

Modernising Volunteering National Support Service

Briefing: Volunteer Champions

Overview

In recent years the concept of Volunteer Champions has begun to emerge and be developed. As a relatively new idea there is little known information or support available; there is also some confusion about what the term means, in fact it is used in four distinct ways.

- Peer led volunteer recruitment and support for organisations
This is where a volunteer or a team of volunteers is identified by an organisation to act as ambassadors and encourage others to volunteer. It can often happen informally, and where undertaken on a more formalised basis will normally be a development opportunity for an existing volunteer. For example, the Prince's Trust Team programme invites young people who have successfully completed their 12 week programme to return in a voluntary capacity as Assistant Team Leaders; these ambassadors help to recruit new groups of young volunteers, provide strong peer-leadership and encourage new teams to work together to achieve their goals.
- Peer led volunteer recruitment for specific sectors or types of organisations
This is where a volunteer or a team of volunteers will promote the concept of volunteering in certain fields on behalf of a range of organisations. For example, v has adopted the Russell Commission proposal to establish Youth Action Teams. Members act as ambassadors, offering advice and guidance, outreach and peer mentoring. They encourage their peers to participate in volunteering activity, designing and running one-off opportunities, alongside more sustained part-time and full-time volunteering opportunities, which provide a focal point for youth action and engagement in each local area.
- Championing volunteering at senior and governance levels within organisations
This is where two individuals ensure effective volunteer involvement within organisations; effectively these are a named Volunteer Manager and a Trustee. The concept can be found in *Volunteering: Compact code of good practice*, which includes a voluntary and community sector commitment that organisations and groups will identify a named person to be responsible for volunteer involvement and for monitoring and reporting on it; and will also identify a trustee board champion for volunteering.
- Championing volunteering at a strategic level in local areas
The Commission on the Future of Volunteering recommended the introduction of volunteering champions, working individually or in groups, at a local level. The role of volunteering champions would be to work with infrastructure agencies and local government to promote the value and

benefits of volunteering to individuals and organisations. The Commission recognised that these champions would need to be supported and trained and could be based in volunteer Centres, other relevant agencies or the local authority. The Commission believed that volunteering champions should themselves be volunteers.

What the Modernising Volunteering National Support Service plans to do

We believe that each of these four areas of understanding has merit; however, whilst there is little known about current practice it is difficult to provide support and encourage further development of the Volunteer Champions concept.

By March 2009 we will:

- Seek to gain an understanding of the emerging development of the role, value and support of volunteer champions
- Identify existing exemplars of good practice in the role and support of Volunteer Champions
- Research the role of online social networking in supporting Volunteer Champions
- Prepare a publication that examines these issues in greater depth including through case studies, good practice guidelines and recommendations for further action.

Based on this year's work we will pilot identified new ways of support and promote exemplars of current activity in order that volunteer led volunteering can be supported more effectively.

How you can participate in this work

We would welcome your input, you can:

- Complete our online survey at www.improvingsupport.org.uk/volunteering on the 'get involved' page by 8th January 2009
- Let us know what you are already doing by emailing us at nss@redfoundation.org or calling on 0845 299 7162 and choosing option 2
- Sign up for the Modernising Volunteering National Support Service newsletter by emailing volunteering.nss@volunteeringengland.org

We look forward to hearing from you.

Modernising Volunteering National Support Service is a Capacity Builders funded programme to give support providers the resources, evidence and good practice they need to develop front line services – led by Volunteering England, in partnership with v, Red Foundation, CSV and the Nationwide Foundation. More information about this strand of work and how to get involved can be found www.improvingsupport.org.uk/volunteering