members of the community. Second, the work of the VC needs to be proportionate and reactive to the mechanisms through which the community conceptualises volunteering. By their own admission, the VC has struggled to advertise a cohesive service in the light of some lack of clarity about whether it simply facilitates volunteering opportunities or if increasing resources have to be identified that would allow for it to *support* potential volunteers to a greater extent than is possible at present.

Volunteering was not a uniform construct but ranged in its implication and connotation. The most basic of definitions seemed, on the surface at least, to involve doing something (anything) for no financial gain. It was therefore understood to be altruistic.

It's not paid work (John; Interview 10)

Basically its sort of unpaid work (Steven, Interview 6)

Volunteering is giving of your time and energy for no financial reward (Leslie, Interview 2)

Keeping people happy (Pat, Interview 4)

I tend to have a somewhat romantic idea of volunteering to be, umm, overseas, ones mind tends to shoot over there and you think of people being involved with worthwhile and interesting stuff particularly third worlds (James, Interview 1)

However, when the participant's explanation of what constituted volunteering was explored further, it became apparent that volunteering as an activity was far from altruistic and in fact was self-serving in many cases.

So what do you understand by the term volunteering then?...Well, for me it wasn't entirely altruistic in that I was aware that doing some voluntary work would be beneficial in getting on to my [university] course (John,, Interview 10).

I'm sure it is commonly the case that it is also self-serving as in as much as one has the opportunity to mix and um, be among other people and experience that umm, also one has a sense of making a contribution (James, Interview 1)

I get a sense that it's something a lot of younger people are doing because I tend to meet a lot of young people who have just maybe left school or left university or something and they've started with a bit of voluntary work, but it's the same as anything, it's kind of to get a career motivated partly (John, Interview 8).

There is a selfish side to it that I wanted to do something that would engage me, my brain, and use what I had which I thought was useful and there was a real motive (Brian, Interview 9)

Steven highlighted his motivation for being interviewed as an outcome of his concern that volunteering can have exploitative tendencies.

One of the motivators for doing the interview was...I need work and so there's a little bit of a concern on whether there's too much of an expectation

for people to volunteer as opposed to give people [paid work]....so, yes, I guess in a way I question, you know, it's society, out of balance in a sense that you've got people earning mega salaries and then you've got people who are expected to work for nothing (Interview 6).

The importance of Volunteering

The benefits of volunteering to participants were widely acknowledged and the importance to their lives consistently outlined by those able to volunteer. The benefit for James can be seen in the following quote where he discusses his integration into the Kibbutz of Israel.

...they're [Kibbutz] volunteers in a sense and the first time I went was I was 24 I had my 25th birthday there I was there for a year that time, and I did go actually with a one way ticket opportunisticly I thought I could get hold of a gun easily and shoot myself that was the reason I went but I obviously it didn't happen and I had too, umm ,err, cope and there was the opportunity to volunteer on a kibbutz (Interview 1).

The importance that volunteering had in James life cannot be overstated. It would be not be appropriate to generalise this point and suggest that volunteering saves people's lives but the health benefits for those volunteering were often evident. James continues by discussing the practical ways that volunteering has allowed him to survive.

...from the suicidal episode, I had to get on with stuff. I found myself with little income in another country. I just had to get on with stuff. And the opportunity was there, one had to eat, one had to sleep, you know one had to cope. Umm, I just, the opportunity of volunteering gave me the opportunity to do those things.....those stay alive type things (Interview 1).

Overall, volunteering played an important part in all the lives of those who participated within this study. This will be explored further in the next section. By way of contrast, the account of Brian (aged 78) who has been unable to secure any placements, due he suspects, to his age, emphasises the frustration people experience in this situation and

the lengths individuals go to to volunteer. Brian characterised his situation as “frustrating” and “disheartening”.

The benefits of volunteering – psychological and physical

What was particularly interesting was the emphasis that each participant placed upon the importance of volunteering. This was related to the manner they defined volunteering as a social activity and the implicit link to their physical and mental good health. For example, six of the ten in this study were unemployed due to physical or mental ill-health. Of these individuals, all were explicit about the importance that volunteering had in their lives. They gave detailed accounts outlining the necessity to be reintroduced into society slowly through the skills that would inevitably be offered through volunteer placements. Interestingly, the remaining four participants also identified the importance of volunteering – although the motivation and benefits of volunteering was grounded slightly differently and sometimes expressed as ‘staying connected’ and ‘finding employment’. Reg, 48, a self-described manic depressive explains;

From my point of view I thought this [volunteering] was a way of helping my communication skills because what had happened was I had various illnesses which stretched my mind, I’m a manic depressive and I take medication to ease the mood swings and so what happens is I felt that I needed somebody with a similar sort of illness that I could relate to (Reg, Interview 3).

Julie, 26, describes volunteering as staying connected through relearning ‘communication skills’ following her brain tumour;

Friends - I think one the main reasons I started volunteering was because when you’re out with your friends and you’re not working and they’ve got work stories and they talk about their friends at work and then you don’t have anything to say (Interview 5).

Julie clarifies this point a second time later in the interview;

I think when you've been ill and you've away from normal kind of reality for a long time...it's like you lose touch with your friends and what's happening in your peer kind of life and your best friends are the nurses that you see every week (Interview 5).

John, 40, who has learning difficulties, explained the importance that volunteering had for him;

I like being with other people. That's the reason why I went into volunteer work, I like being with other people...Just finding things to do, just trying to keep my mind occupied and fill my time in (interview 10).

James also conforms to this trend by suggesting;

why do you do the volunteering?...I; essentially self-serving I think. Because its sometimes, it gets me out, doing stuff, sometimes I can spend an awful lot of time in internalising, and, you know in your own world, and volunteering can, does, get me involved, you know. Its nice to help and know you're meeting need (53, undifferentiated schizophrenic).

Steven's interview was important in providing the conceptual bridge between the two groups – for example, between those who were 'vulnerable' due to mental or physical ill-health and those who were 'vulnerable' due to retirement (the remaining interview was John, 37, a full time student and not considered 'vulnerable' in the context of this report). Steven had been '*diagnosed with a sort of cancer condition so focussed a lot of my attention on alternative treatment*' (Interview 6). One might therefore have expected him to look upon volunteering as being important in providing him with personal development through his ability to remain connected. Steven's cancer was, however, misdiagnosed. This, it would appear, is pivotal in Steven's ability to distance himself from the first group, although he does speak about volunteering providing '*confidence*'. But significantly, he grounds his narrative, and speaks of volunteering, as providing employment opportunities. This is in contrast to others in the mental/physical ill-health group as his discussion is set within the ultimate goal of employment opportunities - characteristic of the 'non-vulnerable' group. This might imply that Steven has moved on in his

development since being diagnosed with cancer and for him volunteering is increasingly about gaining employment rather than personal development.

What are you getting out of it [volunteering]...it's the experience basically and hopefully I'll get the experience and the confidence (Interview 6).

Steven's account was extended by the second micro-vulnerable group - the retired participants. Leslie, Jane and Brian, all retired or semi-retired and therefore not in need of voluntary work as a form of career progression, still allude to the importance of volunteering to their health through the 'connection' it provides to wider society. Leslie speaks about volunteering with a certain amount of 'tongue-in-cheek'. Although she alludes to the importance that volunteering can have for those being serviced by volunteers, her motivation for volunteering is about 'feeling good'. The benefits, quite unlike anyone else in the sampling population, are almost 'religious' rather than practically based.

I decided, I felt that I was going through quite an emotional period and I felt that I committed sin in my life. I'm not a religious person in that sense but things have happened and I've upset people and I felt that I wanted to do some good work. So probably just purely selfishly to make myself feel better. And that's why I thought volunteering would be a good thing to do (Leslie, 65, semi-retired, interview 2).

Brian cites the importance of volunteering as 'remaining busy' and offering a wealth of knowledge and experience to someone that is in need of it. To this end, it is self-serving as a voluntary opportunity would allow Brian to 'stay connected' to his community.

If you've led a life like I've led and your brain is still in top gear you don't want to sit around just doing the Times crossword – you want to keep the brain, keep the mind going. It's something I've attempted to do all the time. It did seem to me that the adult literacy programme or something like that particularly would be something where I'd be useful and which would be very interesting for me (Brian, 73, interview 9).

Similarly to Brian, Jane notes the importance, once retired, of having something to do and somewhere to go.

I wanted to keep busy – stay sane and keep in contact with the wider world, which is especially important when you come to retire (Jane, 60, retired, interview 7).

The interview with John – a full time student – was much less intense when compared with all other interviews. He appeared flippant at times and spoke much more about voluntary work providing an opportunity to ‘give to others’. His motivation was, nevertheless, to do with career aspirations. Although other interviews alluded implicitly to employment opportunities as a basis for their voluntary motivations, John was explicit about this point.

I’m still considering doing some more voluntary work because a good friend of mine has done a lot of voluntary work in community arts projects and it’s helped him get the skills to start a career out of it, he’s doing that in London. And other people as well who have done voluntary work have found it really useful to kind of do things you actually enjoy doing and then sort of give you a bit of work experience as well (John, 37, Interview 8).

How effective was the VC in facilitating the needs of the participants.

There was a huge amount of gratitude for the work of the VC by the majority of the participants.

If you do manage to find something that you think might be okay for you then here at the centre you can phone the people and speak to them and try and arrange an interview. All of that is free. Umm, yeh, I think it’s a good service its been a good service in the past to me, just do what they can to get you to where you think you’d like to go (James, Interview 1).

...to talk me through what happened when you first contacted them...It’s difficult to remember to be honest. But I think I phoned and they spoke

about what they had going and then they put me touch with the place I ended up volunteering so it was quite straightforward. I seem to remember the process took a few weeks between when I first contacted then and when I was put in touch with the organisation I volunteered for (John, 37, Interview 8).

The Volunteer Centre here is very proactive (Brian, Interview 9).

The needs of the participant can generally be classified into three types, all of which require a differing level of service. The first was the non-vulnerable group, the second retired or semi-retired, and the third those who had suffered a physical or mental disability. It would appear from the interviews that the VC was better able to aid some groups than others. Each individual was asked to rate the service of the VC out of 10.

The following scale was offered to the participants from which a mark could be awarded to the VC.

Mark Description

- 1-3** VC unable to support or assist me at all
- 4-6** Minimal support or guidance made available to me
- 7-8** Direction and accurate advise offered by the VC
- 9-10** VC helpful and informative

Group 1: Non-vulnerable group

The data generated from within this group cannot be generalised as it was simply the experience of one individual. John was not understood to be vulnerable in that he was connected with his community and had not suffered mental or physical ill health. His needs were therefore different from all others within this report. In contrast, the needs within the other groups were similar, which goes someway towards explaining the usefulness of categorising the groups and building generalisations from their experiences. John awarded the work of the VC a 9. He cited the dynamic and flexible approach they offered as being positive factors, in particular he liked the service available over the phone and on the internet so that it was not necessary to visit the Centre every time.

I phoned and they spoke about what they had going and then they put me in touch with the place that I ended up volunteering so it was quite straight forward...('Did you physically go to the VC?')...No I spoke with them on the phone (Interview 8).

It's pretty good that's it's a sort of central source of maybe finding out what different voluntary opportunities there are available (Interview 8).

Group 2: Mental & Physical Ill-health.

An overall satisfaction rate of 80% was awarded to the work of the VC by this group.

Reg, who at the time of attending the VC was only recently out of hospital, noted the amount of reading that was required in identifying possible placements.

When you come first of all, it's quite daunting because I really didn't know what to go for. And I also had recently been out of hospital so I was quite sort of new to coming along to things and sorting myself out. They have little descriptions of what, they had it on some boards, descriptions of the type of volunteering that there was and then it just means looking through different files. So if you wanted to do gardening for example there's a number one file, or number two was finance, three was shop work. Then you got the file out and looked through these. There's a lot of looking through. A lot of looking through and trying to take down information and assimilating information quite quickly (Reg, Interview 3).

Although the amount of work and the assimilation of information was an issue for Reg, he does make a comparison of the VC with their centre before they relocated.

In what ways is it more welcoming now?...They don't have the boards with the descriptions of the jobs anymore, they've taken that away. The chairs

are much nicer and they're much more...it looks more organised (Interview 3)

More specifically, James considers the environment to have been particularly welcoming and helpful at the VC.

I think you can wander in, have a look around and see what stuffs up to be looked at, and you might be approached and someone might say 'do you need any help', if you don't, just say no I'm looking, and you could pass back out again. Or, you can approach someone or take up their invitation and erm, take their assistance as needed. So It's more or less open, you know (interview 1).

James sums up the work of the VC;

Its functional, it serves a purpose in as clear way as possible. You know, you get what they have to offer out there, umm, visually and so its clear and umm, yeh, it did that, It was relaxed (James, Interview 1).

John comments that the people at the VC were 'nice people' and were able to aid him in his search for a volunteering placement.

Julie, 26, also commented how friendly and welcoming the new facilities were compared to the old.

Yes, really friendly. Quite happy atmosphere...(So did someone come up to you or were you left to wander around or...?) No someone came up to me and I said why I was there and they sort of directed me in the right direction, showed me where all their folders were (Interview 5).

Steven notes that he found the VC to have been helpful but felt the information they were providing to have been out of date at times. Overall he felt the staff were very friendly.

Well I basically remember the people being very friendly and helpful but then it just became a little bit frustrating when nothing was coming together. Yes, so I think I just kind of disengaged eventually (Steven, Interview 6).

Group 3: Retired & Semi-Retired.

Group 2 awarded the VC an overall satisfaction mark of 60%. It would appear that the VC was unable to meet the needs of the retired population as effectively as the other groups within this study.

Jane pictures her time at the centre to have generally suited her.

I was given a bunch of folders to look through. There was quite a lot of information to go through and no one asked if I wanted any help. (Did you want some help?) As it happens, no. I was able to get on and look through without being hassled (Interview, 7)

Pat, who has suffered from physical disabilities all of her life, suggested that she found her first impressions of the VC to have been unhelpful.

Unfortunately they weren't very helpful. Because what happened was I went up and I said I've just left a job because and she said what sort of job do you want and I said well, I do sign language, I do special needs, anything like that so she rummaged, gave me a few files and said could you look through there because I'm busy and when I looked over she was talking with a friend (Pat, 70, interview 4).

Pat develops her point by saying that she received no volunteering through the VC and she didn't come back to the Centre after that time.

(Have you had any other dealings with the Volunteer Centre?)...No. Only that one...(And why have you not had any other dealings with them?) I didn't...I suppose because of that I didn't come back...(Because of what?)...Well, that problem of when I went in and she gave me that and she

said just that, I can't find anything else I'm busy and just went over to the baby and the lady. I thought oh well, I don't think I'll bother to go back (Pat, Interview 4).

Brian concurred with Pat's account that he too was unable to secure any voluntary work through the centre. He did, however, refrain from criticising the VC, even though he received little support, which he recognised was due to the limited resources an organisation like this would have.

They gave me a folder or some kind to look through with various jobs in it. Not highly precisely defined as I remember...they listen to what you're looking for and then you have to pick them out yourself....maybe they should be doing more and that's not a criticism, evaluating me more closely and doing the match themselves. Of course, if they're busy, they may do this, I don't know, presumably you'll be checking this (Interview 2).

Brian's account has various elements that concur with others in this group. Firstly, he identifies the issue of the basic information provided in the folders (this will be discussed further). It would appear that Brian wanted more help in marrying his skills with particular placements. He suggests that the support he was provided was insufficient in allowing him to leave the Centre informed as to what opportunities might be available. *'I mean I had to come here and go through the pages and from then on I'm on my own'* (Interview 2).

I would have said that they struck me as being very nice and welcoming people. But they struck me as being so busy that could not do much more for me...they were being as helpful as they could be within whatever restrictions they operate (Interview 2).

The issue of funding and the restrictions this places on the centre was also articulated by Leslie when she summed up the work of the VC.

If people are interested in volunteering they [VC] are there to offer you a range of possibilities. So it's all focused in one place which makes it

easier...its really valuable. Horrified to hear that they've lost some of their funding, I mean, its outrageous. They need more funding not less (Interview 2).

Out of date information

Consistently, one of the major criticisms directed towards the work of the VC was about information being passed to potential volunteers that was out of date. The folder system includes inaccurate information about whether placements are still available, what skills would best suit the placement, the contact details of the placement and the times the placement could be contacted.

But what happened was I took away about 10 or a dozen different things, this is way back in sort of May of 2005. Took it away and then I started ringing them up and quite a lot of the information was out of date. I don't know how they keep their information out of date but quite a lot them were that's not really happening anymore or we don't do that any more or we don't have any volunteering ?? so I don't know how they update their files because it's not a difficult thing to do it but certainly I found there were wrong phone numbers (Reg, Interview 3).

Well I wrote down names and addresses, I think I had three or four. And I only got somewhere with a school out at Mile Oak. The others, again I can't remember exactly, I obviously didn't get very far either because people at the other end were baffled by or put off by my approach, or because I couldn't even get hold of them (Brian, Interview 9).

But in actual fact, as far as this organisation goes, I found out that a lot of the positions had either long since been filled but this is going back now almost two years so I don't know if things have changed, but what happened what a lot of the information was redundant (Steven, Interview 6).

I took information away with me, although there was a telephone at the VC I didn't want to use it, but I realised that once home, the information was

wrong. I didn't bother calling the rest cause I assumed it would all be wrong (interview 7).

They gave me a kind of folder to look through. Not very precisely defined as I remember (Interview 9). .

Reg described taking out-of-date information away with him had been frustrating.

How did that make me feel? Well it's a bit frustrating because you expect the information to be up to date but you know they've sometimes been in the file a long time and it must be very difficult for them to keep up that information (Reg, Interview 3).

Brian made useful recommendations about how the VC could improve and provide a quality assurance to maintaining up to date information;

...between the volunteer organisation recruiting all this and the people who are using it, there should be a much more intense connection perhaps, a great scrutiny, a greater...and these are impressions (Interview 9).

I think they do a good service. They need somehow to be able to keep their records up straight. It must be very difficult but there must be some way of getting the people that are, the company that's providing the volunteering, keeping in more regular contact with them so that they've got the details for them (Interview 3).

Brian suggests that communication between the VC and the acting agencies needs to be increasingly robust so as to ensure that volunteers are using accurate and accessible information that allows them to make some judgement as to whether they feel their skills match the placement expectations.

2) Cost Savings to the Local Economy

Action Point: A figure needs to be established approximating the hourly rate of volunteering within B&H.

Participants were asked to estimate the number of hours they had undertaken volunteering within the last year. Some have been volunteering for over thirty years regularly, while others have only recently started. Many of the hours indicated were not as a result of the VC but through the initiative of the individual concerned. For example, some had secured a volunteering opportunity by means of Social Services.

James (interview 1) average of 2 hours per week for past year

Leslie (Interview 2) 2 hours a week for past six months

Reg (Interview 3) 1 hour per week for four months

Pat (Interview 4) 5 hours per week for last year

Julie (Interview 5) 5 hours per week for past year

Steven (Interview 6) 7 hours per week for past year

Jane (interview 7) 4 hours per week for past year

John (Interview 8) 4 hours per week for five months

Brain (interview 9) 0 hours for past year

John (Interview 10) 6 hours per week for past year

TOTAL AMOUNT OF HOURS UNDERTAKEN; 36 HOURS PER WEEK ON AVERAGE

Recommendations

For clarity, this report has classified the sampling population into groups. Although this grouping does not fully reflect the diversity of those accessing the VC, the groups do go some way towards highlighting the multiple needs of people, particularly individuals that could be described as 'vulnerable'. This report raises and highlights the overall success of the VC. All within the study saw the Centre as an important but under resourced community organisation.

On a measure of access to social resources⁷, the mean score of individuals who volunteer is significantly below that of the general population. The importance for connection to the wider environment is therefore of particular significance⁸.

Multiple Needs

The grouping goes some way towards highlighting the multiple needs of those accessing the centre. On the limited evidence available it would appear that the VC was less able to meet the individual needs of the retired group when compared with the other two groups. It was suggested that a possible reason for this, based upon comments from those within this group, might be that they had less idea about what the possibilities of volunteering are. It could be that these people require more support and indeed be more labour-intensive for the VC staff to assist. It was suggested by Brian that he would have appreciated having the opportunity for someone to have sat with him and discussed placements. Jane noted that she only briefly attended the VC because of how busy it was and how little staff were available to help her. In contrast, the two other groups felt that their support needs had been met. Both groups cited the importance and flexibility of the Centre – particularly the use of a free phone service, opportunities being made available on the internet, and the exchange of information over the phone.

Overall:

The needs of people accessing the centre are multiple.

- The VC should aim to identify the particular needs of individuals at an earlier stage in the application process – for example, individuals need to be met at the door and their particular needs discussed.
- The Internet and use of the telephone need to be emphasised as this, it would appear, meets with the need of younger volunteers.

Visibility

⁷ Webber, M. & Huxley, P. (2006) Measuring access to social capital: the validity and reliability of the Resource Generator – UK and its associations with common mental disorders in the UK general population.

⁸ Interim report available at [\[http://www.capitalvolunteering.co.uk/db/files/iop_interim_research_report_final_399.pdf\]](http://www.capitalvolunteering.co.uk/db/files/iop_interim_research_report_final_399.pdf)

The visibility of the centre was brought into question by a number of the participants.

I always struggle to find the centre – I can never remember where the door is and when I tried to check in the yellow pages it wasn't there (Jane, Interview 7).

I mean I would hope what you're doing will result in a higher profile [for the VC]. I think there's obviously no money for advertising... I tried to find their number. I was trying to find their number when they'd moved – it wasn't in the phone book (Interview 2).

They need to be more visible in the community (Interview 6).

Overall:

The VC needs to become increasingly visible within the community. Contact details need to be made explicit. As Jane noted, *'they should have a notice board outside their door or something – I'm sure they lose a lot of potential volunteers because no one knows where they are (Interview 7).*

Reg suggests;

Yes, I mean they brought me bits of paper and pens and things like that and I was told I can chat about things and I was... They were good but they were also, you know, they were good at what they did but I think I would have just have liked a little bit more getting used to being there before trying to make any sort of decisions (Interview 3).

Steven suggests;

Yes, basically a lot of, at the time from what I remember, a lot of it didn't seem up to date and I remember one of the people here saying it's a real

problem because people never get back to them to tell them that a position has been filled, they no longer require a volunteer and stuff like that. Sounded like there was a communication gap there (Interview 6).

Accurate information:

A more dynamic and reactive system of communication needs to be established between the VC and the placement organisations. The onus needs to be placed on placement organisations to update the VC when contact details, opportunities, or the skills required for a particular voluntary task, change. It is vital that information made available at the VC is accurate and up to date since a principle factor in voluntary failure, and feelings of 'frustration' and 'disappointment', stem from participants being given out of date information. All information housed by the VC *has to be accurate.*

Main Conclusions

This project has shown the multiple ways through which individuals come to conceptualise volunteering as an important mechanism and by means of which they are able to access social services and integrate themselves within the local community. All participants placed particular emphasis on the importance that volunteering has had, regardless of the volunteering placement undertaken. This often took the form of a positive impact upon them and their health. This point was particularly important to Brian (Interview 9) who had been unable to secure any voluntary work and who remarked on the distress caused as a consequence.

In all:

- Volunteering allows individuals to stay connected within their community by offering an opportunity to engage with others
- Participants emphasised the development of feelings of 'worth' and 'well-being', themselves conducive to good mental health, where they had been able to undertake voluntary placements of interest.
- Voluntary work offers access to employment through experience

- Voluntary work offers 'social skills' to those who have been disconnected from society due to mental or physical ill health

The work of the VC was applauded by all participants. Although many cited shortcomings in the Centre's work, for example insufficient time being offered during the initial consultation to match the skills of the individual to that required by the placement, such shortcomings were excused due to the lack of funding and resources that was obviously an issue for the VC. The only exception to this consensus concerned the amount of out-of-date information being passed to participants. Here individuals placed greater emphasis on the need for the VC to ensure that all information it provides is accurate.

Volunteering has a huge impact and makes a significant contribution to the local economy in hours worked. This study found that a total number of hours per week being undertaken by our participants summed to 36 hours.

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