

Orgs Event

Our inaugural organisation forum was held on 7 June at the Outset Centre in St James's Street.

A number of charities and groups were represented at what; we hope, will be the first of many opportunities for people to network; hear about potential best practices and to raise any general issues of concern. We also hope that it will enable us to focus on and develop some specific types of help that we can give to organisations.

After general introductions and the usual practical formalities, everyone split into smaller groups to discuss the pros and cons of their differing work with volunteers. Many fascinating and challenging views emerged about working with volunteers but the general themes that appeared included: -

It's great:

- Working with kind, interesting and able people
- Gaining the huge benefits of working with individuals from all walks of life; age; gender; race; culture
- Involving volunteers can free up staff to focus on other areas of work and so enable the organisation to encompass and accomplish far more
- Training and developing people to get them back on track or into paid employment, often with the organisation itself is really worthwhile
- Seeing the benefits of being able to call on casual volunteer staff just at times of greater pressure responds precisely to the organisation's needs

It's not so great:

- Trying to obtain enough committed individuals to volunteer; providing them with proper training and retaining them thereafter
- Attempting to work with insufficient administration support
- Getting sufficient time to manage volunteers properly when the 20% of volunteers who are unreliable soak up far too much of a manager's time, whilst the 80% of excellent volunteers are left without sufficient praise or recognition
- Trying to manage the expectations of volunteers who have a host of different 'drivers' as to why they volunteer
- Lacking proper or correct information on all topics and the lengthy delays in getting vital checks or details before a potential volunteer can begin

Further group discussions followed around the practical help that could be considered and varying suggestions were made including:

Basic training to be given in 'the basics' such as health and safety; equal opportunities and vulnerable people – due to age or health restrictions

Encouragement to pursue official qualification in volunteering

Perhaps a pool of 'types' of volunteers, such as receptionists for example, could be formed and given a taster of the basic requirements for such a role

Creating certificate 'rewards' or individual recognition such as cards for birthdays or festive holidays for volunteers may assist in ensuring they know how much they are valued

Use of various websites which can be accessed to give information on areas such as the law and volunteering

Exchange or recommendation of easy referral of volunteers between organisations to ensure that appropriate people could have a progression chart within volunteering itself, similar to a standard job career path

As the initial forum, ideas for future meetings were also canvassed and varying suggestions made including: -

- Getting information about volunteering for those under 18 – particularly with 2012 in mind
- Obtaining guest speakers from time to time on topical issues
- Getting initial information concerning funding
- Setting up an exchange of e-mail bulletins on topics of general interest

Our meeting concluded with the hope that all attendees would actively look to e-mail the Centre whenever they had suggestions or topics to raise and, any such e-mails about these forums should go to(special ops/orgs address??)