

**volunteering BY  
BLACK  
PEOPLE**

**a route to  
OPPORTUNITY**

**Filiz Niyazi**

 *the  
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volunteering*

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## FOREWORD

# A route to opportunity

This series of booklets is based on a year-long research study carried out by The National Centre for Volunteering with funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The aim was to identify organisations that had succeeded in involving volunteers from one of five groups traditionally under-represented in formal volunteering, and to examine the reasons for their success.

The five groups are young people, older people, unemployed people, disabled people and people of black and ethnic minority communities. National surveys have shown that members of all these groups are disadvantaged when it comes to access into volunteering. Where black people are concerned, however, this under-representation only applies to 'mainstream' organisations; volunteering is a widespread and vital feature of black community life in Britain.

The organisations we studied were chosen with a view to providing a representative sample in terms of geography and field of activity (social welfare, education, environment and so on). For each of the five groups, we also tried to find an organisation that because of its interests might be thought unlikely to succeed in recruiting volunteers from the under-represented group – a youth group involving older people, for example – but this search met with only limited success.

We are not suggesting that the organisations we chose are the best at recruiting particular types of volunteer, or that because they have managed to recruit from one group, they will necessarily be successful with the other four. What they have in common, however, is that they have each tried in their own way to make volunteering accessible to people who have not traditionally been involved.

Who are the booklets aimed at? At every organisation that currently involves volunteers (as well as those who don't do so yet but would like to) and wishes to explore new ways of reaching out to potential recruits. The booklets also contain useful lessons for those who make

public policy – and of course, for the volunteers and would-be volunteers themselves.

The series is intended to be read as a whole. Although some organisations may, because of their circumstances, be drawn to one booklet in particular, we hope they will eventually be led on to read the others as well. In fact, although the booklets are presented as separate texts in their own right, and can of course be read as such, the many common themes that emerge across the five can best be understood by a thorough reading of the whole series.

I would like to thank the following for their assistance to this project: Derek Williams of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, who chaired the steering group; the steering group members; Alan Dingle, who edited the booklets; Jean Foster, who did the desk research including the identification of organisations to take part in the research; and the volunteers and staff of The National Centre for Volunteering. But my greatest debt is to the staff and volunteers of the organisations who participated; without their willingness to share their experiences, there could have been no booklets. However, the author takes sole responsibility for the information and views expressed in these booklets.

**Filiz Niyazi**

## CHAPTER ONE:

# Separate traditions

Black people differ to some extent from the other social groups covered in this series in that they already have strong traditions of volunteering. For the most part, however, this volunteering is done informally within black communities, and not through so-called 'mainstream' voluntary organisations; that is to say, through organisations which reflect the traditional makeup of the population by having paid staff, volunteers and clients who are mostly white.

## Under-represented at all levels

Research has uncovered serious under-representation of black people at all levels within these organisations. For example, a study of voluntary health groups in Liverpool found that only two per cent of the volunteer management committee members were black; indeed, 95 per cent of all management committees had no black members, and there was not a single all-black committee. Black people were also under-represented among paid staff, 98.4 per cent of whom were white. Yet one in twelve Liverpoolians is black, and this proportion increases in the inner-city districts where many of the health projects are based. Other surveys have found under-representation of black people as school governors, one of the most widespread forms of voluntary activity in the UK.

But there is equally abundant evidence that black people volunteer for informal activities within their own community, especially through community groups and places of worship and with a noticeable bias towards self-help. This activity all too often goes unrecognised by the mainstream voluntary sector, but a glance at *Bridges*, the directory of ethnic minority community groups in Greater London, shows how widespread and varied it is. When *Bridges* surveyed its readership, 58 per cent of its Asian respondents, spread across five London boroughs, said that they preferred to work with their own ethnic group.

## The need to reflect diversity

One could ask, where is the problem in all this? So long as black people are volunteering, does it really matter if it's largely within their own community? But the situation is not as simple as that. The bulk of Britain's voluntary services are provided by mainstream organisations, which have a lot of black service-users. Organisations can provide a more appropriate service if black people are involved both as volunteers and paid staff.

Having volunteers from the black communities can increase the effectiveness of organisations operating in a multiracial setting; such volunteers are likely to have a deeper understanding of cultural preferences and a sensitivity to the different experiences of racism.

There is also the wider point about volunteering needing to reflect the diversity of our society, and the right of every citizen, whatever their ethnic origin, to volunteer. Clearly, there will always be some who prefer to work within their own ethnic group – for example, in Muslim women's organisations – but overall the situation is that many black people are simply being denied their right to work in the wider voluntary sector

## A taste for informality

So what is stopping black people from volunteering for mainstream organisations? One reason may be their radically different concept of volunteering. Black culture in Britain remains essentially communal and informal. As the organiser of a London victim support scheme who grew up in Africa said in a recent issue of *Black Echo*, the journal of the Resource Unit for Black Volunteering (RUBV): 'I took it for granted that all adults were concerned for their neighbours, and that the care extended by the family to all its members was a natural part of the fabric of society. In those years in Uganda there was no need for homes for the elderly, and orphans were cared for by aunts or uncles.'

Much of the volunteering done by black people shares these characteristics. Anyone who expresses a desire to help is unquestioningly included in the activities of the community. 'It is inherent in black people to help each other,' says David Obaze of RUBV. 'We have had to look after ourselves and become self-reliant.'

There is certainly some research evidence to suggest that, for black volunteers, helping the community is a particularly important motivation: in a study of 54 volunteers, 18 per cent gave their primary



motive as altruism and a further 11 per cent cited religious reasons. Few seemed to have volunteered specifically to acquire new skills.

## **Culture clash**

But when a black person approaches a typical mainstream voluntary organisation and says, for example, 'I want to help children,' then the organisation will, because of the climate it has to operate in, start asking questions: 'Have you ever done it before?'; 'Can you give me the name of two referees?' It's an example of culture clash – and no one's 'fault' – but it often makes the black applicant recoil with distaste. Middle-class people can usually take this kind of bureaucracy in their stride, but for reasons we shall be examining, most black people in Britain cannot be described as middle class. Interestingly, working-class white people often have the same reservations about the paperwork connected with volunteering, preferring less formal modes of involvement.

In fact, most members of the black community are still so far from middle-class status that economics is often cited as another significant reason why they don't volunteer for mainstream organisations. The level of unemployment is disproportionately high among the black community, and the failure of many organisations to reimburse volunteers' expenses will discourage people on low incomes. If there was an improvement in the socio-economic status of the black community, more volunteers might well come forward.

## **The shadow of racism**

But over these factors of culture clash and poverty falls the shadow of racism. Volunteering inevitably reflects the attitudes of the society in which it takes place, and it's a fact that for black people in Britain, racism and inequality of opportunity permeate most areas of life. For example, black people are five times more likely to be unemployed than white people – and white people are far more likely to get into higher education than black people.

There is racism in mainstream voluntary organisations too. It is seldom deliberate, but more often the product of complacency and ignorance, and is therefore that much harder to confront. Obviously a black volunteer can do anything a white volunteer can do, but because black people are in a minority in most areas, it is easy for organisations to ignore them or exaggerate their separateness. David Obaze cites two classic examples of the attitudes RUBV is fighting against: one

mainstream organisation protested, 'Why do we need to change? We've done perfectly well without black volunteers all these years;' and another asked, 'We have no black volunteers, so why do we need an equal opportunities policy?'

## Tokenism

A more subtle variant of racism is where the organisation obviously values black volunteers mostly because of the colour of their skin; the volunteers are apt to feel that they are the 'token black person'. In the same way, there is a tendency to assume that black people are automatically experts on race, and are not interested in other aspects of volunteering.

So it comes as no surprise that black people prefer to volunteer in black organisations; it's a gesture of solidarity in response to the mainstream voluntary organisations whose attitudes and practices marginalise them. If the mainstream genuinely wishes to recruit black people, they must abandon such practices. This requires more than just token gestures; there has to be clarity of purpose, honest commitment, a valuing of skills and a willingness to learn from mistakes. The key lies in the ability to value the contribution all individuals bring to their roles within organisations.

## The big issues

In practice, anyone trying to persuade black people to volunteer will need to address these main issues:

- 1. Mainstream organisations do not reach out to black people.** In the past, organisations recruiting volunteers have tended to ignore black people, who have therefore concluded that volunteering is not for them. The organisations need to say clearly, 'We welcome applications from black people' – and they should say this in places where the ethnic minority communities are bound to see it.
- 2. Removing the bureaucratic barriers.** The bureaucratic procedures of some mainstream organisations deter black people, who are traditionally accustomed to a more informal type of helping. Whilst most people will appreciate the need for good management practices, creating an informal and friendly working atmosphere will help to recruit and retain black volunteers.

### 3. **Black people must be offered interesting and challenging work.**

Most black people volunteer for altruistic motives within their own community. If mainstream organisations are to attract them, they must make the volunteering they are offering as personally fulfilling and as empowering as possible. Providing continual support and training, and giving black volunteers challenging roles, will produce long-term results that can only benefit the community as a whole.

## **The pathfinders**

In this booklet we shall be focusing on how five organisations have succeeded, each in their different ways, in tackling these issues.

- **The Bradford Care Consortium (BCC)** provides a range of residential and day care services for people with learning disabilities in the Bradford area. It is an independent, non-profit making company registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts.
- **Leicester Victims of Crime Support Scheme (LVCSS)** helps crime victims in the Leicester area. It is affiliated to the national body of Victim Support Schemes.
- **Butetown History and Arts Centre (BHAC)** is a self-help group of Cardiff residents who are trying to ensure that the social history of Butetown, Tiger Bay and the Docks – one of Britain's oldest multicultural communities – is preserved for posterity.
- **Parchmore Community Centre (PCC)** is dedicated to enhancing the lives of everyone in the Thornton Heath area. It is a Methodist church, a youth centre and a community centre that caters for all ages, races, religions and classes.
- **The Barnardos Family Centre (BFC)** in Bristol offers help and support to children and young people at risk in the Bristol area. It is one of Barnardos many projects nationwide.

# A sense of belonging

If black people try to volunteer with mainstream organisations but have a bad experience, the news quickly gets around the black community. The result is that, not surprisingly, members of that community prefer to stay with black organisations rather than tackle what they see as the racism of predominantly white-run ones.

For the reasons given in chapter one, this booklet is about encouraging black people to volunteer in mainstream organisations as well. So we ought to look at what it is that black voluntary groups have going for them. Essentially, they allow a black person to experience a sense of belonging; in black organisations, they are surrounded by people who respect their culture and do not expect them to conform to a set of completely different cultural norms.

Mainstream organisations simply do not make the extra effort needed to give black volunteers this sense of belonging. Black people need to be convinced that volunteering for that particular organisation will enable them to contribute to the whole community. But first they have to be convinced that they will be working in an atmosphere of equality, not discrimination. In short, white-run organisations have to win back the trust of black people.

## Making the extra effort

When recruiting volunteers, organisations such as BFC, PCC and LVCSS deliberately set out to correct the under-representation of black people in their organisations. They do so by targeting a geographical area and actively encouraging its black residents to volunteer.

The following ways of advertising the existence of the organisation have proved successful:

- placing **articles** in the black media
- **translating** leaflets and distributing them widely

- **word of mouth:** black volunteers and staff telling other black people about volunteering
- **talks** by black staff or volunteers to groups of young people, students and retired people
- **networking** with community groups who can spread the word.

The actual messages used to promote volunteering have included:

- volunteering is important
- volunteering is satisfying
- volunteering is open to all
- volunteers have opportunities to learn new skills
- volunteering needs your specialist skills and knowledge
- volunteers' expenses are paid

But most effective of all, it seems, is to state as clearly as possible that 'black volunteers are particularly welcome'. Moroua, who has been a volunteer for four years, explained that she applied to Barnardo's because she wanted to help young people; but just as important was the fact that the advertisement said 'black people welcome'. 'Otherwise,' she admitted, 'I might have thought twice.'

## The all-inclusive approach

The PCC uses a similar – and equally effective – strategy for promoting itself, by pointing out that as 'the people of Parchmore are of all ages, different races, various religions, differing abilities and many backgrounds, *all are welcome*'. The Centre does leaflet drops in the area, which was what initially interested Kapila Patel in becoming a volunteer. 'I already do some voluntary work for an Indian organisation, which I enjoy,' she told us, 'but I also wanted to do some good for the rest of the community, not just my own people.'



**Bernice D'Souza,**  
volunteer with Parchmore  
Community Centre

An organisation like PCC offers a wide variety of services to every possible sector of the community: to children, disabled people, older people, young people and people with mental health problems from

all kinds of cultural and religious backgrounds. Its aim is to enhance the lives of everyone, not just to target any one group, so it tends to attract the same diversity of people to work as volunteers.

What also makes the Centre special is its non-rejection policy. For example, a black volunteer with a disability had the opportunity of working in the luncheon clubs serving meals to older people. She was able to perform this physical activity thanks to the help of a support worker. But if PCC *really* cannot find work for a volunteer, it will carefully refer them on to somewhere else.

David Obaze of RUBV points out that strategies like this 'are not simply about targeting black people, but about welcoming more people in general. It's simply a matter of good practice to open up services to black people, as users or volunteers.'

## **Giving multiculturalism a good name**

It was a black American researcher, Glen Jordan, who launched BHAC in 1987. Previous studies of Tiger Bay and the Cardiff docks had mostly been critical of the district and the people who lived there, but Jordan recognised the importance of the area's unique and colourful multiculturalism, dating as it did from the early 1900s. So he set up a discussion group and trained a group of interested volunteers to research the oral histories of local residents.

When asked why they wanted to help BHAC, black volunteers said it was to counter the usually scathing press criticism of the area. Neil Sinclair, BHAC's volunteer editor, said, 'Having as director a black person who was a researcher encouraged us to research our own histories. It attracted the whole initial core of volunteers.' Volunteer Olwen added, 'We knew we had skills and knowledge to offer. Here was an opportunity to document our own histories, the histories of the people we knew. Not the way white researchers and journalists saw it, but the way it was.'

## **Black people on the payroll**

The PCC volunteer co-ordinator Benneive Thompson, who is herself black, emphasises the benefits for recruitment of having black people on the paid staff: 'It reassures black potential volunteers who are visiting the centre for the first time that we are an organisation which really means it when we say, "Everybody is welcome".'

about volunteering. I could see all the different people here, and I knew I too could help. I could be a part of things and feel satisfied.'

The LVCSS has employed an Asian worker, Shama Ahmed, specifically to recruit and support black volunteers. Director Maurice Jones explained, 'I always wanted better representation on our staff, which was all white. So I looked for some extra funding to employ Shama part-time for a year.'

Since taking up the job, Shama has contacted local volunteer bureaux to register LVCSS's desire for more black volunteers. She has also written articles in the black press to encourage black people both to use LVCSS and volunteer for it. And she has had LVCSS leaflets translated into several Asian languages. Her activities are arousing considerable interest, and the name of LVCSS is becoming well-known within the ethnic minority communities.

Clearly, organisations that already have black staff and volunteers in positions of authority stand a better chance of attracting yet more black volunteers. Black people can see for themselves that the organisation practises what it preaches, and is not merely tokenistic in its approach to equal opportunities.

Although recruiting specialist black staff may cost extra money, it is essentially a matter of priorities. LVCSS raised £3,000 from City Challenge and an equal amount by convincing the management committee of the importance of employing this worker. It is important to remember also that not just these specialist posts should be open to black candidates but all the paid posts within an organisation.

# Dismantling the barriers of bureaucracy

Many black people demonstrate their preferences by volunteering with black groups that take an informal, community-based approach. According to David Obaze, the same people might be persuaded to consider mainstream organisations if the recruiting procedures were made far less bureaucratic. David has, for example, already convinced several large organisations that, perhaps because of its paramilitary overtones, the very word 'volunteer' is uniquely discouraging to black people, and has suggested that the word 'helper' should be used instead. He would also like to substitute 'chat' for 'interview'.

The reams of paperwork involved in applying to volunteer for some of the larger mainstream organisations can also be rather intimidating, especially for people who speak English as their second language. Drastically simplifying these procedures would help to create the informal, friendly atmosphere such applicants would probably prefer.

But being non-bureaucratic and informal must not be taken to mean being disorganised. It's worth remembering that the 1991 *National Survey of Voluntary Activity* found that many volunteers felt their volunteering was badly organised, and this was a major reason why people left volunteering. Organisations that are serious about recruiting black people will have to ensure that effectiveness and informality can coexist harmoniously; one of the best ways of ensuring this is to introduce an equal opportunities policy – and *apply* it.

## Policies against discrimination

Humie Webbe is the first paid administrator at BHAC, and her job involves co-ordinating the volunteers. Her appointment was a response to the growth of the organisation since its launch in 1989, and the consequent need to recruit more volunteers.

Before her arrival, the twenty core volunteers had been responsible for doing everything in the organisation, so they were quite used to





**Humie Webb (co-ordinator) and Rita Delpêche (volunteer)  
from Butetown History and Arts Centre**

taking decisions. They certainly did not want BHAC to be hijacked by a so-called 'expert'. So they initially had to be persuaded of the need for good practice, such as introducing an equal opportunities policy, paying volunteers' expenses, giving them training, encouraging volunteer reps to attend volunteer forums, securing more funding, and networking.

Humie realised it was especially important to convince the existing volunteers of the need for equal opportunities training. 'Volunteers often dislike the idea of training, but once they were there, they realised how important it is to attract more volunteers who are representative of the whole community.' She asked the volunteer representative to represent BHAC at the monthly Intervol meetings, and encouraged other volunteers to attend special meetings where they received training in equal opportunities and other interpersonal skills.

Those who attended then helped with training the other BHAC volunteers, and eventually strategies were developed for recruiting other under-represented people, such as disabled people and unemployed people. 'You can't force equal opportunities on existing volunteers,' she explained. 'Rather than assuming they feel the same way as you do about it, you have to show them how important it is.'

But Humie is adamant that none of this will fundamentally change

what the organisation stands for, because all decisions will still be taken by the volunteers themselves. She told us, 'The changes have been successful because I always try to explain to people why good practice is necessary rather than simply imposing it.'

In addition to recruiting new volunteers, Humie has the task of sustaining the interest of the volunteers who originally founded BHAC in 1989. She has therefore devised an audit of skills. The aim is to record the various skills of these founding volunteers, many of whom are older and very knowledgeable, and match them with the those of the new volunteers.

As the core of 20 founding volunteers are now all over 45, the first group to be targeted under BHAC's new equal opportunities policy is young people. The organisation has contacted local sixth-form colleges and school students, and has met with local youth centres, in an attempt to recruit young volunteers.

## **Fundamental equality**

Some voluntary organisations certainly go to a lot of trouble to devise equal opportunity policies. But these policies are not always put into practice effectively or monitored properly. So although an EO policy is a perfectly valid starting-point for introducing equal opportunities, it is not in itself enough.

If, for example, the culture of an organisation is not genuinely founded on equality for all, it will always be trying to bring in equality as an 'extra', subject to time constraints and the views of individual workers. In this context, targeted attempts to recruit certain groups of people (and to monitor such activity) are likely to be dismissed as tokenism – as 'balancing the equal opportunities books'.

But if it is absolutely fundamental to an organisation's philosophy that every person involved with it – staff, volunteer or client – is treated equally and with respect, then introducing equal opportunities will become natural and easy. All the five organisations we studied cherish this concept of fundamental equality: they are working to enhance the lives of all marginalised people, not just particular groups.

Although PCC, for example, is still in the process of developing its equal opportunities policy, it has for some years been recruiting volunteers from a wide variety of backgrounds. It also operates a non-rejection policy. 'We have an equal opportunity statement that backs up exactly what we stand for as an organisation,' says Benneive Thompson. 'That we care for people, and that by giving them a feeling

of belonging, client, staff or volunteer are working in harmony with the organisation.' Benneive believes that this is the most important message she can give to new volunteers, and is why so many people with diverse skills, perspectives and backgrounds volunteer for the organisation and stay with it for so long.

## The immediate opportunity

But however welcoming a volunteer's first contact with an organisation may be, it is vital to maintain the newcomer's interest. This is when it pays to take an informal and friendly approach – and to provide immediate opportunities for volunteering.

Organisations should certainly not make the mistake of interviewing volunteers and then leaving them to wait for weeks, or even months, while it checks their references. If volunteers are kept hanging around, they will lose interest; this may be particularly true of black volunteers, who, as we have seen, often have to overcome misgivings about volunteering with mainstream organisations.

This problem can be avoided by immediately giving all new volunteers an initial induction or some training, or by letting them spend a trial period in a role they think they might like. BFC and LVCSS volunteers told us they really appreciated the fact that, after their informal chat with the volunteer co-ordinators, they felt as if 'they were already on board'. The co-ordinators kept in regular contact with the would-be volunteers until all the police checks were completed.

## Taking risks

Police checks need to be used with caution. Many young men have had brushes with the police in the past, and young black men disproportionately so – even if they have no actual criminal record – so an organisation that insists on police checks for all its volunteers *when there is no good reason to do so* will not succeed in recruiting such men. If the volunteers will not be working with vulnerable clients or handling money, it is best to assume that they are trustworthy and perhaps limit the investigations to taking up their references. 'It's about giving people a fair chance and sometimes taking a risk,' said Benneive Thompson.

BFC is also prepared to take a risk in certain circumstances. Because of the vulnerability of its clients, the Centre's policy is to carry out police checks on all volunteers, but it does not automatically refuse to

take someone just because they have convictions. Co-ordinator Geoff Yorath told us, 'It would depend on whether the volunteer had told me before the check was done, and what kind of offence it was.'

Geoff Yorath, as well as Sue Rogers from LVCSS, told us that, regardless of whether they have received the references or the results of the police checks, they go ahead with planning volunteer inductions if there is a large enough group; this keeps the potential volunteers interested. Richard Stokes, a newly-recruited BFC volunteer, said, 'From my first chat with Geoff he was friendly and the organisation seemed well organised. I liked that.'

This is an excellent way for an organisation to show potential volunteers that it trusts them: by investing time and money in inducting them and starting their training even before the references (and the results of the police checks, if used) have arrived. Looking for the best rather than the worst in applicants will earn you the respect of all volunteers, not just black ones.

## **The induction process**

Since both BFC and LVCSS recruit volunteers to work one-to-one with vulnerable people, they regard induction and initial training as particularly important. Induction is the moment when these organisations can explain their aims and their culture of equality to the new volunteer, and touch on matters such as the volunteer role, confidentiality, and the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

Both organisations usually do this through discussion groups, which enable volunteers and staff to see how they relate to each other and to the people they have been recruited to help. As part of its volunteer policy, LVCSS asks its volunteers to sign a confidentiality agreement. By the time the volunteers and the organisation have got to know each other, all references should have been checked and the volunteers should be ready to start work.

By contrast, PCC, BCC and BHAC carry out much longer one-to-one interviews at their first meeting with a volunteer: in effect, an individual induction. The volunteers are given an induction pack and asked to come back when they have chosen the task to which they feel most attracted. Once they have made a choice, they are put straight to work. They are supervised and supported in this task for a time, and then its suitability is reviewed.

## Choosing a job

There is a wide choice of tasks available at PCC. Volunteers are involved in driving people to and from the Centre, delivering meals to nearby residents, serving at the luncheon clubs, looking after under-fives in the crèche, being a youth worker, and helping to organise markets and fetes.

When Kapila, a recent PCC volunteer, was interviewed, she chose to work in the luncheon club. After some weeks in the post, she asked the volunteer co-ordinator if she could make use of her creative skills. Kapila was then asked to demonstrate her arts and crafts to the Brownies and Girl Guides who meet at the centre. This was not advertised as a volunteer task, but as volunteer co-ordinator Benneive says, 'If a volunteer has a particular skill, it's good if we can use it.'

## Choice, satisfaction and practical obstacles

Because of racism in society, volunteering is one of the few areas of modern life where black people can see other black people holding positions of authority and making decisions at all levels. It also offers black people the freedom to choose the type of work they wish to do.

Although it can never be a substitute for paid work, volunteering is for these reasons a valuable way of empowering those whom society tends to marginalise.

### Sharing one's assets

For most black people, as we have seen, volunteering is not something one does out of a sense of 'duty' or primarily to benefit oneself. Rather, it is seen as a way of sharing one's time and talents with others.

The volunteers we interviewed certainly showed a strong motivation to help fellow-citizens of all types and the community as a whole. Rather than volunteering to acquire skills and experience, many of them appear to have taken up voluntary work because they already possess these assets and want to share them with others. Accordingly, all five organisations have made it a priority to provide every opportunity for the volunteers to use their skills.

The volunteers in BFC, BCC and LVCSS all work with vulnerable people. The volunteer co-ordinators of these organisations told us that their volunteers stay on because they have been well-matched, as befrienders or carers, with the service users and have built a good relationship. Their main priority is to gain the trust of the clients; once achieved, this provides them with their job satisfaction.

BFC volunteers Moroua, Richard and Philip are befrienders of young people at risk, and they all feel that they serve as useful role models. Geoff was insistent that the matching of volunteer and client was not based exclusively on skin colour, but on the whole range of needs of

both parties involved, taking into account factors such as cultural background, personality and interests.

As a mother and a volunteer of many years standing, Moroua has plenty of experience of life. She told us that she had volunteered because she knew she could help; also because she hoped someone would help *her* children if they were in need. 'Over the last two years I've befriended three young people, black and white, and I've found it a real challenge,' she said. 'It always recharges me.'

Richard, a newly-recruited black volunteer, has spent a lot of time talking to young black people, who have told him that racism is widespread in Bristol. He has therefore asked to be matched with young black clients, a wish Geoff Yorath will try to accommodate. 'I feel I've got a lot to offer a young black person,' says Richard. 'They need all the support they can get – it's still not easy being black.'

Philip, whose full-time job is not connected with young people, has been a volunteer for a year. He too is aware that he has much to offer. 'When recruited, I hoped I could become a good role model for disadvantaged kids. I've not come from that background, but I've now got a really good relationship with the young person I'm befriending. Just knowing that you're there for them makes you feel good.'

## **A major commitment**

BCC volunteers usually undertake one-to-one befriending of people with learning disabilities. Co-ordinator Ronnie Hartley therefore takes considerable care to match service users with volunteers. This is especially true of BCC's Community Service Volunteers, who are recruited to live with the client.

These volunteers are recruited by the national charity Community Service Volunteers, which operates a non-rejection policy. Ronnie is sent a confidential profile of a volunteer and shares the information with the service user who may be receiving support from that volunteer; similarly, the prospective volunteer is given details about the placement. BCC and the service-user then decide whether to accept the volunteer. If accepted, the volunteer comes to share a house with a group of service-users for between six and 12 months. The first time the volunteer and the residents meet is when the volunteer arrives to begin the placement.

The system has been successful: at any one time, there are 25 CSV volunteers working with BCC's service. Volunteer Roger told us, 'For me, it was the satisfaction of working with one person – of

understanding how a person thinks. Sometimes it's a slow process but when something does happen, it's very good.' Ronnie asked us to point out that although locally-recruited volunteers are also individually matched with service users, the procedure is less formal, and the two do meet in advance for a mutual exchange of information.

Gurdawar Soor, however, prefers group work to one-to-one work. He particularly appreciates the opportunity to use his skills in art and design. 'My arts background really helps me when doing group sessions,' he told us. 'Recently we've incorporated artwork by clients into making a video of dance.'



**Gurdawar Singh Soor is shown here supporting someone to participate in a recent Asian dance workshop with the Bradford-based dance company Additti**

LVCSS volunteer Simone told us that she gets a great deal of job satisfaction from her work. As a counsellor of victims of crime for four years, she has been able to draw upon her personal experience as well as on the useful training she has received. 'After my 13-week basic training, I knew I was ready to take on counselling,' she told us. 'My life experiences are valued by this organisation.'

As we have seen, the BHAC volunteers have probably been motivated to stay with the organisation for so long because they have been able to watch it grow from nothing to the size it is today. The volunteers include teachers, editors and archivists, many of whom have applied their professional skills to writing and publishing books to further the reputation of their community. Since 1989 they have



published several books, including *Old Cardiff Winds*, *A Tiger Bay Childhood*, *How I Saw It* and *The Tiger Bay Story*.

## **Making oneself approachable**

The kind of support and supervision volunteers receive makes all the difference between keeping and losing them. So if black volunteers are used to working in an informal atmosphere, it makes sense to offer them support of the 'as and when' kind.

The co-ordinators of all the organisations we studied try to make themselves approachable to volunteers. The first step is to tell the volunteers that you are there to support them; after that comes practising what you preach – stopping for a chat when you are walking past, asking at regular intervals how things are going, sending volunteers updated information by post.

'Our organisation is not very hierarchical,' explains LVCSS co-ordinator Sue Rogers. 'Everyone works very much as part of a team, supporting one another all the time.' LVCSS volunteer Trish confirms that 'the staff are very supportive – they are always there to help me when I need it.'

For their part, BCC volunteers Roger Krywyszyn and Gurdawar Soor had high praise for their co-ordinator Ronnie Hartley: 'She has the answers to most situations, and is always very approachable.'

## **Supportive occasions**

Another kind of support much appreciated by black volunteers was group meetings. The co-ordinators may initially have had to persuade the volunteers to attend these meetings, but the effort has paid off in the end.

All five organisations have found that one of the best ways to get all their volunteers together is to turn these support meetings into informal social events. PCC volunteers are enticed to meetings by inviting them to a party at the Centre with free food and drink. At LVCSS the meeting takes place over a meal, at the pub and even while playing skittles. The co-ordinators use these gatherings as an opportunity to introduce volunteers to each other. If they rarely get a chance to meet the volunteers otherwise, they can also tell them how much the organisation appreciates their work.

LVCSS varies the venue of its meetings to ensure that everyone is able to attend at least some of them. It also makes sure that the meals

cater for vegetarians and that the activities are as culturally inclusive as possible.

BFC has found that focusing the volunteer meeting around a meal has had favourable results: it has been well supported, and offers a relaxed and productive time for all concerned. Volunteer co-ordinator Geoff Yorath feels this socialising is very important, as his volunteers work as one-to-one befrienders and therefore tend to be isolated from each other. 'The meal is one of the few chances volunteers get to relax and meet other volunteers.' BFC volunteer Philip said, 'I've felt very supported in my role. At the meetings we can discuss with other volunteers the issues we are facing as a befriender.'

## **The right to supervision**

Volunteers should also have the same right to supervision as paid members of staff, whether it is to discuss their own needs or those of their clients. LVCSS, for example, offers regular supervision to all its volunteers. Volunteer co-ordinator Sue Rogers told us that, since the volunteers are counselling the victims of crime, 'they need not only on-the-job support but also specific time with me to sit down and seek advice, discuss areas of concern, or talk about training needs'.

Lorraine, an LVCSS volunteer for five years, told us, 'I really appreciate being given the same rights to supervision as a paid member of staff. I found the time essential to my job.' She added that two of the core volunteers were currently representatives on the monthly volunteer training meetings. They have found this a very interesting experience and have shared it with their colleagues. All the volunteers now see the importance of attending such networking meetings for training and future recruitment.

## **Volunteering and employment**

The unemployment rate among black people in Britain is higher than in the white community, especially for young people. As we have seen, however, most black people regard volunteering as an activity that is undertaken for altruistic reasons – it is rarely seen as a direct link to paid work.

But there is no doubt that, in addition to providing personal satisfaction, volunteering is playing an increasingly important role in enabling black people to check out a possible career option or to acquire skills that will help them in their search for a paid job.

All the five organisations we studied offer genuine training opportunities to their volunteers. This high-quality formal training complements the life experience and existing skills of the volunteers. The work experience also complements any professional qualifications for which volunteers may be studying. In short, volunteering can often provide a black person with that extra something that gives them an edge when applying for paid work.

Co-ordinators from LVCSS, BFC and BCC told us that experience of volunteering, and the training that goes with it, are becoming increasingly important for getting a place on courses such as social work and counselling. The quality of the professional training offered to LVCSS, BFC and BCC volunteers stands them in good stead at interviews. LVCSS, for example, offers a 12-week basic training course that covers:

- the ground rules of LVCSS
- active listening/responding
- police investigative procedures
- a Victim's Tale
- the effects of burglary and domestic violence
- the victim in court
- the LVCSS Equal Opportunities Policy

After this initial course, volunteers have an opportunity to go on to more in-depth training that will equip them to work with victims of rape, sexual assault and domestic violence.

Simone is currently doing a social work course, which she finds is helped by her voluntary work. The experience and the training she receives are both excellent: 'I *really* enjoyed the role plays.'

BFC also runs a very well-planned induction and training course. It regularly invites outside speakers to talk to the volunteers about the problems young people face. Volunteers Collins and Richard both want to be social workers helping children and families. 'This volunteering will give me some good work experience and help get me on to a course,' explains Collins. Moroua adds, 'I really enjoy the speakers that come to talk to us. I was surprised to find when I filled in a job application that, thanks to my work at Barnardos, I met all the selection criteria concerning experience.'

BCC has little trouble in recruiting or retaining volunteers. This is because applicants know they will get a good deal in terms of training and practical experience. The training takes the form of a Certificate

Course in Direct Care and Support for Adults with Learning Difficulties, consisting of 19 training modules that can be used to underpin knowledge for an NVQ – covering themes such as coping with violent behaviour, abuse awareness, sexuality and relationships, communication and counselling skills, and alternative therapies. Each module represents a full day's training, and volunteers have to complete at least 10 (completing all 19 can take up to a year).

Volunteer co-ordinator Ronnie Hartley told us that the black volunteers at BCC have been particularly successful in finding paid employment: 'In fact, the main reason why volunteers leave us is because they get paid work.' Ronnie believes this is because of the high standard of training offered: volunteers receive a recognised BCC certificate as well as plenty of work experience.

Ronnie told us about Nasir, who had volunteered a year previously. He was very quiet and uncommunicative at his interview, but she felt he should be given a chance. After attending all the training modules over the year and working as a befriender at a day support service, he began to form good relationships with clients. Nasir realised that he was now ready for paid employment, so Ronnie organised some training in interview techniques for him; Nasir now has a job with social services. Over the last two years, three black volunteers have gone on to paid employment.

## **'Tainted with compulsion'**

Unfortunately for the reputation of volunteering, unemployed people on various government training schemes have been placed with voluntary agencies to do so-called 'community work'. The National Centre for Volunteering does not recognise this as genuine volunteering, so it will not be discussed in any detail in this book. It needs to be mentioned in passing, however, as its apparent voluntary nature can be confusing to unemployed people.

Black people are apprehensive about volunteering with mainstream organisations at the best of times, so they are hardly likely to feel any better about volunteering if they see that it is tainted with compulsion, as in these government training schemes. As a result, four out of the five organisations we studied have not recruited volunteers from such schemes.

## Among the decision-makers

As is the case among service-providing volunteers, black people are also under-represented at management level, especially on management committees or trustee boards. Tesse Akpeki of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations thinks that the traditional methods of recruitment to boards can be discriminatory. As long as organisations continue to select their trustees on the basis of their professional or managerial expertise, black people will be disadvantaged. Indeed, some organisations have even questioned why diversity should be necessary on a trustee board.

Tesse Akpeki believes that word-of-mouth recruitment of committee members/trustees tends to exclude certain people or groups. Widening the recruitment process is a way of reaching a larger and more diverse pool of people and attracting diverse talents and skills. Reaching out to the black community by using open recruitment procedures can result in wider perspectives being represented on boards and thereby creating a more effective and informed decision-making process.

Recruiting black board members is very important, but so are strategies to retain them through proper induction, training and support programmes. Mentoring and 'shadowing' play an important part in supporting people as trustees.

All five organisations we studied feel strongly that black volunteers should be represented at management level, and given an opportunity to be involved in decision-making. The 'management-type' volunteer roles available across the five organisations include:

- management committee members
- project innovators and managers
- group leaders
- representing the organisation
- trainers

The management committee of LVCSS has always sought to have black members. One of them was Simone, for whom it was the first experience of management. She felt valued at being asked to represent the volunteers. 'At my first meeting, I wasn't sure of what was going on, so I sat back and listened,' she said. 'But once I got the hang of the procedures, I began to contribute.'

Simone is now encouraging the other volunteers to tell her about their concerns, so that she can represent them at management level.



**Simone at work at the Leicester Victims of Crime Support Scheme**

Apart from her usual counselling work, Simone has also undertaken other responsible tasks. She has, for example, represented the organisation in public, giving a speech at last year's Women's Day describing the services available to women who have been victims of crime.

Lorraine, another LVCSS volunteer, has served on the committee and been a counsellor for five years. As if that were not achievement enough, she has now become a highly creative project manager (though this not an official title). She helped in the setting up of surgeries for victims of crime at a local church to publicise the service to black people, who were not using it. This has meant, for example, organising a door-to-door campaign to tell local people about the surgeries, and training new volunteers to give talks to those who attend them. Lorraine told us, 'It's important to me to volunteer with an organisation that lets me develop my ideas, that has faith in my skills.'

BHAC volunteers are no strangers to taking decisions: the twenty core volunteers include archivists, editors and writers. Recently, as we have seen, these volunteers have been empowered in a different way. Two of them have become reps at the monthly Intervol meetings, where they represent their organisation and absorb information about volunteering issues such as equal opportunities, training, disciplinary procedures, confidentiality and presentation skills.

Humie said, 'At first I had to convince volunteers of the importance of attending such meetings, but they now find them very interesting and have shared the information with other volunteers.' Volunteer Mavis Jackson said, 'The meetings are useful for networking and information-sharing. However, they were sometimes a bit unstructured when the proposed speaker did not attend. Also, finding time to attend the meetings is a problem when you are involved in your own organisation's activities.'

## Money matters

The discrimination in British society means that black people tend to be poorer than white people: they have a higher than average rate of unemployment, and if they do have a job it will probably be a low-wage one. So it is obviously important for organisations to remove any financial barriers that might discourage members of ethnic minorities from volunteering.

Certain expenses are inseparable from volunteering, such as fares, meals, the cost of special clothing and so on. To someone with little money, this is unlikely to make volunteering seem attractive – unless, of course, these expenses are paid for them. Without this, formal volunteering will remain the preserve of the white, the middle class and the employed. The organisations we studied make it quite clear, both in their publicity material and in the talks they give, that all volunteer expenses are paid and that the working hours are flexible.

PCC's leaflet for volunteers, for example, lists the various types of activities on offer, then says in bold type **Out-of-pocket expenses are paid**. At interviews and inductions, the co-ordinators repeat the message that no one should be ever be out of pocket because of their volunteering, and that it is the right of all volunteers to have their expenses paid.

Collins, an unemployed BFC volunteer, told us, 'As soon as I was recruited I got a form for travel expenses, which is a great help if you're unemployed.' Roger Krywyszyn of BCC did however point that, although you can indeed claim for travel, 'you have to put the money up front, which can be costly.' Organisations should be sensitive to the fact that not all volunteers will have the cash available to pay large sums like this.

## **Flexible hours**

Organisations should not assume that just because a volunteer is unemployed, they have all the time in the world and you're doing them a favour by keeping them off the streets. Unemployed people need flexible hours like any other volunteers: more particularly, they need to know that they can volunteer but still be able to sign on when they need to – otherwise, their unemployment benefits could be cut.

## **Welfare benefits**

Although the benefits rules do allow unemployed people to volunteer for up to 16 hours per week as long as they are available for work at 48 hours' notice, some benefits offices misapply these rules and put pressure on volunteers. Organisations should be prepared to liaise with the local office to make sure that their volunteers' rights are recognised.

Ronnie Hartley of BCC, for example, maintains regular contact with the benefits office. If, say, CSV volunteers who have finished their placement wish to start claiming unemployment benefit, Ronnie explains to the benefits staff that what those volunteers had been doing was not paid but voluntary work. She also stresses that the locally-recruited volunteers are indeed actively seeking work, and that taking time out to attend a job interview is not a problem. BCC volunteers have access to training in the welfare benefits their service users are entitled to; they are also given information and advice about their own entitlements.

LVCSS makes a point of suggesting to unemployed prospective volunteers that they contact the benefits office to check on whether their benefits will be jeopardised in any way.



## The lessons for organisations

Blatant and deliberate racism is rare in voluntary organisations, but ignorance and complacency about black communities is unfortunately less so. It is not enough to accept unquestioningly the stereotypical view that 'black people do not volunteer' and carry on recruiting white volunteers to deliver services to clients of whom a significant proportion may themselves be black. If mainstream voluntary organisations want to be genuinely representative of the community they serve, they will have to rouse themselves from their complacency and target black people in their volunteer recruitment campaigns.

- Voluntary organisations should take another look at the assumptions they have been making about black people and volunteering. They could start by finding out what black people are already doing in and for their local communities.
- Organisations should take up an explicitly anti-racist stance by drawing up an equal opportunities policy – and letting everyone know about it. In drawing up the policy, they should look at topics such as publicity material and the atmosphere within the organisation.
- Once an EO policy is in place, it needs to be vigorously pursued and reviewed at intervals. The practical implications of implementing the policy need to be fully addressed by the organisation.
- As well as racism, lack of information inhibits black people from volunteering. In addition to producing attractive recruitment leaflets and posters, organisations should explore the possibility of linking into informal networks in black communities. Contact should be made and information exchanged with black organisations and community leaders.

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