

Homelessness ends here

Crisis

ENGAGING YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE

Crisis' experience of being involved in the v programme

Simon Teasdale
8/10/2008



About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change.

Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help people to transform their lives.

We are determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and advocating solutions informed by research and our direct experience.

We have ambitious plans for the future and are committed to help more people in more places across the UK. We know we won't end homelessness overnight or on our own. But we take a lead, collaborate with others and, together, make change happen.

How we help to transform lives

It is the hard work and commitment of thousands of volunteers that allows us to change people's lives. We are fortunate in our capacity to call on the support of thousands of volunteers. We plan to harness this support more effectively as we grow, including a mentoring programme which matches homeless people to volunteer mentors and coaches. We are also grateful for the support of 66,000 individuals and many companies, trusts and other organisations which fund our work through donations and grants.

We know that access to volunteering is not equal across the population. As a result, we know that not everyone is equally as likely to get involved in volunteering. We also know that, as a movement, we need to do more to tackle the barriers that exist to volunteering. What we don't always know is how exactly to go about this, or what experience organisations have had when they have attempted to do so. In research that the Institute for Volunteering Research conducted a few years ago into the relationship between social exclusion and volunteering, organisations told us that what they needed was to hear from other organisations about their attempts to involve 'hard to reach' groups in volunteering in order to learn from these experiences.

This report is, therefore, a welcome and timely addition to the growing body of literature on how to involve 'hard to reach' groups in volunteering. Rather than providing (more) 'good practice' advice and guidance in the traditional sense however, this report tells it as it is, or at least how it was for one organisation.

It tells the story of how Crisis set out to open up access to volunteering within their organisation to a group of people that are notoriously hard to involve. It does so in an honest and engaging way. Alongside telling us 'what worked' in terms of engaging homeless people as volunteers, it also tells us what didn't work and so warns us of the potential pitfalls. I have certainly put it on my recommended reading list and will be passing it on to others.

Angela Ellis Paine
Director, Institute for Volunteering Research

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Designing the bid	2
1.1	Formulating a bid	2
1.2	Organisational ethos and aims	2
1.3	Setting targets	3
1.4	Negotiations with funders	3
1.5	What we learnt about bidding for funding	5
2	Getting the programme off the ground	6
2.1	Employing key staff	6
2.2	Internal buy-in	6
2.3	Identifying needs and opportunities	6
	2.3.1 For The projects	6
	2.3.2 For the volunteers	6
2.4	What we learnt about getting a programme off the ground	7
3	Volunteer recruitment	8
3.1	Key partnerships with external agencies	8
3.2	The impact of volunteers being socially excluded upon volunteer recruitment	9
3.3	Induction events	10
3.4	What we learnt about volunteer recruitment	10
4.	Supporting Volunteers	12
4.1	The impact of volunteers being socially excluded upon their support needs	12
4.2	One to One Support	13
4.3	Informal mentoring	14
4.4	Offering Accredited Qualifications	14
4.5	Setting boundaries	15
4.6	What we learnt about supporting young homeless volunteers	15
5.	Delivering volunteering opportunities	17
5.1	Establishing Partnerships to deliver volunteering opportunities	17
	5.1.1 Internal Partnerships	17
	5.1.2 External partnerships	18
5.2	What type of volunteering opportunities worked best	19
5.3	What we learnt about delivering volunteering opportunities for young homeless people.	20
6.	Moving On	22
6.1	Support for the volunteers after completing the projects.	22
	6.1.1 Support for participants to escape social homelessness	22
	6.1.2 Support for participants to access further volunteering opportunities	22
6.2	What happened to Crisis after the programme had finished?	23
6.3	What we learnt about moving on?	24
7.	Conclusions and recommendations	25

INTRODUCTION

This report is the culmination of a one year v funded programme to provide volunteering opportunities to 52 homeless young people in London and Newcastle. As part of the funding conditions, Crisis was asked to produce a 'good practice guide' to help enable other organisations to follow a similar process.

A brief search of the literature on volunteering among socially excluded groups revealed numerous 'how to' guides to involve different marginalised groups, including for example homeless people, the elderly, those with mental or physical health problems, and ex-offenders. Closer examination of these guides reveals a tendency to lay out a series of prescriptive steps that an organisation should follow. There is little to suggest how or why these steps were arrived at. The assumption is that there is a clear linear path that organisations should follow in setting up a volunteering programme. Our own experience suggests that real life is more complicated and that the specific circumstances of each organisation, volunteer programme and groups of volunteers need more careful attention.

The existing resources provide limited information about the experience of setting up a programme. We felt a resource was needed that is open and honest about this journey – what worked and what didn't, and how the steps in traditional good practice guides are arrived at.

Thus each chapter of this report is structured by telling the reader what we did in the key areas of designing a bid;

getting the programme off the ground; volunteer recruitment; supporting volunteers; delivering volunteering opportunities; and moving on once the programme has finished. The key learning points from each chapter are drawn out and fed into a series of top tips in order to help other organisations and their volunteer managers to develop similar programmes.

This is intended to give the reader a realistic picture. Not everything went to plan for us. Most likely your programmes will also suffer setbacks. The key lesson is to persevere and learn from your experiences. The end results make it all worthwhile.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all those who did so much to make the programme a success. Particularly Helen Bryant and Vicky Williamson, our volunteer co-ordinators. Additionally to all those staff and volunteers at Crisis who gave up their time to help out. Acknowledgements must also go to those at the BBC, Fairbridge, the London buskers, all artists and musicians who performed at the events. Angela Ellis Paine at the Institute for Volunteering Research provided invaluable advice and assistance with the writing of this report. Without the financial support from v this programme could not have taken place.

Finally an immense gratitude is owed to all the young people who volunteered to help out at Crisis as part of the v programme.

1 DESIGNING THE BID

To some extent Crisis's involvement with v came around through chance. v were half way through a two year funding programme and had a small pot of money left over from the 1st round. They were keen to involve more socially excluded and ethnic minority volunteers, and let it be known that they were looking to fund organisations involving these groups for a one year period. Crisis aims to provide opportunities for homeless people to improve their situation and has a long tradition of involving volunteers. We felt that we were well placed to combine these two roles by offering volunteering opportunities to homeless young people.

1.1 Formulating a bid

At an initial meeting between our volunteer manager and other key staff we agreed that a formal bid should be submitted, and that any programme should be based around setting up Crisis Christmas (CC), and also feed into our campaigning voice. However there was only three weeks to plan a programme and formulate a bid.

Following an email discussion that involved all staff, the managers of our Skylight Café and of CC expressed a desire to become directly involved in the programme, and the initial ideas for two projects which could involve homeless young volunteers began to emerge.

1.2 Organisational ethos and aims

To some extent the v programme was ideal for Crisis. There was a close fit between the v aim (to involve socially excluded volunteers) and our own objectives. Crisis began life as a volunteer-led organisation and around 9,000 volunteers are involved each year. A small proportion of our volunteers are drawn from our members who are, or have previously been homeless. However, partly as a consequence of the v programme, member volunteering at Crisis is to be developed significantly over the next 12 months in order to tie in more closely with training for employment.

Despite the close fit between our objectives and those of v, several issues arose from the bid. Firstly, Crisis has traditionally worked with older homeless people (aged 25 and above), whereas the v bid involved working with younger homeless people. This meant that most of the young homeless volunteers had to be recruited from other organisations in the homelessness sector.

Secondly, many of the volunteers who are involved on a year round basis undertake skilled roles. For example they may be involved in fundraising or providing assistance with learning and skills training. Our volunteering programme did not have the capacity to take on any more volunteers. Partly for this reason it was decided that the young volunteers would be engaged in

short term and one off volunteer led projects. The idea of our volunteer manager was that these projects would be developed by the young people as they progressed. It was felt that this approach would help them with accountability and ownership of the projects, while providing a clear goal to each volunteering project. Additionally, offering opportunities to young people to design, plan and organise events was seen as a good way of attracting them to the programme and of providing a meaningful and worthwhile experience.

1.3 Setting targets

As part of the v bid, targets had to be set. Crisis had recently opened a new Skylight learning and activity centre in Newcastle and it was felt that half of the projects should be based there and half in London. We aimed to put on three 'events' in each city, each run by eight to twelve volunteers and supported by a full time volunteer co-ordinator. It was felt that this provided a balance between the number of people needed to put on each event and the difficulties we expected to encounter recruiting young homeless people to the volunteering programme. It was felt that recruiting eight volunteers every three months in each city was a manageable target.

However it proved difficult to meet the target for Newcastle. In part this was because the volunteer co-ordinator role in Newcastle became a part time role (see next section). In addition we had only been open in Newcastle for a short period of time, and were a little naïve in assuming it would be as easy to find young homeless people to take part as it was in London.

1.4 Negotiations with funders

Our initial bid was based on being able to recruit two full time staff to co-ordinate the projects – one in each city. This was rejected by v, who asked us to revise our staffing proposal. A redrafted bid based on 1.5 full time staff was accepted. However, we were not permitted to change the original target of 52 volunteering opportunities.

Thus the Newcastle office was expected to provide 24 volunteering opportunities with only a part time volunteer co-ordinator.

The final contract stated that we would provide 52 volunteering opportunities, through six short-term and one off projects (See Table 1.1). The bid made no allowance for any costs in supporting volunteers in their private lives. At the time it was assumed that the volunteers would be supported by other homeless agencies they were already in contact with. v eventually agreed to a grant of £101,000 to provide 52 volunteering opportunities (equivalent to £1942 per volunteering opportunity).

Table 1.1 Volunteering Opportunities to be provided through the v programme

Project	Description	Length of project	Volunteering opportunities to be created
Skylight Café Awareness Event (London)	<p>The opportunity to plan and deliver an awareness raising event for the Skylight Café, aimed at highlighting the role the café plays in helping homeless people rebuild their social and practical skills in preparation for the world of work. Participants decided to recruit buskers to play at the café</p> <p>Our Skylight Café provides on the job training for ex-homeless people, utilising a social enterprise model</p>	12 weeks	8 Part Time
Crisis Christmas Event (London)	<p>The opportunity to be involved in the planning, setting up and closing down of a Crisis Christmas (CC) centre.</p> <p>CC involves the provision of food, accommodation, medical and advice services to homeless people over the Christmas period.</p>	13 weeks	12 Full Time
Homelessness Awareness Event (London)	<p>An event to raise awareness of hidden homelessness in London. At this stage the project was not fully defined</p> <p>The project evolved into the production of a DVD in partnership with the BBC (See Chapter 5.1)</p>	16 weeks	8 Part Time
Art Exhibition (Newcastle)	<p>Volunteers would arrange a venue and produce an exhibition of art work produced by homeless people in Newcastle. The exhibition was held at the Arts Work Gallery – one of the largest commercial galleries in Europe. Attended by over 2000 people over the month</p>	12 weeks	8 Part Time
Skylight Café Music event (Newcastle)	<p>An event to publicise the opening of Crisis in Newcastle. The original aim was to develop and hold a music event to publicise hidden homelessness in Newcastle. The project evolved into a music event at the Skylight Café, attended by over 100 people (This project combined two projects from the original proposal)</p>	13 weeks	16 Part Time

1.5 What we learnt about bidding for funding

Formulating a bid takes time. We had to prepare a bid in three weeks, and underestimated the additional costs of the programme in terms of providing support to the volunteers outside of their volunteering roles.

In retrospect a firmer approach with funders could have been adopted. We are now clearer that £2,000 is not a lot of money with which to provide a volunteering opportunity to a young homeless person. Indeed, it turned out that the funding from v had to be indirectly supplemented by Crisis own funds, and by existing staff giving up their time to help out.

With hindsight Crisis should have tried to ensure Newcastle did not end up with the same targets as London as we did not have sufficient capacity to meet those targets. Additionally we should have tried to lever in additional funding from other sources to ensure that the non-volunteering related support needs of the young people could be met.

Top Tips:

- Where possible allow plenty of time to design and submit a bid to potential funders
- Talk to people in your finance team, and fully budget for all costs – DON'T be tempted to under cost to secure funding
- Be aware that socially excluded people may have additional support needs, and budget for these
- Ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of the programme, and encouraged to feed into its design

2 GETTING THE PROGRAMME OFF THE GROUND

Within two weeks of the deadline for applications, Crisis had been notified we were successful, and had received the first instalment of funding. Recruitment of staff had to start immediately, and we began laying the foundations for the programme.

2.1 Employing key staff

In terms of staff, two Volunteer Co-ordinators with previous experience in three key areas were required: volunteer management, accreditation delivery (a key part of the bid to v), and knowledge or experience of working with hard to reach young people. The posts were advertised in Society Guardian, and on our own website. The staff appointed were both experienced volunteer co-ordinators, although neither had previously worked with our target 'hard to reach' volunteers.

2.2 Internal buy-in

Following notification that the bid had been successful, discussions took place with the campaigning and media teams as to how to develop the projects in more detail. After having been in post for a month, our London based volunteer co-ordinator presented the programme to a meeting of Crisis managers. There was mixed enthusiasm for the programme. Many staff were concerned about how the volunteers were to be supported. Another member of staff questioned how we would manage to recruit 52 young homeless people to take part given our lack of experience working with this specific age group. It took time before the benefits of the v programme were recognised by all staff and internal buy in was achieved.

2.3 Identifying needs and opportunities

2.3.1 For The projects

Once the volunteer co-ordinators had settled into post, the initial ideas for the events were developed more fully. Our manager of CC suggested that one group of volunteers could take responsibility for setting up one of the CC centres. The manager of our Skylight Café also suggested that a group of volunteers could put on an event to publicise the work of Crisis, and that this should be held in the café. Following meetings with the volunteer co-ordinator and the young volunteers, this project developed into a music event involving Crisis members and London Underground buskers.

It was decided that the other projects should be developed by the volunteers, based on the broad ideas of raising awareness of homelessness, and of the work done by Crisis. There was a conscious decision that the volunteers should have a sense of ownership over the projects, and this would best be developed by giving them as much autonomy as possible.

The Newcastle projects borrowed heavily from the London events, and involved an exhibition of Crisis members' artwork in a local art gallery, and a music event to publicise the opening of Crisis in Newcastle.

2.3.2 For the volunteers

We felt that the benefits to volunteers from taking part in the programme would be increased self esteem, the chance to meet new people, and hopefully a chance to move out of homelessness. In terms of what we were able to offer participants, we identified gaining experience in taking control over a project, team working, an opportunity to gain a recognised accreditation, and possible advice on progression routes.

We initially assumed that volunteer's wider support and progression needs would be met by their host organisations. This was not always the case. As the programme progressed and we built closer bonds with the volunteers, we had to build links with other organisations

to provide opportunities for them to access education, employment, housing or further volunteering opportunities.

2.4 What we learnt about getting a programme off the ground

We felt that recruitment of volunteer co-ordinators went well. More problematic was the lack of 'buy-in' to the programme from existing staff. Some of this was a consequence of the speed with which the programme was launched.

In future we would establish a working group to support the programme, with representatives drawn from different departments within Crisis, particularly those which would be directly affected. At the time we had not anticipated the demands upon existing staff that would be imposed by the programme.

Ideally we would have been able to seamlessly integrate the new volunteers into the organisation within our existing services. We realised that it takes time for new programmes to become

integrated into the wider organisation. However, we felt that placing volunteers into our existing services was unsuitable for a variety of reasons – some required volunteers with teaching experience, others involved relatively menial work that was unlikely to appeal to the younger target group.

The advantages of the fixed term project approach were that it enabled volunteers to see a clear start and finish, and to gain a sense of achievement from completing the projects. Moreover, we felt that we could design short term projects to appeal to younger homeless people. Set against this was the need to consider progression routes for volunteers before they even begin their placements.

Finally we did not pay enough attention at the planning stage to the potential support needs of the young homeless people, and how Crisis could ensure they could be met alongside the provision of volunteering opportunities.

Top Tips:

- Be clear about the roles of key staff
- Ensure that the programme is supported at all levels of the organisation, before you start involving volunteers
- Be aware of volunteers' support needs, in relation to their volunteering and their private lives, and plan how these will be accommodated
- Identify how new groups of volunteers can be seamlessly integrated into the organisation
- Short term and one off volunteering projects can be a good way of attracting socially excluded young people, and will give them a clear goal, but think about what will happen to them once the project is finished

3 VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

As touched upon in section 1.2, Crisis does not usually work with younger homeless people. Therefore, to recruit volunteers to our projects, we needed to develop partnerships with external agencies.

3.1 Key partnerships with external agencies

Our newly appointed volunteer co-ordinator in London compiled a list of over 100 organisations and key personnel working with younger homeless people, through speaking to existing staff and searching local databases of homeless service providers.

These key people were invited to an event to discuss the programme. Only 16 organisations sent representatives, and the event did not run to plan. A number of participants expressed criticism of the programme. Some felt that young homeless people would not be interested in volunteering, and that Crisis would be unable to recruit and retain sufficient homeless young people. There was probably some inter-organisational rivalry at play here, alongside some genuine concerns.

In Newcastle, a similar approach yielded more success. However, we made the mistake of inviting higher level managerial staff at the relevant organisations, rather than those working directly with homeless people. This meant that information about the programme took longer to filter down to potential participants. Indeed, some homeless people from one organisation attempted to join the programme after it had finished.

Over time, the volunteer co-ordinators were able to build more constructive relationships with external partners. As the later projects began, our volunteer co-ordinators both found that recruitment became easier. In part this was because other organisations started to realise some of the benefits to their clients of being involved. At one of the hostels from which participants in one of the earlier projects had been recruited, a key worker put forward some more of his clients after seeing first hands the benefits to earlier participants.

3.2 The impact of volunteers being socially excluded upon volunteer recruitment

Homeless people are one of the hardest groups to motivate to volunteer. As well as being homeless, they may suffer from other problems, including but not limited to, physical and mental health problems, alcohol and /or substance abuse, long term unemployment and low levels of educational attainment, which all have an impact on their self esteem. These problems are of course exacerbated by not having a permanent roof over their heads.

Indeed, persuading young homeless people that engaging in the programme could be beneficial to them was difficult. Many homeless people live a day to day existence and their situation makes it difficult for them to plan ahead. Others found it difficult to trust people they had never met before. This meant it was important that partnerships with their key workers were in place. More traditional forms of volunteer recruitment were never going to work.

In both Newcastle and London, our volunteer co-ordinators persevered, and over time built up sufficient volunteer numbers to enable the projects to move forward. As the overall programme progressed, the volunteer co-ordinators became aware of the best places to recruit homeless volunteers. Having got to know homeless people involved in the earlier projects, the co-ordinators discovered more about the day centres where they spent their time, and actively targeted them.

Perhaps most significantly, somebody who attended the first project in London was recruited to the later projects as an unpaid volunteer support worker. This person's homeless background enabled him to recruit his own friends to the later projects. He was also able to recruit participants from local day centres more easily, as a consequence of his greater credibility with homeless people.

Art Exhibition Project

In Newcastle, our volunteer co-ordinator toured local homeless service providers trying to encourage young homeless people to volunteer. Initially she was pleasantly surprised by the number of people who turned up to the sessions, and the high proportion of these who agreed to take part. She then invited interested people to a day out bowling. While this was well attended, none of those who went bowling eventually took part in the p\n the recruitment drive and the projects commencing. This was exacerbated by the social exclusion faced by the client group. Some of the reasons for not attending the projects included drug or alcohol relapse and imprisonment. Other people lost interest for whatever reason.

3.3 Induction events

At the first project run from London, our volunteer co-ordinator in London held a series of interviews, with homeless people given specific time slots at which to attend. This did not work well, as their time keeping was rather lax, and everybody turned up at the same time leading to chaos in the building. For the next project, we learnt from her earlier experience, and tried to design the inductions within a format that would appeal to the young people.

Crisis Christmas Project

Crisis held an open day beginning with a session explaining the project and the opportunity to gain accreditation. This was followed by a clip from the film 'The Matrix'. The clip was designed to illustrate that what the volunteers contributed to the project would determine what they got out of it. The afternoon session involved the volunteers having one to one sessions with the volunteer co-ordinator while the others watched the rest of the film. One of the participants from the earlier project took on a role as volunteer support worker, and was able to look after the group while the one to one sessions took place.

Rather than inducting people via a (more) formal interview process, we found that a group induction structured around an event that is of interest to young people, and is of relevance to their participation, works better.

3.4 What we learnt about volunteer recruitment

Over the course of the v programme, we learnt the importance of developing partnerships with organisations working directly with our client group, in this case young homeless people. However, it takes time to build the levels of trust necessary for partnerships to develop effectively. Sometimes these partnerships may already exist, often at a higher level in the organisational hierarchy. However, we would suggest that partnerships between staff working directly with homeless people were key to the successful recruitment of volunteers.

One important lesson we learnt, and applied to the later projects, was to recruit around four times as many people as were actually needed for a project. We expected to lose half of these before the projects started, and many more would drop out over the course of the project. While it is relatively easy to attract young homeless people to attend an event and then get them interested in the idea of volunteering, it is more difficult to get them to attend on a regular basis.

In terms of outlining the benefits to participants, we found that young homeless people welcomed the chance to mix with similar people and make new friends. They also welcomed the opportunity to take an active role in designing their own projects, and were attracted by the opportunity to have some control over these projects. Some, though not all, welcomed the chance to gain accreditation. We would not recommend stressing volunteering as a potential escape route from social exclusion. Although for some participants the programme did play a part in their longer term progression, it is unfair to promise something that can't always be delivered.

Finally, once participants have signed up to the projects, it is important to minimise any delay before the project starts.

Top Tips:

- Socially excluded people tend to be harder to recruit than ‘traditional volunteers’. It is important to be able to demonstrate the benefit to the individual concerned, but be careful not to over promise
- One way to ‘find’ socially excluded volunteers is to form partnerships with organisations working with the target group. Developing trust between organisations takes time. However, time is not always available, particularly within short term funded projects
- Involving existing volunteers from a similar background to help out makes recruitment easier. They are also able to offer a positive example of what can be achieved from participating
- Once a programme involving socially excluded volunteers is successfully underway, it is likely that word of mouth will encourage further participation. Achieving this snowball effect takes time and effort
- Some socially excluded people may be less likely to complete a volunteering opportunity. Around half of those who signed up to volunteer failed to attend their first session
- Planning for a high drop out rate could involve recruiting extra volunteers to ensure the programme is successful
- A careful screening approach aimed at ensuring that participants are aware of what they want to achieve and the effort they will need to commit to the project could reduce the drop-out rate
- Induction events need to be interesting and relevant. Group inductions worked better than one to one sessions. Once people realise that they are able to make friends with people from similar backgrounds they will be keen to stay involved

4 SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS

Chapter Three suggested that one reason for other organisations reluctance to refer clients to Crisis's v programme was a concern that homeless young people would not receive appropriate support. To some extent this was justified. Neither of the volunteer co-ordinators recruited to run the programme had experience working with homeless people. However, Crisis as an organisation has a long tradition of working with, and supporting, homeless people. This experience was essential as the volunteer programme became established, and increasing numbers of young people with high support needs became involved. Nonetheless, it took time to develop the appropriate support structures for the volunteers.

4.1 The impact of volunteers being socially excluded upon their support needs

Volunteers, like paid staff, have support needs. These might normally include training and supervision, but working with volunteers from a socially excluded background brings additional support needs and may challenge conventional ways of managing volunteers.

Crisis Christmas Project

The CC project involved a team of homeless volunteers designing and setting up one of the centres used to accommodate homeless people over the Christmas period. CC has been established for 37 years. It is a volunteer led event, but this was the first time that one of the centres had been set up by young homeless people.

The volunteers on this project were deliberately drawn from those who slept rough. This was intended to directly engage rough sleepers in developing the services they received. As the project took place in the winter months, many of the volunteers had not been able to sleep during the night, and so missed the sessions. Those that did turn up were often exhausted. As the project involved using tools, we had to prevent volunteers using them while overly tired.

In addition to lack of sleep, many of the volunteers were hungry, having not had any breakfast. Partly to encourage people to turn up on time, but more importantly to ensure people did not go hungry, a cooked meal was prepared for all volunteers once they arrived.

The CC project highlighted the acute nature of many rough sleepers' (our volunteers') support needs. Before Crisis could even begin to support them as volunteers, we had to help them as people. In London, the volunteer co-ordinator was involved in providing food and temporary spaces to sleep during the day for the young people, as well as the more traditional travel expenses. Without these, it was impossible for many of the young people to be expected to progress through the project.

As discussed in Chapter Three, a common theme running through each of the projects was a relatively high drop out rate. Around 60% of the volunteers who made it past the induction stage would fail to complete the projects. This was often a consequence of the volunteers' social exclusion. Sometimes the reasons for dropping out were positive, that is the volunteers progressed into full time employment or education. Other people dropped out because they had been sent to prison or admitted to hospital. Some simply decided that the project was not for them. Sadly, on a couple of occasions, participants had to be asked to leave the projects as their behaviour was impacting adversely upon the rest of the group.

It is important to emphasise that these types of project will suffer from high drop out rates due to the nature of the client group. It is equally true that no matter how important the project appears to the volunteer co-ordinator or the project funder, for the volunteers themselves finding housing and employment is likely to be a higher priority. Other people may not yet be ready to commit to a longer term programme. Sometimes a person's substance abuse or health problems will mean that further participation is not viable. Where possible the recruitment stage should focus on identifying those individuals who are ready to commit to a longer term programme.

4.2 One to One Support

Our bid to v stipulated that the volunteers would receive regular one to one supervision meetings. However, the complexity of the volunteers support needs meant that the volunteer co-ordinators did not have sufficient time or expertise to give all of them individual supervision and offer wider support. Often volunteers wider support needs were not being met by the homeless organisations from where we recruited them. We had to make a distinction between support to help people in their volunteering roles, and wider support relating to their social exclusion.

Support for people to help them fulfil their volunteering roles was provided, although often on a group basis due to time constraints. This was far from an ideal situation. Although the volunteer co-ordinators' organisational responsibility was to ensure the volunteering projects ran smoothly, they recognised that this could not be achieved if volunteers had more pressing issues to cope with such as having nowhere to sleep, or no money for food. Other volunteers had mental health or substance misuse issues which impacted adversely on the group dynamics.

Where possible, our volunteer co-ordinators referred the volunteers onto other departments within Crisis, or other organisations for help. However, our co-ordinators had built up a bond with the young volunteers that enabled them to talk freely. Many wouldn't accept help from more formal service providers.

Partly in recognition of this, the volunteer co-ordinator turned to other staff within Crisis, for assistance. Without this backup it would have been very difficult.

4.3 Informal mentoring

Many of the young people taking part in the volunteering programme were not used to people taking an interest in them. As our volunteer co-ordinators got to know the participants as individuals, they began to uncover their life stories and support needs. They turned to fellow members of staff at Crisis for advice. As a consequence, other members of staff were introduced to the volunteers and got to know them. Over time a number of informal mentoring relationships developed.

Skylight Café Awareness Event

One of our volunteers was having problems with the criminal justice system. He had missed a court appearance, and rather than face up to the problems, he was turning to alcohol and drugs in an order to blank them out. One of our paid staff showed an interest in the volunteer, and they met up regularly for a coffee and a chat. This took some of the pressure away from our volunteer co-ordinator. She was able to provide support for his volunteering, while the informal mentoring arrangements helped with his life outside of the project. Over time the value of these informal mentoring relationships was recognised, and new ones were actively developed.

The informal mentoring aspect has now been developed more formally within Crisis, in order that more service user volunteers can be supported outside of their volunteering.

4.4 Offering Accredited Qualifications

All the participants were offered the opportunity to gain ASDAN accredited qualifications in community volunteering. In part this made things more difficult for the volunteer co-ordinators. Most of the participants had no educational qualifications and had left school early. In London our volunteer co-ordinator had little experience in 'teaching' socially excluded young people, and found that many of the participants on the early projects refused to do their course work.

In contrast to London, in Newcastle the accreditation aspect was working well. Our volunteer co-ordinator there came from a teaching and youth work background, and was experienced in working with less motivated groups. The two volunteer co-ordinators discussed their problems, and shared their knowledge and experience.

Homelessness Awareness Project London

For the final project, the volunteer co-ordinator in London adapted her teaching style, and started using games and role play to get the volunteers to think about their work. She (and the young people) discovered that teaching (and learning) could be fun. The young people began discussing the accreditation outside of the sessions, and a much higher proportion completed the course than in the earlier projects. Time spent on the accreditation side of things remained an issue, however.

Although providing the opportunity to gain a qualification made things difficult for the staff, it made a huge difference to the people who passed. At the awards ceremony for young people passing their accreditation, one participant was crying with joy as she remarked that it was the only certificate she had ever received.

4.5 Setting boundaries

As the young people became more integrated into Crisis, through informal mentoring and through the volunteering programme, they developed personal bonds with members of staff. The volunteer co-ordinators were showing a genuine interest in how they were progressing and they began to feel good about themselves. Many of the volunteers had never developed positive adult relationships before. Most of their friends were also homeless. The few non-homeless people they were in contact with tended to be in a position of authority, for example hostel staff or probation workers. Our volunteer co-ordinators had tried to develop a partnership approach to working with the young people based on respect rather than authority. As a consequence, many of the young volunteers began to feel they had made friends they could rely upon.

However, this was not without problems. One of our volunteer co-ordinators made the (understandable) mistake of providing her mobile phone number to one of the young people who was facing particular problems. This led to numerous late night telephone calls, to the extent that our co-ordinator began to feel there was no distinction between her work and private lives. Following on from this, she realised that no matter how much she wanted to help the volunteers, she would be unable to do so 24 hours a day. Instead all volunteers were politely but firmly told of the need for boundaries, and that outside of the project time, the co-ordinator would not be available. All volunteers were provided with a booklet that explained who they could call for help in a variety of circumstances. This does, however, highlight the need to ensure that staff who are responsible for volunteers also need to be supported and trained.

4.6 What we learnt about supporting young homeless volunteers

This chapter has highlighted a number of issues around support needs, informal mentoring and the need to set clear boundaries when working with homeless volunteers. The general theme that holds these issues together is the need to support socially excluded volunteers in both their volunteering roles, and with their wider support needs. While ideally other volunteer involving organisations would be able to rely on other agencies to look after their homeless volunteers day to day needs, the reality is that many homeless people are disengaged from support agencies. Their volunteering may be the first time they have meaningfully engaged with non-homeless people for a long time. Sometimes the young homeless people recruited to our projects were simply not ready to volunteer. This was particularly the case for those living more chaotic lifestyles. However it is not always easy to work out who is and isn't ready at an induction stage. On balance we found it preferable to recruit people even when we thought they wouldn't complete the project. However, there were two occasions where people's challenging behaviour disrupted the work of other volunteers to the extent we asked them to leave.

There is a tendency for strong bonds to develop between the volunteers and the co-ordinator. These bonds need to be managed carefully, and with clear boundaries. However, the relationship between co-ordinator and volunteer may also offer an opportunity to engage the homeless volunteers with other people / organisations that can help them. In this sense, volunteering opportunities can be seen as a carrot with which to engage homeless people who might otherwise remain marginalised from society.

Top Tips:

- Before involving socially excluded volunteers be aware of all their potential support needs, and ensure that you can meet them
- Some support needs can be provided through mentoring relationships with existing staff. If this is to be undertaken during work time there will be a cost to the organisation
- Other support needs may be related to basic subsistence. If an organisation is expecting economically deprived people to volunteer for them, they should provide a hot meal and cover their expenses
- Many (but not all) young homeless people welcome the chance to gain a certificate to demonstrate their achievements. However, ensure that any accreditation offered is the most appropriate, and be aware of the extra demands on staff time. Consider budgeting for additional staff time/capacity focusing solely on the accreditation
- For some socially excluded people, becoming involved as a volunteer may represent the first time somebody has taken an interest in them. Be clear about boundaries, and the distinction between work and non-work time. This is difficult to do, but not doing so can end up causing pain and trouble (usually to the volunteer) in the long run
- Despite all the hard work, it is likely that around 60% of the volunteers will fail to complete a placement. Once the initial 'buzz' has worn off, people's enthusiasm will begin to wane. This can be discouraging for organisers, so be prepared!
- Support the supporters: ensure that those who are responsible for supporting volunteers are in turn themselves well supported and (if necessary) trained

5 DELIVERING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The v programme was structured as five one-off projects, all directly relevant to the Crisis aims of raising awareness of homelessness, and providing homeless people with opportunities to progress.

The rationale behind one-off projects was that it would give participants an end product, demonstrating their achievements to themselves and the wider world. The projects were run one after another, and simultaneously in London and Newcastle. This worked well, particularly for the volunteers. However, it would not have been financially viable to keep doing this without external funding.

5.1 Establishing Partnerships to deliver volunteering opportunities

To deliver the different projects, the volunteer co-ordinators had to develop various partnerships. These partnerships operated both within Crisis at an inter-departmental level, and externally – with other organisations.

5.1.1 Internal Partnerships

The first (Crisis Christmas) project in London took place before the v programme had become fully integrated into Crisis. As a result there was a lack of clarity about the purpose of the project in other organisational departments.

The Crisis Christmas Project

The CC project was planned in partnership with a team of architects, who gave their time and expertise free of charge at weekends. Unfortunately, during the week, Crisis' regular volunteers inadvertently took advantage of the homeless volunteers by getting them to help with menial tasks such as cleaning and deliveries which distracted them from their main roles. The homeless young people soon came to resent this, and matters soon came to a head. Some of the homeless volunteers left the project.

Thus while on the one hand the young homeless people were supposed to be designing the layout of the centre – i.e. a role they saw as having responsibility – a breakdown in communications led to them being used in more menial roles. If other departments had a better understanding of the v programme this may not have occurred.

The volunteer co-ordinators learnt from this, and future projects were more closely integrated into the organisational ethos.

Skylight Café Music Project

In Newcastle the whole staff team were involved in the Skylight Café Music project. The café staff were involved in all the meetings with the volunteers and co-ordinator. At the event itself – a series of performances by local musicians to officially open the café – the young homeless people held a raffle to raise money for Crisis. One of the project workers used her contacts to obtain a signed rugby ball from the local rugby team. At the event, the project workers sold the raffle tickets while the young people took on organisational roles. By all mucking in together, the volunteers felt part of a wider team.

Crisis operates a smaller team of staff in Newcastle, and this no doubt facilitates sharing information and developing partnerships. Nonetheless, other organisations involved in similar programmes should look into ensuring that the whole organisation is aware of the aims of the programme. Rather than being additional, any programme needs to be integral to the organisation. Ideally it should be driven forward by somebody with the power to force things through when necessary.

5.1.2 External partnerships

Delivering the v projects also necessitated building partnerships with external organisations. Some of these partnerships were alluded to earlier when discussing recruitment strategies. Other partnerships also needed to be built up to help deliver volunteering opportunities.

Some of the more successful partnerships lay with organisations outside the homelessness field. For example, the Homelessness Awareness Project in London ended up being a partnership initiative with the BBC and students at a local college.

Homelessness Awareness Project

Our London based volunteer co-ordinator used her personal contacts to encourage drama students and young homeless people to come together to produce a play highlighting issues around homelessness. She felt that this would broaden students' minds, and help the young homeless people recognise that higher education was not a totally separate world to the one they inhabited.

This coincided with the BBC wanting to make a film about homelessness. Crisis saw the opportunity to combine this with the Homelessness Awareness project. Following a four week period working alongside the drama students to develop potential ideas and storylines for the film, the volunteers went to White City to meet the film crew and present their ideas. This led to a week filming 'Behind Closed Doors'.

Of course external partnerships need to be developed carefully. Sometimes there are likely to be power imbalances. During the Homelessness Awareness project, whilst Crisis paid the majority of costs, the timing and location of filming were in the control of the BBC. The BBC was also keen to

retain copyright of the final product, whilst the volunteers hoped to have been able to send it to schools and colleges to raise awareness of homelessness (the original aim of the project).

Moreover, some of the volunteers were also upset at the lack of control they felt they had over the project. The project had begun life as a play to put on in schools and colleges. While the volunteers were delighted to be able to work with the BBC, some felt that the partnership had taken away their control over the project.

Our volunteer co-ordinator had watched events unfold, and made a judgment that the benefits to the volunteers of being able to work with the BBC outweighed the negatives relating to a loss of autonomy. The benefits of this decision became apparent at the launch of the film in London, and during discussions with volunteers to evaluate the projects when one of the volunteers said:

“The BBC lot were really friendly. It was a once in a lifetime experience and I’m grateful for the opportunity. It has given me the chance to do something I could never have done in my life. It’s a dream to be an actor.”

5.2 What type of volunteering opportunities worked best

We held an evaluation event bringing together volunteers from the different projects. Volunteers who had been placed on the Homelessness Awareness project in London were particularly pleased with their experiences. Our volunteer co-ordinator in London also felt that this project had worked best. Retention levels for volunteers, and attendance records were highest for this project. From the volunteers’ perspective, outcomes were also more positive – a higher proportion had moved into paid employment or full time education, or continued with their volunteering with other organisations (See Table 6.1). To some extent this was attributable to a more careful screening and selection process for those wanting to join the project; other factors also played a role.

One factor identified by our volunteer co-ordinator for this project’s success was that this time participants were living in hostels rather than sleeping rough. While more settled housing circumstances were undoubtedly a contributory factor, the volunteer co-ordinator perhaps did not recognise her own vital role in making the project a success, particularly in developing external partnerships. Whereas the previous projects had revolved around partnerships with those working in the homelessness sector, this project introduced many of volunteers to a more diverse outside world. Being able to tell their story via the BBC made the young people feel that their skills were valued.

Crisis learnt lessons from what had not worked well in earlier projects, and acted upon this learning. One of the previous volunteers from an earlier project acted as a support worker. He was able to assist with the accreditation aspect of the project. Internal partnerships had been developed which meant that the programme had become more fully integrated into the organisational ethos. Externally, partnerships had been developed with organisations to provide opportunities for the volunteers once the project had finished. In short, our learning from earlier projects came to fruition in this project, helping to make it a real success.

5.3 What we learnt about delivering volunteering opportunities for young homeless people.

Ideally it would have been possible to place the volunteers within existing Crisis services. Running the v programme as a series of new projects led to some additional costs. It also meant that the programme was initially seen by other staff and volunteers as additional, rather than central to Crisis organisational aims and ethos. However, there were advantages to the one off project based approach. The volunteers felt a sense of ownership of the projects. Being able to see an end point and a final product helped to keep them motivated, and gave them something to be proud of achieving.

Over time the v programme became more integrated into Crisis's organisational goals and ethos. This did not happen naturally. It required hard work and commitment from the volunteer co-ordinators and staff across the organisation. This was only able to happen once the whole organisation was aware of the v projects and their alignment with Crisis's organisational goals.

Delivering short term and one off volunteering opportunities for homeless young people necessitated partnership building with external organisations. These partnerships took time to develop. Nonetheless they proved particularly valuable when they provided opportunities for homeless people to volunteer in new environments such as with the BBC. This made volunteers feel that they were valued for their skills as well as their time, rather than defined solely by their homelessness.

One of the factors that helped in delivering volunteering opportunities in the later projects was having volunteers with experience of social exclusion acting in co-ordinator type roles. This helped bridge the gap between the (paid) volunteer co-ordinators and the homeless volunteers.

Top Tips:

- Developing new partnerships was essential for the success of projects like ours, but they take time and effort
- Where possible make use of, and build upon, existing partnerships or links you have with other organisations
- Alternatively make use of the contacts of colleagues working in your organisation.
- Partnerships also need to be built internally, between different departments or staff members. It helps if the whole organisation is aware of your programme, and the ethos behind it
- Having somebody at a senior level driving through the programme helps to ensure organisational buy-in
- Volunteering opportunities work best when people feel valued for their skills as well as their time
- Offering accreditation can be important for some people. However, be aware of the extra demands on staff time. Consider budgeting for additional staff time to focus solely on the accreditation
- Being able to see an end product is important in short term projects for volunteers
- It may be easier for young people if they can see somebody involved in the project who has experience of social exclusion and of being involved in a similar project

6 MOVING ON

Once the individual projects and the programme as a whole finished, life carried on for Crisis as the host organisation, but what about the legacy left by the programme? This chapter examines what happened to the participants and Crisis as an organisation.

6.1 Support for the volunteers after completing the projects.

We expected some participants to move into paid employment, education, and/or more secure accommodation. However we had not made any specific plans to ensure this was possible, and had to develop the support package offered as the programme developed. From v's perspective, the programme aimed to encourage people into a lifetime of volunteering through initial engagement in a one off project. Our role then was twofold: firstly we wanted to ensure that as homeless people, volunteers had the best possible opportunities to escape their social exclusion. Secondly, we wanted to ensure that participants were able to access further volunteering opportunities.

6.1.1 Support for participants to escape social homelessness

All the participants in the projects were able to continue using Crisis services as members upon finishing. Two of those staff who had developed informal mentoring relationships with volunteers continued with these after the volunteering projects ended.

Table 6.1 shows the known outcomes of the programme. Many participants escaped homelessness and unemployment while taking part in the volunteering programme. For example, after successfully completing the ASDAN accreditation, one volunteer developed a taste for learning and has begun attending college. In total seven volunteers

took up learning and educational opportunities. Others have been re-housed. Seven volunteers have started full time jobs. According to one volunteer:

"Before I started the project I was sitting at home, doing nothing, always in bed until two, three in the afternoon. But since coming here, knowing that I have to get up in order to get here, it's made me realise that I actually have to do it and I can't sit on my ass. Before I started this project I hadn't worked for over a year and a half. A lot of people won't employ you if you're homeless. The job I have now I found on my own, but Crisis has helped me with my confidence towards other people. Coming here I had to speak to people. It has told me that if I talk to people it's much better than sitting at home and doing nothing."

6.1.2 Support for participants to access further volunteering opportunities

While Crisis is well-equipped to help people escape homelessness, our role in helping people progress onto new volunteering opportunities was a new one.

Over the course of the programme we developed close links with other volunteer-involving organisations. After the end of the first project, Crisis held an event in London, with guest speakers from intermediary volunteer involving organisations. In total, ten of the people who completed the volunteering projects in London were supported into further volunteering opportunities. Five of these continued to volunteer within Crisis, while five were helped to access volunteering opportunities with other organisations. In particular, a partnership with Fairbridge was a great success, and two of our volunteers are currently preparing to travel to Africa to help on projects there.

When gathering the data for this section of the report, it became apparent that our monitoring and evaluation processes were of limited use. We collected the data asked for by v. However, data on outcomes for participants had to be pieced

together from interviews with volunteers and key staff. At Crisis we are currently implementing a new client centred monitoring and evaluation system that will attempt to track all our homeless members as they progress through our volunteering programme.

6.2 What happened to Crisis after the programme had finished?

In one sense, the completion of any particular funded programme generally represents closure to the host organisation. The volunteer co-ordinators were on temporary contracts, and their experience has helped them to move onto higher level

positions elsewhere. However, there are wider learning issues for the organisation. We wanted to capture the knowledge gained by the volunteer co-ordinators from the programme, and feed any lessons into future development of the organisation. Hence this report!

As part of the information gathering for this exercise, we held an evaluation event with those who volunteered for the different projects. Participants were interviewed individually, and within a group setting. Both volunteer co-ordinators produced detailed notes to help with the evaluation process, and to help retain their knowledge within the organisation.

Table 6.1: Known outcomes from the v programme¹

Project	Volunteering Opportunities provided	Volunteers completing project	Found employment	Education	Further Volunteering
Skylight Café Awareness Event (London)	12	4	3 (One of whom didn't complete the programme)	2 2	2 (The same two people went into further education and continued to volunteer)
Crisis Christmas Event (London)	12	4	1	4 (One of whom didn't complete the programme)	2 (Both also went into further education)
Homelessness Awareness Event (London)	14	10	3	1	6
Art Exhibition (Newcastle)	12	3	Not known	Not known	Not known
Skylight Café Music event (Newcastle)	13	4	Not known	Not known	Not known
Total	63	25	7	7	10

1. For most of those people not completing the project, we know little about what happened to them.

They were then interviewed on key points arising from these notes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. This report draws together some of the learning to help ourselves progress, and (we hope) to help others undertaking a similar programme. Much of this learning has already been put into place within Crisis, particularly within our wider member volunteering services.

6.3 What we learnt about moving on?

All homeless users of Crisis Skylight services are offered an ongoing package of support, and stay within the organisation until they feel ready to progress into education or employment. Most homeless people volunteering within Crisis are usually Skylight service users before they become volunteers. Thus for them a package of support for their wider needs is already in place.

For those homeless people coming from outside of Crisis, and taking up short term and one off volunteering opportunities through the v programme, this support package was not initially in place. We quickly learnt that progression routes had to be identified before volunteers started the projects. This entailed opening up Crisis's services to younger homeless people, and formalising the mentoring partnerships outlined in section 4.3.

The informal mentoring that developed over the course of the programme has now been developed more fully within Crisis. As well as having a dedicated volunteer co-ordinator, our socially excluded volunteers are all offered the chance to be mentored by a member of staff or established volunteer.

Additionally we learnt the value of developing partnerships with other organisations to deliver opportunities for those moving on from homelessness. These proved particularly valuable for those participants who wanted to continue with their volunteering.

Section 5.2 suggested that homeless volunteers gained particular value from the opportunity to participate alongside people from organisations outside the homeless sector. This has been formalised within our member volunteering services. Now homeless people can take part in a structured programme involving three months volunteering within the familiar environment of Crisis. This is followed by three months taking part in a work placement with a partner organisation outside the homelessness sector.

Over the course of the v programme, the various partnerships (internal and external) came together. Over time the v programme and the young volunteers became seen as central to Crisis ethos and mission. Some of the v participants continued to volunteer at Crisis after the projects finished, and the lessons from v have fed back into our wider volunteering services. All service user volunteers now receive regular one to one supervision meetings with a volunteer manager or co-ordinator. All of them are also able to access support within Crisis relating to their housing, education and employment needs, and they all have a dedicated support worker to facilitate this.

Top Tips:

- It is important to be clear about what you are able to offer participants to help them move on from social exclusion once they have finished their volunteering
- Develop partnerships with other organisations who may be better placed to offer progression routes appropriate to the needs of the particular client group
- Monitor and evaluate your volunteering programme. This should include regular monitoring of participants, but also measures of wider outcomes

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Delivering the v programme was at times difficult. For those managing the programme who were not used to dealing with homeless volunteers, these difficulties were counterbalanced by a sense of reward when things did go well. For them, the key lessons for other organisations to learn from are that:

- Projects need as much time as possible devoted to the **planning** stages
- Organisations should only take on what fits within their **organisational aims and ethos**
- It takes **buy-in and partnerships** (both within the organisation, and from partner organisations)
- It takes **time**
- Integrating socially excluded volunteers into an organisation takes **commitment** – from new and existing volunteers, paid staff and the organisation
- It takes **money**
- It takes **patience**
- **However, it's worth it**

If just one person permanently escapes homelessness as a consequence of the v programme, this investment of £101,000 has been worthwhile. According to figures from the Department of Communities and Local Government, the cost to the state of supporting a homeless person for one year is about £80,000.²

We know that over half the people recruited to the v programme failed to complete it. We also know that many of the young people who did complete the programme are still homeless. However, around half of those who completed the programme have achieved a positive outcome, whether moving into their own home, finding a permanent job, moving into education or accessing further volunteering opportunities. We cannot attribute all these positive outcomes to the v programme. Equally, however, we know that without the projects, many of these young people would not have had the chance to escape homelessness. We cannot say for certain, but having witnessed the strength of character of the

2. Ashton, T and Turl, D. 2008. Research into the financial benefits of the Supporting People Programme. London: Communities and Local Government.

young homeless volunteers, and watched their talents develop, we are confident that many of them will turn their lives around.

Examining outcomes purely on an economic basis ignores the wider benefits to Crisis from involving young homeless people. Through the different projects, Crisis was able to draw attention to its work to a much wider audience, in both London and Newcastle; to set up one of the Crisis Christmas centres; to produce a DVD that aims to warn other young people about the dangers of homelessness; and showcase the work of homeless people in an Art gallery. While the different projects often proved challenging, the organisation is much stronger through having being involved.

An economic evaluation also ignores the wider benefits to the volunteers. Many of the young people who became involved in volunteering through the v programme would not normally have considered helping others when their own needs were so acute. Talking to many of the volunteers, we found that participating in the projects and helping others had boosted their own self esteem and helped them recognise their own abilities. Volunteering is not just for the better off. It can also offer a chance for socially excluded groups to participate and help shape their own communities.

Crisis

66 Commercial Street
London E1 6LT
Telephone: 0844 251 0111
Fax: 0844 251 0110

Crisis Skylight Newcastle

City House
1-3 City Road
Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 2AF
Telephone: 0191 222 0622

www.crisis.org.uk

Crisis UK (trading as Crisis)
Registered Charity Number: 1082947
Company Number: 4024938

© Crisis 2008