

Small Groups Network Summer Conference- The Power of Volunteering:

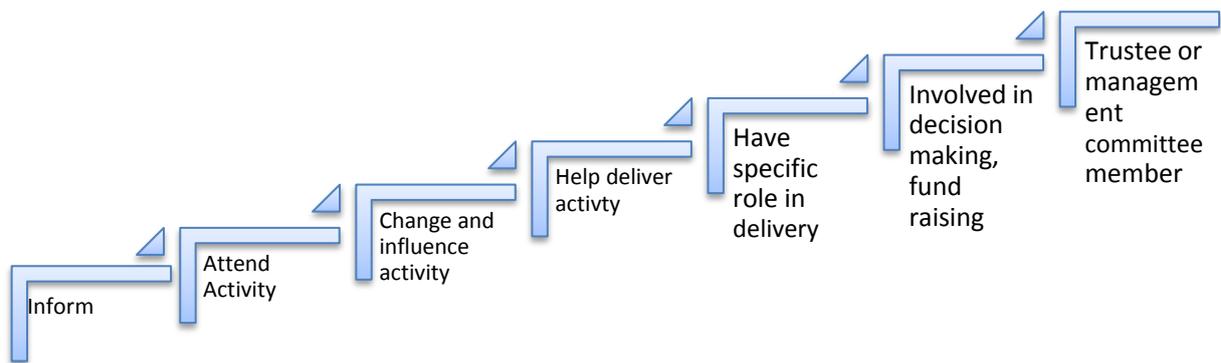
The group introduced themselves and then said a sentence about what volunteering means to them:

- **We need volunteers in order to deliver activity as well as volunteers to run our group.**
- **Volunteers and volunteering helps reduce isolation, it can give people, who in our society are more marginalised, a sense of being part of a community.**
- **My own experience is that group members are enthusiastic about volunteering**
- **We are totally volunteer led and run, we rely on our committed volunteers.**
- **I have volunteered since I retired, I am proud of our volunteers and of volunteering, and I have met lovely people, volunteering is full of lovely people.**
- **Feeling of empowerment that you can achieve something real and positive.**
- **I do not consider I am a volunteer, I just do things.**
- **Volunteering is not just about empowerment, there is also responsibly.**
- **Volunteering is good for education, skills development and personal development.**

The group split into two and looked at the different forms of volunteering in their group/organisation and how to enable more volunteering and how to mark people changing from one role to another, taking on new roles and more responsibility, using the participation ladder as a guide/example of a volunteer's journey.

- Volunteering can give people a sense of community – help deal with fragmentation that people can feel also some Volunteers can join groups because they feel isolated.
- The friendliness of a group draws an individual in to be more involved.
- New knowledge and passion about the group drives them forward – the group can share ideas.
- Some people will join because they know someone in the group, this is especially true of older people's groups.
- When a new person joins: "we find out about their skills – they might be good at organising events".
- You can change your strategy to recruit more group members – e.g. instead of a central city location, organise events in local residential areas. This can reach new participants.
- The times of day that you meet may attract different ages of participant.
- There are different levels and types of volunteer:

- Note-taker and meeting organiser
- Someone who loves filling in forms
- Committee members
- Activity supporters
- Some groups meet less regularly – it can be harder to get people to take on responsibilities in these cases.
- One committee meets weekly and it has become a social event, they have meals together sometimes. Another committee meets only every 2-3 months.
- People may only get involved after a period of time after benefitting from being in the group.
- If a volunteer leaves, you can meet with them for a debrief/exit interview. This gives you information to improve things.
- Groups that rely heavily on *retired* volunteers expressed concern that as those people age, they perhaps become less capable.
- The commitment to turning up can be variable between different volunteers.
- Volunteers need training as well as support– this is so valuable.



We need to record what we are doing, we do not want to take away from the friendly, creative activity- we meet regularly and people want to talk , some are very isolated, for others this is their “me” time- BUT we must record what we are doing and what good people think they get from attending/volunteering.

People are naturally drawn to do tasks that suit their skills and experience- allow them to do this, but balance with encouragement to try new things, learn new things too, this helps motivation.

Members naturally progress up the stair case/ participation ladder above.

There are different ways of recording a volunteers or attendees development:-

Attendees: Simple well-being questionnaires, bench marking, reviewing and exit interviews are all good to implement. There's a balance between asking attendees what they want to get out of a group (i.e. useful info) vs asking them too much (i.e. too onerous). When a person first arrives at a group they might not be able to think clearly about their objectives but bench marking with people when they first attend is a good idea, even one or two questions about what they want to get from attending WRITE IT down. It's helpful to capture what is happening along the way and it enables people to own and decides their development journey, what they want and may get from attending an activity/group.

Volunteers:- For volunteers it is a good idea to do a non-competitive interview so that the group or organisation and the volunteer can be clear about expectations.

Roles have different levels of responsibility, responsibility can be off putting for instance, some roles hold a group together and the group can fold if they go- this needs to be balanced with people not feeling they are indispensable. How do you keep a group going? Share the responsibilities. KEY POINT: when volunteers do step up to extra responsibilities, we need to avoid swamping them and mark the occasion with them.

Regular reviews are a good idea – again even if just a quick chat- BUT record what is said and share with that volunteer- self assessment is always best.

Formalisation can help facilitate peoples volunteering progression within your group/organisation.

Generally: Evaluation process- are good for fundraising, bidding, recording social value, even if just a box people tick with a few questions, remember- reflecting allows people to feel involved.

Be positive about ANY feedback, ask specifics and be prepared to change your plans, trial different ways of working, record this so the group learns as it develops.

Some people are “drains”- they drain time and are demanding, or sometimes just apathetic, others are radiators, they keep the activity, group going, lots of groups rely on a few radiators to run everything and keep it going.

Here is a useful toolkit for managing volunteers that includes templates:[http://www.vodg.org.uk/uploads/pdfs/2016%20VODG%20NCF%20Volunteer%20Management%20Toolkit%20\(Second%20Edition\).pdf](http://www.vodg.org.uk/uploads/pdfs/2016%20VODG%20NCF%20Volunteer%20Management%20Toolkit%20(Second%20Edition).pdf)

Twelve Top Tips to support the power of volunteering:

- 1) Involve as many people in the group's decisions and in the process of the group.
- 2) Start the relationship with volunteers with the focus on their need NOT the groups need,
- 3) Avoid swamping individuals with too much to do- this needs constant eye as some times of the year are busier than others.
Rotate any actions- so not reliant on one person, chat over tasks and offer support if people unsure or not able to do, life is busy, sometimes people just cannot manage to complete a task-
E.g. One group rotates a role that people had not wanted sole responsibility for – their Secretary role is rotated between three people. Their AGM records that the Secretary rotates.
- 4) If you have enough volunteers, you can organise either a working group or a sub-group, for example to organise events also having working groups can work well as a way for people to experience taking on a new role/task without feeling that it is a long term commitment.
- 5) Having a Buddying or shadowing in place can really help people be confident enough to try a new role but also acknowledge the skills and contribution of the exiting person. Forward planning – if you know that a treasurer, say, is leaving next year – you could get a person to 'shadow' them to learn the role.
- 6) Give permission for people to do things and give permission for new people to do things in a new way.
- 7) Communicate in a way that suits the attendees and your volunteers- avoid systems where you must sign up to it i.e. Facebook, these can be "useful extra communication tools" BUT should not be the main one- also be aware that they do not allow for anonymity and so may discourage some people.
- 8) Some people are "drains"- they drain time and are demanding , or sometimes just apathetic, others are radiators, they keep the activity, group going, lots of groups rely on a few radiators to run everything and keep it going.
- 9) Participants/volunteers have personal circumstance; we cannot always control or foresee what will happen so it's good to have a plan B – if a volunteer post-holder is unwell, who will step in. This plan can be particularly useful if a post-holder knows they have health issues.
- 10) Most groups are made up of people who have something in common, or they share an experience or issue- coming together helps others, doing small events, building things gradually, going at peoples pace , helps development and ownership
- 11) Sometimes there can be a clash of personalities- try using a third person to change this dynamic. If you get difficult behaviour from a member who is sabotaging the group and causing others to leave. You could draw up a code of practice about group expectations and values, written in a positive way.
- 12) Keep fun- not too formal as to be off putting.

Information from Jonathan Best to SGN on 14th June 2016

The grant programme is moving over to Commissioning- and will be called the communities fund.

So Discretionary Grants are ending and we are not sure how much money will be available.

All groups MUST deliver on one of the routes-

- Improve Well-being
- Building Cohesion
- Promoting Fairness

Need and want it be accessible funding and we know language can be a barrier to small groups who offer unique and lived in experience so we want to produce our information and guidance in simple English.

BHCC is going paperless (not paper-lite) But paperless so all applications MUST be submitted on an on line form (some people in group are not happy about this, Jonathan said he was working with other support providers including the resource centre to look at support package)

The broad overarching outcomes will be (works out 10% of income)

- Engagement Model/fund- income up to £20K and can apply for up to £2K.
- Resilience Model/fund – income up to £100K and limit up to 10K
- Collaboration Model/fund- Any size- not info re limit to apply for.

All will be framed by the Fairness Commission recommendations.

Jonathan reassured the groups that activities will be funded and that the guidance notes will be clear and the monitoring and evaluation reasonable.

Information sessions will happen this summer and Donna is able to inform groups through outreach.

There is still more work to be done on definitions and making sure that the three overarching Outcomes/routes are relevant to small groups.