Safer, Healthier Communities – involving older volunteers

VCF network meeting notes

13 October 2016

The session began with an opportunity for volunteer coordinators to network with each other before having a discussion about the role and responsibility that volunteer coordinators vis a vie areas of social agenda.

Agenda topics were identified:

Social agenda themes include - but is not exclusive to:

1. Social action
2. Inclusion
3. Employability
4. Social cohesion
5. Healthier, safer communities
6. Health and Wellbeing
7. Increased democracy and participation
8. Welfare

Where do these agendas come from?

1. National government
2. Local government

NB: IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT VOLUNTEERING WAS ALSO ADDRESSING SOME OF THESE ISSUES PRIOR TO THE INFLUENCES OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

And the following questions were given to as possible areas for discussion:

1. What part of social agenda influences your volunteer programme?
2. How does government (local and national) see volunteering in meeting these agendas?
3. How does this align with your volunteering aims/service/activity/delivery? -Does it make a difference if the volunteering is formal or informal?
4. What is the relevance for you as a coordinator and what do you need to be aware of to fulfil your role?

Areas that volunteering programmes consideration social agenda:

Employability

Cuts to welfare

Social inclusion

Health and wellbeing

Some impacts:

It can feel like volunteers are being asked to fill in gaps in services – internal requests for volunteers to take on equivalent role of a paid staff member. Requiring volunteering to be more formal. Who looks after volunteers when/it they start to replace statutory services – what is the sustainability?

A rise in informal volunteering such as campaigning against cuts

There can be some difficulty in increasing volunteering numbers and potentially impinging on paid staff.

Desire to focus some activities on more deprived areas

Service users becoming volunteers and developing services to fill a gap

Government focus of volunteers does not take into account amount of work involved

Involving volunteers on agendas can create more work, so small organisations can't always take on additional demands.

It is not always easy volunteering whilst on benefits

Focusing on safer, healthier communities, but specifically focusing on the impact of involving older volunteers (50+yrs). Some of these benefits were introduced through a presentation from Alan Marchbank (Lifelines). Alan identified the health benefits to older people by including them in the volunteering programme, (see attached presentation). The presentation led to a discussion about some of the benefits and challenges faced by both older people in their ability/availability to volunteer.

- Older volunteers can come with much useful life experience and work experience expertise which they bring with them. However,
    - We are all now retiring at a later age so not becoming available to volunteer until later in life
    - Due to limited finances, retirees having to re-enter the job market.

- This only identifies older people who fall into the stereotype of who is an older volunteer and does not take into consideration older people who may fall into 'hard to reach', 'excluded' or 'marginalised' groups
- Volunteering can offer structure to an older person, particularly if they are post retirement where they have been used to being playing a 'useful role'
- Older volunteers are very loyal and have good retention rates
- We also touched on the benefits of intergenerational contact. This is very important in the light of the negative images of young people and the impact of Brexit where older people have been vilified as selfish in their voting pattern.

Other challenges include

- Many older people have family responsibilities which prevent them from volunteering. This may include one or a combination of the following:
  - Taking on more responsibilities as through the grand-parenting role
  - Caring for ageing relatives (e.g. parents)
  - Caring for a significant other
- Levels of vulnerability
  - Organisation policies and procedures particularly around safeguarding and DBS

This fed into the post presentation discussions. We looked at areas of volunteer management with which we are all familiar but conversations were directed particularly addressing older volunteers.

Recruitment

Feedback looked at what would be the best places to target recruitment and suggestion for being more inclusive.

Recruitment portals include:

- Talking to and recruiting existing service users
- Targeting places such as charity shops either with a poster or in person
- Outreach - stands in
  - **Garden Centres**
  - Supermarkets
  - Libraries
- Websites
- Bookmarks
- Leaflets
- Events and festivals
- Social media – Twitter, Facebook, Streetlife
- Community Works – Do-it

- Reach https://reachskills.org.uk/ for more skilled volunteering (trustees, finance, business skills)
- Networking with other local organisations
- How do we reach people who don't want to or have not considered volunteering
- In addition to considering all these different portals, it is imperative to think about what language/words are being used for target audiences.
- Word of mouth
- Have safe spaces

Role/Task development

This group talked about the need to take a role and be able to break this down into tasks. This can have the benefit of people feeling able to apply themselves to one specific aspect of a role rather than feeling that they need to take the whole role on. It also means there is more space for more volunteers and if people can focus on their area of choice, the skill level for each area will be increased. If we can identify tasks, we can link this to or create a volunteering role.

- Listen and learn from older volunteers themselves and create opportunities based on feedback
    - What will people enjoy doing
    - What will they like to do
        - Older volunteers have identified both volunteering with their peers and intergenerational volunteering.
        - Volunteering that utilises their skill set
- Offer structured opportunities that offer routine for those that need it.
- Offer training
- Ensure that volunteers can move to new roles with your organisation as skills as experience develop.
- David shared that within the scout movement, people went from being scouts, to leaders and then could move into more senior roles within the organisation as it suited so there were always to be involved at all levels and ages.
- Offer tasters and short-term volunteering
    - Shadowing, mentoring, buddying to build confidence and help people realise their own skills with someone of a similar age.
- Increased flexibility
- Phone befriending by people who are house-bound.

Support

It is useful for volunteers to have a main point of contact within the group. It is important to develop a good rapport (personal touch)

Listen to what volunteers have to say and get them involved. They have a lot of skills and experience. Involve in committees

Acknowledge their input

Plan social opportunities so volunteers can meet one another and engage together

Expenses – limited finances can be a hindrance to volunteering on a fixed income.

Offer training and networking opportunities

Consider types of communication other than electronic

Be flexible around volunteering – as identified above, there may be other demands on volunteers time

Take time to understand the motivations as to why older people volunteer, so that you can offer support according to need

Be aware of potential health issues

Volunteer buddying.

Monitoring

Have an effective review process both formal and informal.

Exit interviews

Q: Do you ask for volunteer's age on an application form? If so why and what do you do with the information?

Q: How do you 'retire' volunteers?