

Evaluation of the Modernising Volunteering National Support Services Programme

Overcoming barriers to volunteering

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Contents

Introduction	2
Year One research	4
Policy Action Community Teams	8
Mental health PACT	21
Refugee and asylum seekers PACT	23
Learning disabilities PACT	25
Governance PACT	27
Views of PACT members	29
Conclusions	35
Appendix	41

Introduction

The Network of National Volunteer-Involving Agencies (NNVIA), in partnership with Volunteering England, is leading work on the overcoming barriers to volunteering (OBV) strand of the Modernising Volunteering National Support Services (MVNSS) programme. This work is primarily concerned with targeting, recruiting and supporting socially excluded groups in volunteering.

NNVIA was established in 2003 to ensure that the views of national volunteer-involving agencies were formulated and heard in government policy consultations and development. NNVIA has 55 members including Barnardo's, British Red Cross, Citizens Advice Bureau, Mind, WRVS, The National Trust, The Princes Trust, RNIB, RNID, and The Samaritans. NNVIA aims to promote the work of the volunteering sector to the public, private and voluntary and community sectors through partnership working. Between them, the NNVIA members mobilise over 1 million volunteers per annum¹.

Community Service Volunteers (CSV) provides the secretariat for NNVIA and was also responsible for the provision of support to the work undertaken within the strand.

NNVIA's primary goal in being involved in the OBV strand is to develop its work around equalities, to develop and lead work on inclusion and look at its links to local infrastructure.

Three interrelated aims are driving NNVIA's leadership of the OBV strand:

- To make volunteering more accessible to marginalised / socially excluded groups through the development of best practice policies and strategies
- To improve the performance of volunteer-involving agencies in involving volunteers from socially excluded groups
- To make and present a strong case to the wider sector for doing more to make volunteering accessible to all.

The intended outcome was to facilitate an exchange of knowledge, experience and expertise that raises awareness of the benefits for organisations of changing their volunteering profiles, thus making equality a reality in the sector.

The purpose of this report is to set out the results of an in-depth evaluation undertaken on the OBV strand of the MVNSS programme and covers the period from April 2008 to August 2010.

The evaluation includes the Year One research on OBV undertaken by CSV and Amber Consulting, which was conducted to gather evidence of good practice on including volunteers from socially excluded groups, survey the practice of NNVIA members in developing and implementing volunteer policies and practices that are targeted at different socially excluded groups and inform recommendations for Year Two and beyond. It also includes all activity associated with Year Two, including the establishment and running of five Policy Action Community Teams (PACTs) which were established to develop policy and practice on removing the barriers to volunteering for different under-represented groups.

¹ *Overcoming Barriers to Volunteering, A Modernising Volunteering Workstream Report*, NNVIA

The evaluation is based on three research methods:

- Desk research in relation to the Year One research
- Face-to-face interviews with all the key individuals involved in the management and running of the workstream and all PACT leads
- Telephone interviews with ten PACT members.

In addition, face-to-face and telephone discussions have been held with the MVNSS Implementation Manager on a regular basis throughout the evaluation programme.

All fieldwork in connection with the evaluation was undertaken over the period 9 August – 17 September 2010.

Year One research

Introduction

The Network of National Volunteer-Involving Agencies (NNVIA) commissioned the Year One research in line with the outcomes agreed in the Modernising Volunteering Business Plan, which included NNVIA members working with support from CSV to:

- Establish a project steering group consisting of 12 NNVIA members which outlined the aims, objectives, outcomes and project/grant management standards
- Conduct a survey through national partners: looking at track records of national organisations in five areas covering:
 - Use of local capacity building provision
 - Engaging with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups
 - Engaging with refugee and asylum seeker's groups
 - Those working with disabled people
 - Engaging with ex-offenders and other socially excluded groups.

Year One research report

The Year One report was produced for volunteer-involving agencies and third sector organisations in England, including volunteer development agencies that want or need to provide opportunities for everyone in society to contribute to their communities through volunteering.

It was felt that these organisations may also, at some future date, have a duty under the Equality Bill to consider the needs of diverse groups in the community when designing and delivering public services. It was also intended that the report would provide third sector organisations with good practical ideas that, if put into practice and developed in the next stage of this work, would help organisations both increase the diversity of volunteers and ensure they are ready to fulfil that duty.

The report laid considerable emphasis on the role of NNVIA members in effecting a fundamental change in volunteering from socially excluded groups:

“Between them, NNVIA members mobilise over 1 million volunteers each year. Their role is critical; an improvement of only 1% in the numbers of volunteers from socially excluded groups being recruited into those organisations alone would mean an impact on 10,000 individuals if plans for Years Two and Three of this programme are successful.”

The Year One research report *Overcoming Barriers to Volunteering* is structured under the following main sections:

- **Background to the overcoming barriers to volunteering strand:** which explains the rationale behind NNVIA's approach to delivering the required outcomes for this strand of work

- **Process and methodology:** which maps out intended outcomes for the three years work included within the agreed Modernising Volunteering Business Plan and also outlines the terms of reference and research methods to be used in surveying NNVA members
- **Key findings from the research** undertaken with NNVA members
- **Case studies and examples of good practice** in overcoming barriers to volunteering with groups that are often excluded
- **Conclusions:** which included the main findings from the survey of NNVA members and also a summary of the actions needed to take the work of the overcoming barriers to volunteering strand forward
- **Recommendations** for future action.

Appendix One to the report contained the full report on the findings of the survey undertaken with NNVA members, which was produced by Amber Analysis Consultancy².

Year One research findings

Responses to the survey of NNVA members were received from 22 national members³. The survey for local projects / branches was sent to 19 national members (three of the 22 did not have local projects) for onward transmission to their regional offices or local projects in the North West, East and South West of England regions. Responses were received from 42 local projects/branches of 14 of the national organisations. This was considered by Amber Analysis Consultancy to be a disappointing response.

Because of the low response rate, a second questionnaire was subsequently sent to local projects / branches in three additional regions in England: North East, West Midlands and South East. The questionnaire was a reduced version of the original, containing some key questions only, in order to maximise the response. Eighteen local projects completed the new questionnaire, which, when combined with respondents from the first questionnaire, gave a total sample of 60.

Despite the fact that the results are based upon a low sample size, some important findings did emerge.

Overall, the survey findings suggest that only a very limited number of NNVA members and their local branches and projects are articulating, prioritising, developing and implementing volunteer policies, plans and practices that are specifically targeted to the socially excluded groups of:

- Volunteers from BME groups
- Volunteers who are refugee or asylum seekers
- Volunteers with a disability
- Volunteers who are ex-offenders
- Volunteers from other socially excluded groups.

² *Overcoming Barriers to Volunteering for Socially Excluded Groups, Surveying the National Network of Volunteer Involving Agencies*, Amber Analysis, April 2009.

³ At the time the research was undertaken NNVA had 37 members.

The results indicated that NNVA members did not, as yet, seem to have policies and strategies that specifically identify socially excluded groups, and as a result neither do they have associated targets that can be monitored to assess performance. However, the results were based on a low sample size.

In many cases it was felt that there was no sense of an intention to diversify the volunteer base by involving volunteers from socially excluded groups; nevertheless, in spite of the lack of targeted policies and strategies, some organisations are managing to involve volunteers from some of the groups.

The survey results also indicated that local NNVA organisations seem to have few problems in accessing technical assistance services offered by local capacity building organisations to help them implement their volunteer policies and they tend to use more services than expected. There was no evidence of discrimination from the infrastructure bodies against local projects of national organisations; and respondents seem very happy with the quality of support they receive.

“It is clear that many local projects of national organisations (NNVA members) use infrastructure bodies for a wider range of services than previously assumed. In other words, they not only seek support in finding volunteers but they also benefit from other training and advisory services.”

However, the report also pointed out a number of shortcomings of local infrastructure bodies in relation to engaging and supporting volunteers from socially excluded groups and that many of these organisations could take a lead by developing a more strategic approach in this area. It was also pointed out that the lack of resources in local infrastructure bodies was striking; which raised questions about the sustainability of such services.

The results of the research confirmed NNVA members’ own experience that there is work to be done to develop policies and strategies that specifically target socially excluded groups and to establish systems for monitoring outcomes and measuring the impact of implementing such strategies. The report concluded that:

“It seems clear that in order to reach socially excluded groups, volunteer involvers need to ‘fly higher’; they need to think and act thoughtfully and imaginatively, rather than rely on old established mechanisms. They need to think about who their target groups are and what their circumstances are likely to be; what kinds of volunteering opportunities might attract them, and how they might actually be drawn in.

“This study revealed little evidence that respondents had yet thought in a proactive way about how they might sensibly ‘target and market’ in order to rise to the challenge of involving volunteers from socially excluded groups.”

Based on the findings of the research, Amber Analysis Consultancy made a number of recommendations to NNVA, which are summarised below. These included a need to:

- Recognise and act on the importance of leadership at all levels, and report progress and statistics to governing bodies
- Ensure specific objectives, plans and targets are in place to facilitate the involvement of socially excluded volunteers
- Ensure that policies are statements of belief and intent, and are not confused with procedures

- Provide 'role models' by welcoming trustees from socially excluded groups
- Apply members' existing marketing resources to the task of involving volunteers from excluded groups
- Review and upgrade systems for identifying and developing volunteering opportunities
- NNVIA members should report information on volunteering to their governing bodies and they could work together to develop methods for monitoring and evaluating volunteering of socially excluded groups
- Establish a NNVIA 'ideas and experience exchange' to support this work
- Set up a NNVIA Working Group to develop a 'Self Assessment Tool' from the resources emerging from the survey findings and from elsewhere.

The research was completed in April 2009 and the findings accepted by NNVIA members at their meeting on 12 May 2009.

These recommendations were taken into account by NNVIA members in designing the next stages of the work on overcoming barriers to volunteering. The aim is to influence good practice within the NNVIA member organisations working with infrastructure agencies. In particular it is intended that new models of cooperation between infrastructure agencies and national volunteer involving agencies would be developed at all levels e.g. local, regional and national. Policy Action Community Teams (PACTS) were to be the new models of cooperation, which would bring together all interested stakeholders to identify ways of working together in order to attract individuals from socially excluded groups to volunteer.

Conclusions on the Year One report

Overall, the Year One report was well written, easy to read and contained particularly good case studies in overcoming barriers to volunteering with groups that are often excluded. The report also clearly outlined the way forward in Year Two through the establishment of PACTS. The report indicated that the work of the PACTS will include:

“Bringing together all interested stakeholders to identify ways of working together to focus on attracting individuals from the target groups to volunteer. They will source existing materials, approaches and guidance and bringing them to bear on the activity of helping agencies to improve their capacity to provide for a diverse range of volunteering groups and placements in precise ways.”

Policy Action Community Teams (PACTs)

Purpose

The concept of PACTS was developed through the Year One research, which set out a clear template for their establishment in Year Two. This included each PACT addressing the following objectives:

- Confirm why certain groups are under-represented in volunteering
- Identify what needs to be done to engage people from under-represented groups in volunteering and draw up an Engagement Plan
- Implement the Engagement Plan that includes carrying out 'Model Action' activities
- Measure the effectiveness of the Engagement Plan and the 'Model Action' activities (PACTS were required to agree how they will monitor and evaluate the process)
- Prepare an 'Effective Action Report' (it was also always the intention to produce resources for others who may be seeking to extend their reach and increase the diversity of volunteers)
- Disseminate the learning from the PACTs regionally and nationally (regional seminars and a national one-day conference were part of the planned dissemination work).

The NNVA definition of a PACT is 'a group of people who share common knowledge or vision that come together to influence policy and practice development'. The NNVA PACTs brought together expertise from national and local organisations to focus on developing policy and practice for promoting equality and removing the barriers to volunteering for under-represented groups.

The aim of the PACTs in Year Two was to take forward a programme of policy and practice development which resulted in more people from under-represented groups participating in volunteering. While eight PACTs were planned, this proved to be over ambitious and by October 2010 there were five PACTs. Each PACT was set up and led by a NNVA member; there were four regional PACTs and one national PACT which focused on governance and leadership:

- Learning disabilities – led by Mencap and Midland Mencap
- Refugee and asylum seekers – led by CSV Volunteer Centre Newcastle;
- Mental health services – led by the Samaritans;
- Physical and sensory impairment – led by Vitalise in 09/10 and jointly by Jewish Care and Guild Dogs for the Blind in 10/11
- Governance – led by Family Action.

Within the context of the overall funding provided by Volunteering England to the overcoming barriers to volunteering strand, CSV was responsible for determining the allocation of resources in line with agreed objectives and outcomes⁴.

⁴ CSV received about £81,000 in year 1, £74,000 in year 2 and are likely to receive about £76,000 in Year 3 in order to deliver the Overcoming Barriers to Volunteering programme (a total of about £231,000 over the three-year programme).

Each PACT received £4,250 in Year Two. When the PACTs reduced from eight in number, it was Volunteering England's understanding was that the underspend would also be reallocated to the remaining PACTS, but this did not appear to happen.

Although the concept of the PACTs was clear, there was a considerable amount of work undertaken by CSV defining each PACT, what they would look like, leadership, organising membership and what their aims and objectives should be. This resulted in a standardised approach to each area of PACT activity being developed in terms of:

- Identifying and appointing a PACT lead
- Supporting the PACT lead in recruiting a PACT membership
- Timetabling six meetings in which PACT work would be undertaken
- Determining what each PACT would actually do. This resulted in a requirement for each PACT to complete the production of a Model Engagement Plan. This contained key objectives for Year Two work and detailed what each PACT was aiming to achieve.

PACT lead and PACT team

PACT leadership was recognised as a critical issue at the outset and there was also a concern to ensure that each PACT was led by a NNVA member, but with different English regions being involved in providing the lead.

PACT leads were responsible for delivering Model Engagement Plans. Plans formed the basis of what Volunteering England were expecting in terms of delivery and all monitoring activity. The project management role was to communicate this to PACT leads.

“We [CSV] were now very clear about what Volunteering England and Capacitybuilders wanted from us and it was about making sure that PACT leads and their members were equally clear about that in terms of what they delivered.”

The appointment of PACT leads and the establishment of PACT teams proved to be a challenging process and took place from May 2009 until all PACTS had undertaken their first meeting. The main difficulties in securing PACT leadership appeared to revolve around the time and commitment that would be required to manage a PACT effectively.

Most of the PACTS had their first meeting in September and some in October 2009. The latest one to start was the governance PACT, which did not come into operation until November 2009. However, with the exception of the physical and sensory impairment PACT⁵, all PACTS subsequently caught up with their meeting schedules and plans of action.

“The tricky part was setting up the PACTS. It was all very very tight, it was this time last year (August 2009), so lots of people were on holiday. It was all kind of getting the PACTS together and getting to the point where they had their first meeting. I think what worked really well when they started to meet, the uniqueness about them was that it wasn't just people from volunteer centres or national organisations it was a whole mixture of people.”

⁵ The Physical and Sensory Impairment PACT had difficulty in attracting PACT members and only held several poorly attended meetings.

Membership of the PACTs reflects the intention to engage a mix of volunteering involving organisations, infrastructure agencies, volunteers and others.

“The whole idea of the PACT was to get a hold range of knowledge and experience in the room and work out how best to better involve people from those (disadvantaged) groups. I think what the PACT leads did really well was to get together a really interesting group of people that were able to do that.”

With the exception of the physical disabilities PACT, the four remaining PACTS all had a membership at least eight members with an average PACT membership of about ten members.

The following three pages include a number of case studies relating to the establishment of the following PACTS:

- Refugee and asylum seeker PACT
- Mental health PACT
- Physical disabilities PACT.

The case studies serve to illustrate the experience of PACT leads in relation to their understanding of the PACT lead role and their experience in assembling the membership of their respective PACTs.

Case study: The refugee and asylum Seekers PACT

The Manager of CSV Volunteering and Community Services (Kath Patton) in Newcastle got involved in the work of the PACTs because CSV HQ in London was undertaking the administration for the PACT strand and knew that CSV in Newcastle had previously run a very successful project between 2005 and 2008 called Community Connexions. This project was specifically aimed at reducing the barriers to volunteering for refugees and asylum seekers. Because of this project, CSV had established very good networks in the north east and had contacts in all the relevant local support services. Also CSV is a NNVA member and local infrastructure organisation (because CSV runs the Volunteer Centre in Newcastle).

Kath was happy to take on the leadership role associated with the work of the PACTs. Kath felt the role and what was expected of her in leading the PACT was set out 'pretty well'.

"Like all these things it ended up being more work...they said all you have got to do is attend six meetings and contribute to a final report and hold a Model Action Day. I thought that sounds easy enough, but obviously there was quite a lot of work involved in what we decided to do as a PACT, so it did take up quite a lot more time (than originally anticipated)."

However, Kath acknowledged that this was very much her choice and that a good team of people contributed to the work.

Essentially CSV are committed to the nature of the work; it is a subject that they feel quite strongly about and have a lot of relevant experience in this area of activity, including working on GoldStar. The work associated with the PACT was therefore not daunting to the organisation.

The PACT team consisted of people that CSV already knew. About a dozen people / organisations responded favourably and most became regular members of the team. The Volunteer Centre, VODA (the manager of the three year refugee and asylum seeker project), Red Cross, Oxfam and local refugee support services (e.g. the Comfrey project, which provides environmental volunteering for refugees and asylum seekers). In addition, a number of volunteers participated who were refugees and asylum seekers. It was considered to be a good mix of members.

The first meeting of the refugee and asylum seeker PACT took place in September 2009.

Case study: The mental health PACT

The Volunteer Support Manager (Ruth Buchanan) has represented Samaritans in NNVA for several years and the PACT work came up at the perfect time. Ruth, from a personal development perspective, wanted to gain more experience in partnership working. Ruth was also interested in the mental health aspect, so when the opportunity of leading the PACT came along, Ruth volunteered in spring 2009.

Members of the PACT were recruited by Ruth based on previous contacts / knowledge. Ruth was concerned to ensure wider membership and not just volunteer managers, but also statutory sector and practitioners involved in mental health programmes in London. Ruth was aware at the outset that recruitment of PACT membership was the responsibility of the PACT leads, but not the associated administration (CSV provided support in following up emails, providing background information, etc). Ruth feels that it was important for her to speak to potential PACT members directly.

Overall responsibilities assigned to PACT leads were felt to be clear, but Ruth felt that she carried out more administrative tasks than she would have wanted to.

A core group of six PACT members came to all six meetings, but the PACT had a wider membership of interested parties (four or five) that participated and commented, but did not attend all meetings. Other volunteer managers (e.g. MIND) attended plus other consultants who were specialists in mental health also formed the membership (mainly third sector), but unfortunately the statutory sector was not involved in the work of the PACT as Ruth would have liked.

Ruth felt that the role of PACT members was not as clear as it could have been and more particularly what was expected of them in terms of involvement. In reality, much more work was taken on by the PACT lead rather than being shared around.

Most PACT members came along for a few hours to each meeting, gave their expert knowledge, attended the Model Action Day and so forth, but did not contribute any further.

Case study: physical disabilities PACT

The Volunteering Development Manager at Vitalise (Dave Clough) became involved in PACT in about April 2009 through the NNVA group of which Vitalise is a member.

Physical disabilities were one of the areas that NNVA had decided to look and were looking for someone to coordinate a PACT in the East Midlands.⁶ Dave volunteered to take on the PACT lead role and felt that there was sufficient clarity about the role of a PACT lead and what was expected of him in carrying out that role. It was understood that a key role of a PACT leader was to assemble the membership of a PACT within the region specified, but Dave had not appreciated how difficult and time-consuming a task this would be.

The PACT did hold a couple of meetings, but few people attended. Despite many and varied efforts by Dave to generate interest in the PACT, only a small core of people had expressed interest, mainly by email and phone calls, but no-one could really spare the time. The idea of a virtual network was considered, but did not really get off the ground.

Dave agreed that the whole PACT model was predicated on the PACT lead in having the time and commitment to make things happen. In other regions (such as West Midlands in working with learning disabilities) an infrastructure / network was already perceived to be in place. Without such a regional body / network / infrastructure it is considered to be much more difficult to get a PACT together.

Despite the difficulties in recruiting PACT members, a successful Model Action Day was held on 26 March 2010 with the help of a local organisation (CEFET). Fifteen people attended the day and overall the day worked reasonably well.

In conjunction with the idea of a virtual network, Dave also undertook an online survey in order to establish what disabled people themselves thought about volunteering. The survey was put out through a number of Networks including the Modernising Volunteering site, Volunteering England, Vitalise and other regional contacts. Over 100 people completed the survey, which indicated about 67 per cent of respondents felt that there were currently a range of physical, attitudinal and emotional barriers to volunteering. Attitudinal barriers among staff brokering or managing volunteering were perceived to be the dominant issue. It was also felt that the main 'subjective' barrier among volunteers – lack of confidence – may be partly accounted for by poor experiences relating to attitudinal problems.

Dave was also aware that Scope had done a lot of work in addressing the barriers to volunteering for disabled people and felt that the work of the PACT may simply be duplicating what had been done already.

Following the Model Action Day, Dave found it difficult to maintain any momentum and ceased his involvement in the work of the PACT. Leadership for this PACT is now shared between Jo Sullivan at Guide Dogs for the Blind and Joanna Masters at Jewish Care.

⁶ Initially the PACT's terms of reference did include sensory impairment, but the main focus of the PACT's work was actually on physical impairment.

Model Engagement plans

Model Engagement Plans were produced by each PACT which detailed what each PACT was seeking to achieve at the end of six planned meetings.

Each Model Engagement Plan included the following elements:

- PACT baseline – detailing the baseline which the PACT is starting from
- PACT objectives – detailing why target groups are under-represented in volunteering, what needs to be done to engage people from target groups, organising model action days and measuring the effectiveness of the PACT
- Monitoring and evaluation of PACT activities to ensure that PACT objectives are met. This aspect was also intended to help ensure that the NNVA Capacitybuilders targets were achieved (e.g. the number of NNVA organisations who adopt the Model Volunteer Strategy and targets that require an increase number of NNVA organisations publishing diversity monitoring figures of volunteers in their annual reports)
- Scheduled dates for PACT meetings and Model Action Days
- A summary of key actions that will be undertaken by the PACT including expected outcomes, monitoring processes, time scale and responsibility.

PACT meetings

With the exception of the physical disabilities PACT, all PACTs held six meetings.

The PACT meeting case study over the page relates to the experience of the learning disabilities PACT with regard to membership, approach, conduct of meetings and the contribution made by PACT members. This case study is considered to be fairly representative of all PACTS with the exception of the physical disabilities PACT.

Case study: learning disabilities PACT

PACT meetings were considered to be very useful. Mencap and Midland Mencap (who are two separate organisations that jointly led the learning disabilities PACT and are referred to simply as Mencap in this case study), jointly tried to develop a diverse group – not just people interested in learning disability. It was felt that Mencap had the ‘specialist’ learning disability knowledge, but tried to engage with the local infrastructure including a local volunteer bureau, a CVS (Lichfield) and other volunteer-involving organisations. However, membership did not just include voluntary organisations, but also organisations such as the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital and Walsall College (because Mencap had worked with them before and knew they had students with a learning disability).

This approach was taken in order to get a very wide perspective on what the problems were in relation to involving volunteers with a learning disability and what the barriers were. It was felt that Mencap have a set of perceptions about what the barriers to involving those with learning disabilities are, but these are not always the same issues faced by other organisations – and these issues are likely to vary from organisation to organisation. For example, local volunteer bureaus have different challenges to those actually hosting the opportunities.

The approach therefore was to try and engage a wide range of stakeholders. The PACT leads considered that this was achieved reasonably well.

It was felt that a lot of connections were made through the PACT meetings and significant partnership working resulted.

Each meeting had an agenda and minutes were also made of each meeting.

Several different people involved in the PACT meetings contributed to the national conference and ran a workshop relating to disability – Mencap stood back from this. CVS (Lichfield) provided an introduction, Royal Orthopaedic Hospital talked about barriers and Valuing People Now spoke about next steps linked to employment or other outcomes.

Model action days

In March 2010, each PACT held a Model Action Day with a collective total of 190 participants from a range of NNVA organisations, infrastructure organisations and frontline direct delivery organisations. All PACTs arranged for a variety of speakers to attend and make presentations that were of relevance to each area of PACT work. Most of the PACTs undertook evaluation of the Model Action Days and the feedback was generally very positive.

Mental health PACT – led by the Samaritans

The target audience was volunteer managers from local charities, Volunteer Centre managers and so on. 27 delegates attended the day and generally very good feedback was received through the evaluation undertaken. 22 people felt the day went well or very well.

“People didn’t feel like it was on a shoestring. The attendees at the model action day thought it was a quality bit of work, so it must have been a quality bit of work.”

Feedback also gave the PACT ideas about what was needed in the future, if the work could continue.

One aspect of the feedback was that the day was spread too thinly with different people having slightly different needs (for example, Volunteer Centre managers have different needs from those doing day-to-day volunteer management work). Volunteer management did form an important part of the day, but the first half of the day was about mental health and what it can mean.

The learning disabilities PACT – led by Royal Mencap Society and Midlands Mencap

Nearly 60 people attended the Model Action Day, which was held in Birmingham. The outcomes from the Model Action day were highlighted by Mencap as being particularly useful – ‘It just got people thinking’. The evaluation returns from the day also indicated that delegates felt that the seminar had been a positive experience. Information from the day was also fed back on flip charts.

Learning disabilities PACT members were keen to measure how attitudes might shift following awareness raising about learning disabilities and what action delegates might be prepared to take when they were more informed.

Monitoring was put in place as part of the Model Action Day. A questionnaire was completed at the beginning of the day to assess delegates’ understanding of learning disability, what they thought the barriers were, what needs to be put in place and so forth. Delegates were then asked to complete the same questionnaire at the end.

It was felt that this process got participants really thinking as to what needed to be put in place, not necessarily what they thought was needed at the outset. Mencap gained more of an understanding of what different organisations need to take on people with a learning disability and this has helped to identify specific support needs.

The refugee and asylum Seekers PACT – led by Newcastle Volunteer Centre (CSV)

The first Model Action Day involved about 50 people – about 35 were representatives of organisations (such as the local authority, Primary Care Trust, Local Housing Associations, local volunteer-involving organisations). An Evaluation was completed by those people that attended, which reflected very well on the Day with a lot of positive feedback.

A volunteer's comments (Leonard) at the Model Action Day were remembered by the PACT lead:

“I have been volunteering for six or seven months now, and it is only today that I realised that I am not doing anything illegal.”

Nobody at the Red Cross had thought to tell Leonard that what he was doing was not illegal and Leonard was convinced that, because he received letters saying that he must not do any work (paid or unpaid), he was undertaking activities that were not really legal. This was a theme of the Model Action Day and Leonard was delighted to discover that volunteering was legal.

“It's something that you just never think of. You never think of saying to people 'would you like to become a volunteer and by the way it's not illegal.'”

The governance PACT – led by Family-Action

Thirty people attended the Governance PACT seminar and of those between ten and fifteen were either trustees or CEOs (the majority of which were from NNVA organisations). The seminar explored the role that boards can play in increasing the diversity of volunteers.

A further six PACT members were recruited from the Model Action Day including (three trustees and 3 NNVA members). This outcome was a real boost for the group.

“One of the PACT members is a trustee of two different organisations, and he said that it was because of the Model Action Day that he went back to one of the organisations and said 'look we need to increase our membership and be more diverse [because they are not diverse] and this is how you can do it'. They ended up extending their membership numbers and putting out an ad and asking for volunteers. I think they had five spaces and ended up with eight people responding. He said that was all as a result of coming along to the Model Action day.”

Physical disabilities PACT – led by Vitalise

A Model Action Day was held on 26th March 2010 with the help of a local organisation (CEFET). Fifteen people attended the day and overall the day worked reasonably well. Presentations included a review of the findings of the survey carried out by Vitalise to identify the barriers to volunteering that people with physical disabilities face. The day also included workshop discussions identifying what steps organisations need to take to overcome the barriers identified.

The outcomes of the day were written up and generally the day was well received by those that participated. One of the attendees was the Wildlife Trust, which was looking to open up access to woodland, identify what the barriers were and what to do about them.

Leadership for this PACT is now shared between Jo Sullivan at Guide Dogs for the Blind and Joanna Masters at Jewish Care.

Conference on 1st June

The Year Two workplan ended on 1st June with a National Conference and the start of the Year Three workplan.

The conference brought together key voices across the charity sector to share how organisations can overcome barriers to volunteering and give proper recognition to the positive impact of volunteers.

150 people attended the conference. Joe Montgomery, Director General, Communities and Local Government, who chaired the morning session set the conference in a context of challenging times ahead and called for:

“Backing for organisations and individuals prepared to give if we are to make it through the next period.”

Key speakers were Dr Justin Davis-Smith, CEO, Volunteering England and Dame Elisabeth Hoodless, Director, CSV, who challenged delegates to a 'call for action' on overcoming barriers to volunteering. Following the conference, an electronic copy of the call for action was sent to all delegates and later this year, NNVA secretariat will be back in contact to follow up with delegates to find out how they are getting on.

The call for action is outlined in the Appendix.

NNVA analysis of feedback from delegates included:

- Positive feedback on the conference and positive comments from delegates:
 - Very positive good vibe with lots of network opportunities
 - Brilliant day, excellent venue, great food, fantastic set of people, inspirational panel
 - Excellent day, good networking opportunity. Thank you!
 - Thanks! Volunteers speak session: was inspiring!
 - Keep waving the flag!
 - Volunteers speak session: really powerful
- Views on the main barriers to volunteering given by those completing the evaluation forms, were considered to be:
 - Funding / costs
 - Attitude
 - Lack of resources
 - Lack of support
 - Existing volunteers / workers (perception, attitude, treatment).

NNVA considered that these barriers were in line with the experience / findings from the PACTs and point towards the need for more training for those already involving volunteers, for volunteering to be properly resourced and the need for boards and senior management teams to demonstrate the importance (and their commitment to) volunteering consistently.

Four PACTs attended the conference and presented some of the learning from their work, although some did feel that this opportunity was more limited than they had hoped.

The conference was considered by another PACT lead to be 'just a sharing of what had been achieved' rather than any more tangible outputs. However, several PACT members have been approached by more than one organisation wanting details of particular speakers / initiatives referred to by speakers.

Whilst another PACT lead felt that the conference was a worthwhile and well organised event, it was not perceived to be too successful in attracting strategic leaders – CEOs and trustees. (The idea was that Model Action Days were for practitioners and the National Conference would be aimed at CEOs and trustees).

In relation to a conference workshop undertaken by one PACT it was commented:

“I felt that this was a really good piece of work, because we all pulled together in terms of the key things that we wanted to get across, the content of the workshop and who we wanted to invite to speak.”

The PACT received positive feedback on the workshop.

The only slight criticism of the conference mentioned by one PACT was that there should have been the opportunity to attend two workshops. In addition, it was felt that the workshops on funding and European Year of the Volunteer in 2011 detracted from the work of the PACTs.

Support

CSV undertook a considerable amount of initial work in defining the PACTs, what they would look like, membership and leadership, a timetable for meetings and what their aims and objectives should be. This work resulted in the production of a Model Engagement Plan, which each PACT completed.

There were also difficulties in getting the PACTs and PACT support off the ground because of ongoing negotiations about the contract. Initially, Volunteering England wanted to see some external project management support within the workplan, but CSV was keen to keep this role in-house. A compromise was reached whereby the CSV Consulting Projects Director and an external consultant (Dare to Change) were jointly given the task of providing project management support to all Year Two activities.

Work with PACTs was divided between the CSV Consulting Projects Director and Dare to Change. The CSV Consulting Projects Director was the link person with NNVA, organised and facilitated PACT lead meetings (three meetings were held – July 2009, May 2010 and July 2010) and produced monthly monitoring reports for Volunteering England against the project deliverables.

It is apparent that considerable support resources were provided to PACTs. In addition to the project management support, each PACT was provided supporting documentation (such as information on how to promote each PACT, attract membership and bulletins to update PACTS on progress and items of interest).

Support was also provided in terms of:

- Promotion amongst NNVA members
- Through attendance at the England Volunteering Development Council and Volunteer Centre Advisory Group meetings, which have regional representation
- Through CSV internal resources, including partner organisations to encourage interest, support and membership
- Attendance at each of the PACT meetings
- Administrative support – drafting agendas, co-facilitating meetings with PACT leads and writing up the minutes of meetings.

PACT leads were all Heads of Volunteering and whilst it is apparent that all were strongly committed to undertaking the PACT lead role, it is also clear that they also they had limited time. In many ways the project management time was therefore used to try and make the role of PACT leads as easy as possible.

The learning disabilities PACT considered that Dare to Change were ‘fantastic’ in terms of kicking the project off – attending PACT meetings (facilitation and writing up meeting notes) and help in setting the direction of the project. It was also commented that the representative from Dare to Change has also been very responsive to queries and information sent to her since this point.

“If ever we wanted to clarify anything or felt a little unsure about anything she has been there.”

Dare to Change also attended the Model Action Day. This was appreciated in terms of providing ‘moral support’ for the day.

Midland Mencap indicated that, on the whole, the support was considered to be good.

Further details on PACT views on the support provide are contained within the subsequent individual PACT write ups, which cover the following aspects of PACT work:

- Approach: what the PACT set out to achieve (including the relationship to Year One research)
- Partnership working / networking
- Support
- Key challenges
- Outcomes and impact
- Sustainability.

Mental health PACT

Approach

Samaritans is an organisation that supports people with emotional and mental health issues and volunteering is strongly supported as way of getting over mental health issues.

“In some ways it is so self-evident – volunteering is good for your mental health – so why are we not encouraging people to be getting involved in volunteering?”

At their first meeting, members brought forward ideas on what they wanted to try and achieve through the work of the PACT. The group did not want to replicate work that was already out there, but rather aimed to create a central portal / holding space to keep all previous work and information and signpost where appropriate.

The PACT also wanted to specifically look at the wider impact of volunteering within mental health – the extent to which volunteering roles could cause people to feel mentally unwell (such as befriending someone that subsequently died), but did not have the resources to do more of this, although PACT wanted to.

Partnership working / networking

Partnership working was considered to be effective and most PACT members developed good links and contacts. Wider networking – meetings with other PACT leads, the National Conference and so forth provided positive networking meetings. However, the link to mental health and progression in relation to removing the barriers is felt to be less clear.

Support

Support from CSV is considered to have been good and supportive, but it was also felt that CSV also had to support other PACTs and therefore had limited time to spend on things like administrative support. However, PACT meetings were supported by CSV who carried out a secretariat role in terms of producing agenda's and minutes.

Outcomes

It was felt that work very quickly got channelled into deadlines facing the PACT, particularly the Model Action Day, and energy was directed towards the process requirements of the PACTs rather than following through on some of the initial goals. This was a frustrating aspect for the mental health PACT.

“All of us were doing this as an add-on to our day job.”

The purpose of the Engagement Plan was to provide clear outcomes and deadlines for the work of the PACT, which could be measured. However, the PACT was not able to formulate their ideas as clearly as they wanted to as the Plan had to be formulated very quickly. Goals included a promotional campaign about mental health and the fact that volunteers are important whether they have a mental health condition or not (one in four people have some kind of mental health issue).

The plan included aims that the PACT had hoped they would achieve, but were not able to finish and in this regard it was felt that the PACT may be viewed as being unsuccessful because it did not meet the targets.

“What all the PACT leads seemed to find was that actually the volunteer management issue was the same for all hard to reach groups. It’s about volunteer management, listening to people and articulating, being honest and open – all those kind of things.”

It is considered that all of the PACTs spent half their meetings covering the same ground. If this aspect of volunteer management in relation to disadvantaged groups could have been dealt with at the outset then each PACT could have concentrated on its own specific modules. It is felt that each PACT could have then looked at the particular barriers to volunteering faced by each group. However, it is acknowledged that this view is based on the benefit of hindsight.

It is also felt that there was a very strong internal PACT focus and each PACT did not link up as much as they perhaps could have. There was talk of a virtual linkup, but this did not happen, although a number of PACT lead meetings were held (three in July 2009, June 2010 and July 2010). In particular, it was felt that some involvement earlier in the programme may have been beneficial for PACT leads in order that they could direct the progression of the work.

It is generally felt that work was too orientated to achieving the outputs rather than the actual work of the PACT. However, it is felt that the PACT delivered added value; mainly through the commitment of the individuals' that participated, who brought in expertise and experience and produced valuable materials with relatively little resource input.

Challenges

It was commented that in Year Three no financial support has been provided, but there is nevertheless an expectation that work will be carried on, especially the National Conference.

“... We, particularly my PACT, have got expectations of what we want to do ourselves and it will be our goodwill if we do it. The chances are that it will falter out... We do want to meet [our objectives], but we may not be able to do it for nothing.”

There is also a concern that the same work will be replicated in three years' time. In this regard it is felt to be important that whatever happens in future builds on what is already there. In this regard sustaining the resource is considered to be an issue that needs to be addressed.

Sustainability

The intention is to put together a training module that could be sent out to Volunteer Centres and other infrastructure organisations on how to support people with mental health needs. This is something that could be achieved by the PACT in Year Three despite the lack of funding / support. This will be the focus of the dissemination events. However, it is also pointed out that the actual production would be limited because of the lack of funding. The PACT lead is hoping that there are similar positive feelings from other PACT leads in doing something by way of a legacy. This is very reliant on goodwill, but a number of members of the mental health PACT have indicated a willingness to continue.

Refugee and asylum seekers PACT

Approach

The first task of the PACT was to identify what the barriers to volunteering actually were for refugee and asylum seekers and also put those barriers into some kind of priority order. One of the main barriers identified was Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks, which put organisations off recruiting refugee and asylum seeker volunteers. This is because the process of undertaking CRB checks is felt to be too difficult for people that have not been in the country for very long. The team undertook quite a bit of work on this aspect.

The team also decided that what was needed was some kind of guide that organisations could pick up and use as a toolkit. However, the team firstly sought to find out what was in existence already. Team members then came back with information on either CRB checks and / or existing information / guides.

The approach to the toolkit was to build on what was there already. A guide was put together several years earlier by the Volunteer Centre in Newcastle and it was also established that Sheffield had also put together a useful guide. Rather than reinventing the wheel the PACT sought permission from Sheffield to be able to use their guide as a basis for updating, with appropriate recognition.

Partnership working / networking

It is felt that the work of the PACT has 'definitely strengthened' partnership working and enabled relationships to be renewed. The local authority has also been impressed with the work of the PACT and this has helped to improve the relationship with the statutory sector.

The PACT had a strong regional focus and has undertaken regional presentations (such as the England Volunteering Development Council Conference), but were involved in the National Conference in June. CSV will also be involved in organising the Durham event in January 2011.

Support

After the first PACT meeting (which was attended by the CSV Consulting Projects Director) little support was provided as it was felt by CSV in London that a good PACT had been created that required little additional support and that they were experiencing greater demand for support in other areas. However, the PACT lead felt the support was there when needed.

Key challenges

Resourcing was the only issue raised by the PACT and it was felt to be disappointing that no more money was available in Year Three. Lack of funding to properly print the guide produced by the PACT was also highlighted in this context.

“We certainly did more work than we were paid to do and we are continuing to do it, because it is something that we think is important.”

Outcomes and impact

The main outcome of the PACT has been the production of a good practice guide for volunteer managers and coordinators working with people who are refugees or seeking asylum. In addition, the PACT also produced a short leaflet. The leaflet and guide are available on the Volunteer Centre Newcastle website (www.volunteercentrenewcastle.org.uk/volunteer/goodpractice.php) and some regional websites, but it is not thought that they have been posted on any national websites. It is recognised that wider dissemination is needed.

A lot of additional work was undertaken by the PACT in relation to CRB checks, which was seen as the main barrier to volunteering. The finger printing method for CRB checks was put forward and it was established that refugees and asylums seekers were perfectly happy to use this method.

The good practice guide included template letters that people could use to get the information that they would need for CRB checks. The PACT established that a letter from a school confirming that your respective children are attending is acceptable as a proof of identity. A template letter has been produced so that an asylum seeker can send this to the school concerned.

Another outcome is that a member of CSV staff is going to be involved in the leadership seminars that are being organised by Dare to Change.

It is not felt that there is any strong or anecdotal evidence that the practice of organisations has actually changed as a result of the work undertaken by the PACT. However, it is recognised that this is a very difficult area to monitor and assess, which would require the establishment of a baseline and measurement of any effects of the changes that are made as a result of the activity of the PACT.

Sustainability

There is a desire to continue the work of the PACT and work is in progress to obtain further funding from the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Unit, which might help to progress the work. CSV is constantly looking at ways to finance this type of work.

Six PACT meetings were held prior to the National Conference, but a further meeting has now also taken place because the PACT is planning a further Model Action Day on 29th September 2010. This was because the original Model Action Day was so successful, with good guest speakers (such as the Refugee Council), people representing service user groups and people that had moved though volunteering into paid work as well as workshops, etc. It is also recognised that there is now a need for a leaflet for refugees and asylum seekers that wanted to volunteer, including information such as the fact that that they did not need to worry about CRB checks, loss of benefits and so forth. The idea was therefore to hold a volunteering fair) and invite people attending all ESOL classes in the city.

“... We are just calling it a volunteering community day and we are involving health projects as well to make it a bit more rounded, not just volunteering but other services that they can tap into as well because a lot of the barriers (to volunteering) are related to mental health⁷.”

⁷ Mental health barriers can include severe trauma as a result of what people have experienced and also isolation (from everything people have known in the past).

Learning disabilities PACT

Mencap and Midland Mencap

Mencap and Midland Mencap are two separate organisations, which jointly led the learning disabilities PACT. Throughout this report when the term Mencap is used it relates to both organisations working together on the PACT work. It was considered very successful to have both Lynne (based in Birmingham with Midland Mencap) and Kate (with a national Mencap role) involved, offering a regional and national perspective.

Approach

The PACT took a very pragmatic approach:

“This is how it is now – how are we going to make things more accessible for people with a learning disability and for organisations to feel that they can take on volunteers with learning disabilities”?

The main role related to increasing willingness of organisations to involve and take on people with a learning disability. This involved:

- Training of organisations in order that they can take on people with disabilities
- Identifying what organisations might have to think about in order to do this; not necessarily big changes but instead raising awareness of what a learning disability might mean and how approaches can be adapted.

Partnership working / networking

The PACT is clearly identified as successful in terms of improving networking and partnership working amongst those participating in the PACT meetings. Mencap would like to do more networking with organisations at the Model Action Day (in order to place volunteers more effectively), but there is an issue of time and resources as PACT work is undertaken on top of normal jobs.

Support received

Overall, the support provided to the project was considered to be good.

Key challenges

Getting people to join the PACT was identified as a particular challenge:

“You are asking very busy people to give up their time.”

Also, because, at the start Mencap was a little unsure about where the initiative was going and what the outcomes would be it was considered more difficult to sell to people.

“If people are going to come that have to get something out of it – not just sit and talk.”

A key challenge moving on was ‘keeping the momentum’. However, on the positive side, Mencap were quite surprised that some of those who attended meetings stuck with it and were prepared to go to London for the National Conference, stand up in front of people and talk and also get involved in the Model Action Day.

Outcomes

A one-day training session was undertaken with Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) through the BRAVO Group, which consists of about 40 volunteer-involving organisations from a range of socially excluded groups – not just learning disability. BVSC host the room, but there are still expenses involved (materials and facilitator time). A further training day is planned.

Mencap indicated that although they would have put in the funding bid underpinning this activity anyway, without involvement in the PACT initiative they would not have known about the BRAVO Group. In addition, the funding bid may not have been successful without linkage to the BRAVO Group.

Giving people the confidence to take on people with learning disabilities is considered critical. The initiative is identified as helping to give those organisations (and individuals) participating this confidence.

This has led to changes in practice within Mencap in relation to provision of support to other organisations. This is why Mencap is looking at more in-depth training with selected organisations.

Sustainability

Mencap has identified that the focus of Year Three should be to follow up on contacts (organisations that came to the Model Action Day) and work with those people already identified and undertake more in depth work to identify what would help them to move forward.

Mencap would like to look at the development of a Year Three programme relating to these organisations. However, Mencap is unclear what funding may be available for this.

It was considered that moving the initiative to another region would be really challenging, particularly because of a lack of contacts and lack of knowledge on what is already available. Hence the approach for Year Three is to go ‘more in-depth’, with those that have already expressed an interest.

Mencap identified the need to give more thought to how to instil confidence to take on volunteers with learning disabilities in organisations.

Continuing the initiative in the future is considered a challenge.

Mencap identify that establishing a support network would be useful. This would enable identification of how to offer mutual support and keep track of emerging issues faced by different organisations.

Governance PACT

Approach

Karen represents Family Action at NNVA and the subject area governance was of most interest, so Karen joined as a member of the PACT.

“For me governance is quite a key platform and foundation – if you have got that right then things can hopefully flow from that.”

Several individuals / organisations identified as PACT leads, but both pulled out. Karen then took on the leadership role.

“I was interested and wanted to get involved, but was aware of my time limitations, because I am part-time and I’ve got a national remit, so I have to make sure I’m doing what I need to do for my organisation.”

The PACT looked specifically at how CEOs and trustees could be influenced, particularly in terms of making decisions that would increase the diversity of volunteers within their organisations, such as including information about volunteers into an Annual Review or developing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Support

The support provided to the PACT was considered to be extremely good. The PACT started quite late and CSV and Dare to Change provided a lot of the support.

“Barbara and Emma were complete stars, I have to say.”

Dare to Change were considered to be very effective in securing PACT membership from senior levels (CEO and director level). However, it is felt that PACT membership and therefore the effectiveness of the PACT did not really get going until after the Model Action Day.

Partnership working / Networking

“For me that has been one of the real benefits. Although I attended the NNVA meetings, I didn’t really know anybody and I had been going for about a year before I went on maternity leave. I’d literally go along, listen, take notes and leave again whereas being involved in this (the PACT) I have actually met good colleagues and allies and people who I can communicate with outside the NNVA context, so it’s being really beneficial.”

Key challenges

“Time is a major, major factor.”

Having someone lead the PACT who then dropped out was considered to have hindered the process quite a lot.

It was felt that the person concerned dropped out because of the responsibilities involved and the time commitments associated with running the PACT.

“When I went into this I didn’t realise it was going to be as much work. It’s been a lot of work to do and I have to try and justify it to my organisation.”

“The governance PACT is a national PACT, so it is different to the others and it can feel a little bit overwhelming and what difference are we really making because we are aiming at the high end senior management, trying to get a foot in the door has been really challenging.”

Sustainability

The governance PACT wants to continue meeting, but there is uncertainty about what resources are available, particularly for travel expenses, sundries and so forth. It is felt to be unlikely that the PACT would continue without funding.

There is also some uncertainty about what could be achieved by meeting, but there is currently still a desire to meet and three further meetings of the PACT are planned along with a further Model Action Day.

Outcomes and impact

It is hoped that the NNVA Blue book⁸ survey, which is undertaken annually will inform outcomes and impacts of the project. A number of additional questions have been added to the survey regarding overcoming barriers to volunteering, in particular around governance. It was not felt that there were any obvious impacts in terms of increases in volunteering. However, it was felt that a range of soft outcomes had been achieved in terms of personal development.

“I’ve never chaired a group before and I am now chairing the PACT.”

In terms of networking there is also perceived to be real benefit and value.

“In terms of my organisation there is still a lot of work to do, but at least it’s been raised on the agenda. The Chair of our trustee board attended our Model Action Day and has spoke quite highly of the day and mentioned that to his Chief Executive...It’s been good for raising the profile within our own organisation.”

However, it is also recognised that ***“this type of work has gone on before and the conversations keep happening, but there is a question mark over action.”***

“I’m not sure how much change we [the governance PACT] are really going to see; however, I believe that incremental change is better than nothing, and providing a platform from which others can build upon is key and necessary.”

Sustainability is felt to be key and that something needs to be left as a legacy that others can build on rather than reinventing the wheel again in several years time.

⁸ The blue book is a directory of NNVA members and provides an overview of each organisation, number of volunteers, contact details, etc.

Views of PACT members

As part of the evaluation process a programme of ten telephone interviews was undertaken with the members of the following PACTs:

- Refugee and asylum seeker PACT (two interviews, including one NNVA member)
- Mental health PACT (two interviews)
- Governance PACT (three interviews, including two NNVA members)
- Learning disabilities PACT (three interviews, including one NNVA member).

Of the ten respondents, three had only attended one or two PACT meetings, seven had attended at least one Model Action Day and five had attended the June conference.

Six of the ten respondents were regional or national volunteer co-ordinators (mostly from large national organisations). The other four respondents were involved in undertaking a variety of roles.

PACT meetings

Three respondents had only attended one or two meetings. The meetings were generally felt to have been well organised and chaired. Attendance was perceived as mixed, and better at the start of the programme.

One respondent commented that meetings usually tend not to be inclusive but that a woman with a learning disability attended the meetings.

“It was like a breath of fresh air, because it’s the bit that’s usually missing when you’re talking about rather than with... It was nice to see that happening there.”

However most felt that with busy diaries the PACT leads had done a good job and that with a lot of different organisations this takes time to develop.

“... A good cross-section of organisations and roles.”

In the refugee PACT, respondents felt they worked well together as a team to organise the various events, falling into roles naturally or being issued appropriate tasks and sharing a strong belief in what they were trying to achieve.

In the learning disabilities PACT, one respondent felt that although only attending two meetings, it had been valuable to meet people face-to-face, and the volunteer who had attended enjoyed the meetings, found them welcoming and felt able to participate.

Relevance and usefulness to capacity building

On the one hand, there was a feeling that there was not a particularly strong link between attending the PACTs and capacity building and this was not felt to be the purpose of attendance.

“The aim was to pull together a group who specialised in this field and promote our learning to other people.”

However, it is also clear that there were other important outcomes from attendance at PACT meetings:

“Diversity is an enormously complex issue for any subject let alone volunteering....It was great to share ideas and learn from others.”

One respondent took a trustee to a meeting who then produced a short briefing on why this was important:

“... But where it went next. I think it’s just got sucked into the wider strategy of the Trust...”

One respondent new in post had been able to recruit two volunteers from a refugee background as a direct result of attending the meetings and had been interested to find there was a programme to raise awareness of the issue, but had felt the impact would probably have been greater on smaller organisations.

One respondent in the Learning disabilities PACT with a national brief looking at disability had found the meetings ‘incredibly useful’:

“... Each of us in the regions has a specialism, so it’s about raising awareness and making links with organisations who work with people who have those disabilities. So the PACT has been incredibly useful in that way because it certainly got me back in touch.”

The volunteer respondent commented that she had met other people with disabilities from other organisations and that she felt more confident and able to help big companies have the confidence to take on someone with learning difficulties.

The only single biggest difference noted was that the networking for one respondent had opened a door to contact someone for information:

“... If they don’t know what I’m asking, they know someone who does. It’s got that communication link happening.”

Support

It should be noted at the outset that most respondents did not feel that the meetings, Model Action Days or conference were to support them and their organisations, rather that they were giving the input, in particular skills and knowledge, to support others. For example, one respondent was involved in the meetings in order to help plan the Model Action Day and deliver training. Another commented:

“Personally, it hasn’t impacted a great deal on my day-to-day work. I can only speak for myself but I don’t think the aim of the meetings was to benefit those attending.”

Another said:

“I wouldn’t call it support though, for me it seemed to be much more about almost running a series of focus groups or consulting with a number of organisations who already worked in that field.”

However, most respondents also saw the 'support' activities as a valuable networking tool, particularly for meeting representatives from a broad range of organisations. This was especially true for those relatively new in post.

Relevance and usefulness to capacity building

Apart from the volunteer representative, only one of the respondents felt that their confidence had increased as a result of attending the PACT meetings and this was in relation to going to talk to projects within the organisation with increased knowledge in the area of learning disability.

Most felt that they had not gained new skills as they had been involved to share their own skills and knowledge, but some had gained useful knowledge in recruiting volunteers and specifics such as documentation for people with no passports which they felt able to pass on to colleagues.

One respondent found that it was useful to have feedback from organisations working with the same client group, whilst another commented:

"I'm always very mindful that I'm going in as someone who isn't disabled and doesn't have that kind of background, so having that back-up of people who are willing to share their experience and talk about what would help has been incredibly useful for me really."

One respondent felt the only thing they had gained was a better understanding of the jargon and acronyms used and what other organisations, including Volunteering England, actually do.

However, networking was considered to be a great benefit to many as well as an opportunity to think more widely about the issues or spark a debate within a larger organisation.

One respondent felt their capacity to support those on the frontline had definitely increased through re-establishing links and understanding within the sector as well as raising awareness within their organisation of the support available through the work already being done by others.

Model Action Days

Seven respondents had attended one or more Model Action Days.

They were generally considered well organised with good accessible venues, although one in the West Midlands was only accessible by car.

The Model Action days were also generally considered to be well attended with delegates having an opportunity to ask lots of questions. One respondent felt the Action Day had been very successful for smaller organisations that had wanted to recruit from the refugee sector but had not previously had sufficient knowledge.

As with the meetings most respondents had found the Model Action Days a useful networking opportunity.

“... [It] was great in getting organisations to reflect with each other where the challenges lay and some of the ideas to move that forward.”

The volunteer respondent had given a presentation, which was not something they would have felt confident to do before being involved in the PACT.

Another respondent mentioned that one of the volunteers in the organisation had got involved to help with administration and setting up, but had then gone on to speak at the National Conference and now wished to embark on trainer training and more. The volunteer is now a member of the PACT team and a representative for the organisation. This was cited as a single biggest difference the Model Action Days had made.

Many respondents felt their role at the Model Action Days was to provide support to others and feedback from delegates was seen as positive. However some specific benefits were cited.

One experienced trainer, who had delivered training at the event, had found it difficult to pitch the training at a level suitable for all the delegates (about 25) as they had very different experience and knowledge in the field. They felt the Model Action Day had provided ideas of how to improve future training to address those issues.

“Widening diversity... I think people want a textbook to tell them how to do it and there isn't... But I think I'm going to start putting something in my training for that, for people with limited experience of having volunteers with mental health problems.”

One respondent had attended one Model Action Day but had heard about another which 'sounded more interactive' in Birmingham. It was felt that there was a difference in what the two Action Days were trying to achieve, with one at commission level, raising awareness, whilst the other was targeted at potential employers – 'This is what you can do and this is how you can do it.'

There was an understanding of the difficulty in balancing 'a nice day out and a reasonably nice lunch' with what happens afterwards, that there was a need for an ongoing commitment which was often missing.

The volunteer respondent however had felt in giving a presentation that they had been able to help people get back into work by giving employers the confidence to take on a person with learning difficulties.

National Conference (1st June 2010)

Five of the respondents attended the conference.

One respondent did not feel they had gained anything from attending and had found it slow going with too many unnecessary introductions of the speakers.

Others remembered the day as well structured, although with such a huge topic there was a lot to fit in to a day. The speakers came across well, the workshops were well received and there was considered to be a lot of interest in all of the PACTs.

“I didn't learn anything new, but I think what I did recognise is that we are all very much in this together and these were great forums to share ideas.”

Two respondents had given presentations at the conference and this had been the main purpose of attending.

The biggest single difference it had made to one respondent was to see how people overcame huge difficulties to volunteer. They felt that the volunteers who spoke had done a great job showing what it does for the volunteer in terms of increased self esteem and confidence, and how keen people are to give others a chance.

Another felt it had increased their awareness of the issues charities face and the similarities between them. They also were very aware of other organisations from which they could seek support.

The opportunity to share ideas was seen as a great benefit.

“I would definitely be an advocate for the conference again. I was really impressed with how many people went along and the different ideas people could share, so if only that happened. There’s so much to read and people get so many emails, to have it in bite-sized chunks was fantastic.”

The volunteer respondent had felt her confidence had increased as she had been able to give a presentation to about 150 people and would feel able to do it again.

Specific changes as a result of being involved in the programme

Phrases such as ‘sowed the seeds’ and ‘it was a spark’ were used by some respondents.

Two of the larger national charities that were doing a lot of internal work in their organisations felt that being involved in the PACTs had reinforced their focus on the issues of diversity.

Two other respondents were looking at the way they approach and support volunteers with specific difficulties. One felt they now had the impetus to work with an organisation to produce a guide for volunteer hosting organisations on supporting adults with learning difficulties in volunteering. Another felt their involvement had re-awakened a need to highlight where the organisation might be excluding people, particularly looking at meetings

“...it has focussed my mind to get back to thinking in that way... It’s so easy to get your head down and not go out of the office.”

One respondent working with refugees felt she would spend more time advising colleagues that it is worth the little extra time to ensure paperwork is correct and language barriers are overcome ‘because people get so much out of it. It’s worth the investment.’

A respondent from a large national charity felt that they needed to look at who was attending the meetings and events in terms of up-skilling members of staff who could be the enablers of those in the organisation who might be unsure and think it was too much hard work.

“... Or else we’ll go through the same exercises again in a year’s time and we’ll have Model Action Days and people will turn up but it’ll be called something else.”

They also felt the programme had enabled the organisation to question why rather than how, looking at a strategic level hence their desire to be involved from the centre.

“So if a member of staff had gone to the Mencap Action Day they would probably have been inspired and gone off with things, but that’s not really strategic, so it would have had an impact in that one place in the National Trust, it wouldn’t have caused a single ripple at all.”

“The involvement of people with a disability is still minimalist across the board.... Just to get more people involved in this would be great because then you’ve got the voice of experience feeding in to what you’re doing. People are generally done to rather than done with.”

“Ideally I would like better buy-in from a broader range of stakeholders...”

One respondent felt the role of the consultants needed more clarity as sometimes it seemed they were pushing everyone else to do the work.

On a practical level one respondent found a room at the conference too cramped for the workshop.

Another hadn’t thought about the programme for a while and was unaware of further meetings. They felt an email about what had happened post-conference would be helpful and whether any of the resources talked about had been developed.

One respondent felt that the whole concept of the programme had been set up in an overly complex way and had worked with the PACT chair to put together two sides of A4 in order to better understand the programme before selling it to prospective Volunteer Champions. They commented that the regional dissemination events around the country were extremely time-consuming for the chair and it appeared that things had to be done because the funders required it rather than because they were useful.

Another felt that the language was not making it easy for people, with a long winded programme title and some weird acronyms. In their experience people had taken a long time to understand what PACT stood for.

Additional comments

One respondent felt the next Model Action Day would be the real test, to see if people from refugee backgrounds got involved in volunteering with the organisations attending.

Another found it very positive having a volunteer with a learning disability attending the PACT meetings who brought them down to earth ‘just gives you that sense of reality when you’re drifting off into the world of theorising and pontificating’.

In the larger national organisations, a lot of in-house discussion and consultation was evident as diversity meant so many things to different people within the organisation and out. Smaller single-issue organisations already dealing with inclusion issues for their clients, and perhaps not having to consult so widely, had appeared to find it an easier concept to address and make practical progress with.

Conclusions

Year One research

The Year One research report was well written, easy to read and contained particularly good case studies in overcoming barriers to volunteering with groups that are often excluded.

Despite a disappointing response from NNVA members to the Year One research survey, some important findings did emerge. Overall, the survey findings suggest that there is work to be done to develop policies and strategies that specifically target socially excluded groups and to establish systems for monitoring outcomes and measuring the impact of implementing such strategies.

It is not clear whether the results would provide a sufficiently robust baseline to measure change in the practice of NNVA members⁹.

A range of recommendations were made to NNVA, which, if acted upon, would provide a sound basis for addressing the key issues arising from the stage one research. The findings and recommendations were agreed by NNVA and were taken into account in formulating the Year Two work programme.

The report also clearly outlined the way forward in Year Two through the establishment of a number of Policy Action Community Teams (PACTs). The report indicated that the aim of each PACT would be to take forward a programme of policy and practice development which results in more people from underrepresented groups participating in volunteering.

PACTs

PACTs are an innovative concept developed by NNVA which effectively brought together expertise from national and local organisations to focus on developing policy and practice for promoting equality and removing the barriers to volunteering for under-represented groups.

Five PACTs were established by NNVA. Each PACT was set up and led by a NNVA member; there were four regional PACTs (covering learning disabilities, refugee and asylum seekers, mental health and physical and sensory impairment) and one national PACT which focused on governance and leadership.

An effective and clear model was established for the operation of each PACT which was primarily based around Model Engagement Plans and Model Action Days. The model appears to have worked extremely well in focussing the work of each PACT and in ensuring a consistent approach.

The role undertaken by the PACT lead is crucial to the success of a PACT. Some difficulties were experienced in recruiting PACT leads and this, at least in part, was to do with the somewhat onerous responsibilities placed upon this role and the time that it was likely to take up. However, the role and what was expected of PACT leads was clearly set out by NNVA at the outset.

⁹ Given the sample size, unknown scope of the survey questions used in the Year One survey and the likelihood of different recording formats being used by NNVA members.

PACT leads were also responsible for the recruitment of PACT members. Each PACT had an average of around ten members and attracted a good mix of volunteering involving organisations, infrastructure agencies, volunteers and others. However, the statutory sector did not appear to be well represented.

Some difficulties were experienced by several PACTs in recruiting members, but this appeared to be in regions where there was no previous history of partnership working or networking (for example, the governance PACT). In other regions there was a strong commitment to the nature of the work and also a lot of relevant experience in the area of PACT activity.

All PACTs had six meetings, with the exception of the physical disabilities PACT, which only held two. PACT meetings were generally well organised (with agendas and minutes) and well attended and were also considered to be generally useful by attendees. However, some concerns were expressed about the 'process driven' nature of PACT work, which in one instance was felt to prejudice the actual work of the PACT. Clearly this can be a difficult balance to strike on a funded programme that necessarily has an outcome focus, but overall it is considered that PACTs were able to successfully:

- Involve a wide range of stakeholders
- Develop or strengthen partnership working. This has been a particular benefit for a number of PACTs
- Develop a good and unique perspective on the barriers to involving volunteers from different socially excluded groups
- Undertake wider networking. This was also generally felt to be a positive aspect of PACT work with good links and contacts being developed.

In March 2010, each PACT held a Model Action Day with a collective total of 190 participants from a range of NNVA organisations, infrastructure organisations and frontline (direct delivery) organisations. All PACTs arranged for a variety of speakers to attend and make presentations that were of relevance to each area of PACT work. Most of the PACTs undertook evaluation of the Model Action Days and the feedback was generally very positive.

A number of other positive outcomes also resulted from the Model Action Days including further recruitment of PACT members, evidence of impact on the volunteer recruitment practices of national organisations and networking.

Overall, the support provided to the PACTs was considered to be extremely good.

National conference

The Year Two workplan ended on 1st June with a successful National Conference and the start of the Year Three workplan. Four PACTs attended the conference and presented some of the learning from their work.

NNVA undertook an analysis of feedback from the 150 delegates that attended the conference, which were very positive.

Views on the main barriers to volunteering given by those completing the evaluation forms, were considered to be:

- Funding / costs
- Attitude
- Lack of resources
- Lack of support
- Existing volunteers / workers (perception, attitude, treatment).

Whilst the conference was undoubtedly a well organised event and enabled effective networking to be undertaken it was primarily a sharing of what had been achieved.

Outcomes

The outcomes from the work undertaken by PACTs appear to be very good, particularly in terms of producing valuable materials on the barriers to volunteering for the groups covered by each of the PACTs. More specific outcomes included:

- A good practice guide for volunteer managers and coordinators working with people who are refugees or seeking asylum, which included new and relevant work in relation to CRB checks
- Training sessions. The learning disabilities PACT organised a one-day training session which involved 40 volunteer-involving organisations and a further session is booked, which all happened as a result of their involvement in the PACT
- A training module on how to support volunteers with mental health needs
- Personal development. It is clear that the PACT lead role has provided for personal development opportunities in a number of instances. For example, one PACT lead used the opportunity to gain more experience in partnership working
- Leading the PACTs has also provided individuals with a significant opportunity to further develop leadership skills. For one lead the PACT represented an opportunity to gain actual leadership experience and develop confidence in undertaking the role
- Further Model Action Days are being planned by at least two PACTs.

However, there appear to be few outcomes relating specifically to increases in volunteering from the different group covered by the PACT and no real evidence that this aspect was really part of PACT work.

Challenges

The main challenge highlighted by PACT leads was in relation to financial resources (lack of), the time and commitment required to undertake the lead role and recruiting team members.

Resourcing the PACTs

In relation to resources, disappointment has been expressed by PACT leads that there is no financial support in Year Three of the programme. There has also been some fairly widespread concern expressed that despite this there is still an expectation that Year Three work will be undertaken (especially the regional conferences planned for 2011).

It is clear that the PACTs have been largely undertaking work on the basis of goodwill. For example, the mental health PACT used the £4,250 provided as financial support to each PACT to provide a really good venue for the Model Action Day. In the case of nearly all PACTs, no funding whatsoever went as a contribution to the time and resources devoted to PACT activities by the lead and PACT members.

The PACT initiative appears to have been largely undertaken in addition to normal work responsibilities. In some instances this has been a barrier to recruitment of PACT members and in terms of keeping the PACT together and moving forward. It was noted that some other projects have full-time coordinators in place so it was felt that these projects could achieve more. Clearly, any initiative that is reliant on people getting involved in addition to their usual work responsibilities can only reasonably go so far.

“All of our strands are completely different. I went to a couple of stakeholder groups and I did feel that PACTs were the poor relations to the others... There was a different amount of support and money going into the other groups involved in that bit of work that I did not feel we were having.”

The resources, commitment and goodwill devoted to PACT activity appears to be considerably over and above any financial remuneration paid by CSV or partner organisations. Without doubt this can be used to exemplify the added value of the programme delivered by Volunteering England, but it does also raise more fundamental questions.

Time and commitment

The time and commitment required to effectively undertake the leadership role has clearly represented a difficult challenge for all PACT leads. Not only has there been a lot more work involved than PACT leads initially thought there would be, but this has also caused some difficulties in PACT leads justifying the time they have spent on PACT work to their own organisations. However, it is also clear that without the commitment and dedication of PACT leads the PACT model would not have been so successful.

Sustainability

The evaluation has highlighted a number of critical success factors of the PACTs:

- Leadership
- Involving a wide range of stakeholders
- The individual commitment of the PACT lead and members
- Pre-existing regional infrastructure / support network.

The continuation of any work by PACTs in Year Three also appears to be entirely dependent on the goodwill of those involved. Whilst a number of PACTs have indicated a willingness to continue work in the remainder of Year Three, with several PACTs this is subject to some resources being made available to cover the costs of meetings (travel expenses and so forth).

Beyond the conferences planned for early 2011, the continuation of the PACTs is going to represent a considerable challenge without further funding.

Achievement of overall aims

In relation to the stated aims of the overcoming barriers to volunteering (OBV) strand, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions at this stage because of the timing of the evaluation work and the fact that considerable evaluation and impact assessment activity is planned for the last six months of the Modernising Volunteering National Support Services programme (September 2010 – March 2011).

Certainly there is considerable evidence that NNVA has made and presented a strong case to its members for doing more to make volunteering accessible for all, but it is less clear on the extent to which this has been disseminated to the wider sector. It is clearly beyond the scope of this evaluation to attempt to assess the impact of this activity.

In relation to the development of best practice policies and strategies NNVA has, through the work of different PACTs, produced good practice guides and materials. However, beyond the conference, it is unclear on the extent to which they have been received beyond a regional audience. It certainly appears from discussions with PACT leads (such as refugees and asylum seekers) that dissemination has taken place effectively within regions, but that picture in relation to national dissemination is unclear. A concern of PACT leads relates to the legacy of the PACTs and the need to ensure that the work of the PACTs is capable of being built on rather than the exercise being repeated in another three or four years' time.

NNVA is also currently in the process of finalising a template for a Volunteer Involvement Strategy, drawing on the experiences of the PACTs, examples from NNVA members and consultations over the past few months. The intention is that NNVA members and others in the sector who do not have a specific policy that covers social exclusion will be able to use and adapt the template as appropriate for their organisations. At this stage it is not known how this will be disseminated.

In relation to the aim of improving the performance of volunteer-involving agencies in involving volunteers from socially excluded groups, it is difficult to discern at this stage what impact the PACTs have made. One PACT commented that there were no obvious impacts of PACT activity in terms of increases in volunteering and there has certainly been no evidence on the impact on volunteering been produced to date as part of the evaluation work undertaken within the overcoming barriers to volunteering strand.

In addition, there is currently no real evidence of a change in the practice of organisations as a result of PACT activity. One PACT commented that there was not any strong or anecdotal evidence that the practice of organisations had actually changed as a result of the PACTs. This situation clearly points to the importance of work during the remainder of Year Three in highlighting the impact of overall strand activity in relation to the original aims of the strand.

It is apparent that the Blue Book survey undertaken annually amongst NNVA members has been changed in 2010 to include a new range of questions around overcoming barriers to volunteering, which primarily revolve around the policy and practice of NNVA members.

It is understood that a follow up survey will be undertaken within the remainder of Year Three in order to measure actual change in these areas amongst NNVIA members. This could also be used as a means for monitoring the implementation of the Volunteer Involvement Strategy.

What is not clear from the remainder of the Year Three activity is how any measurement of the impact of the programme on involving volunteers from socially excluded groups will be undertaken. This was a fundamental goal of NNVIA's involvement in the MVNSS programme.

Overall, the OBV programme has been a good and worthwhile initiative, but persuading leaders within NNVIA organisations to change their practice and increase the diversity of their volunteers remains a considerable challenge.

Appendix

Call to action

Changing the Profile of Volunteering conference 1st June 2010, Church House, Westminster

Dame Elisabeth Hoodless, Executive Director and Chairman of NNIVIA
ehoodless@csv.org.uk

Step 1: Crystallise your vision. Why volunteers at all?

- a. Credible because unpaid
- b. Volunteers can expand your organisation – stretch the budget
- c. Innovate new approaches
- d. Are powerfully effective and often preferred
- e. Bring luxury of focus
- f. Free to contact legislators.

Step 2: Clarify your commitment

- a. The importance of volunteer- key contributors not “cheap labour”
- b. A major resource
- c. And to diversifying the volunteers (2010 Equality Act)
 - i) To tackle social exclusion
 - ii) To enrich the mix.

Step 3: Clarify tasks flexibly

- a. What more would we like to do?
- b. What needs are not being met?
- c. What would we do if we had more resources?
- d. Why flexibly? Because some will offer capacities of which you have only dreamed.

Step 4: Enlist the support of your board staff and volunteers. Underline the potential available and the legal requirement

- a. Invite their ideas
- b. Mention National Trust volunteer welcomers with learning difficulties (double whammy)
- c. The breadth of skills of refugees and asylum seekers ranging from singers to medical doctors
- d. The Capital gardeners; mental health service users transform long neglected parks and gardens
- e. Elisabeth, the blind volunteer so successful with young offenders of Cotswold Community School because she couldn't see the graffiti and transformed pupils into volunteers
- f. Engineer at UCH invented the stent that transformed the prognosis of spina bifida babies
- g. Southall immigrants practising reading with housebound older people – aim for reciprocity where service users and new volunteers both benefit.

Step 5: Start small

- a. 2 or 3 places for a start (let your mistakes be little ones)
- b. Where the climate is positive.

Step 6: Resources: tight?

- a. Consider volunteer buddies: explore how your current volunteers could support and mentor new recruits
- b. Volunteer volunteer organisers:
 - i) Some potential volunteers make excellent team leaders or volunteer organisers
 - ii) Include leadership roles in your recruitment campaign.

Step 7: Recruitment

- a. Look for partners: local groups will probably welcome the chance for their members to volunteer either individually or in teams.
- b. Invite your current volunteers to help.

Step 8: How will you measure progress?

- a. Start with a survey of current volunteers (model enclosed)
- b. Make a plan for recording new volunteers

Step 9: Reinforcing success

- a. How will you recognise and appreciate progress?

Board item

- i) Ensure the volunteer organiser personally reports to the board at least once a year
- ii) Annual report inclusion

Ensure the annual report includes:
 - Number of volunteers in the year
 - Hours served increase during the year
 - The minimum total value (use minimum wage rates)
 - Changes in the composition towards increasing equality
- iii) Ask one board member to accept responsibility for supporting the initiative and reporting to each board meeting.

How you can help us all do better

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