

Paper Number: PA051032

Paper Title: Linking Theory to Practice: The Challenges of Recruiting & Managing Disabled Volunteers.

Author(s):

Jane Andrews, Aston University, Birmingham, UK

Summary of Research

By drawing upon data collected as part of an empirical study analysing the experiences of physically disabled volunteers, this paper focuses on the distinct challenges associated with recruiting and managing disabled volunteers within the UK not-for-profit sector. It will contribute to an understanding of the challenges associated with the management of disabled volunteers and will show how knowledge gained during the course of academic study may be applied by practitioners working within the not-for-profit sector. Thus in focusing attention upon the management of disabled volunteers this paper adds to academic and practitioner knowledge in both the not-for-profit and disability fields

Description

Introduction:

By drawing upon data collected as part of an empirical study analysing the experiences of physically disabled volunteers, this paper focuses on the distinct challenges associated with recruiting and managing disabled volunteers within the not-for-profit sector of the UK. More specifically, the paper draws attention to 5 separate influences impacting upon the experiences of disabled volunteers and suggests how such influences may result in both functional and attitudinal difficulties for disabled volunteers. Furthermore, in suggesting various actions that volunteer managers may take in order to alleviate such difficulties, the paper offers practical advice for those practitioners responsible for volunteer management and recruitment.

It is envisaged that this paper will encourage practitioners involved with volunteer management to consider how the distinctiveness and diversity of their organisations might be enriched by the recruitment of disabled volunteers. It is also hoped that the paper will also promote further academic study in this area.

Background:

Following grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss: 1968), fifty people volunteering and working within a total of 30 not-for-profit and 9 public sector organisations and agencies were interviewed. Forty-seven of the study participants were wheelchair users who volunteered; of these twenty-six were engaged in managerial or governance roles. The interviews, which were semi-structured in nature focused on volunteering and voluntarism; disability and volunteering; and the management of volunteers and disability not-for-profit organisations.

The Literature:

There exists a reputable body of literature pertaining to voluntarism and volunteering within both the UK and the USA. Such literature ranges from analyses of volunteering by specific groups of people (Brudney & Gazeley: 2002, Handy & Narasimhan: 2004, Steinberg et al: 2001), to studies analysing volunteer motivation (Clary & Snyder: 1991, Davis Smith: 1992, Wardell et al: 2000), and volunteering activities (Brudney: 2001, Cnaan et al: 1996, Gaskin & Davis Smith: 1995). Whilst some literature draws attention to issues surrounding volunteer management, (Brudney: 1990, Brudney & Kellough: 2002, Mason: 1996), there exists a substantial gap in knowledge regarding the management of disabled volunteers.

This paper draws attention to the unique and diverse range of issues faced both by disabled volunteers and those responsible for their management. It will contribute to an understanding of the distinct and varied challenges associated with the management of disabled volunteers and will show how knowledge gained during the course of academic study may be applied by practitioners working within

the not-for-profit sector. Thus in focusing attention upon the management of disabled volunteers this paper adds to academic and practitioner knowledge in both the not-for-profit and disability fields.

Influences on the Volunteers' Experiences:

During the course of the study five distinctive influences upon the volunteers' experiences were identified:

1. Biomedical-social factors; dependant upon the manner in which disability is conceptualised; incorporating medically and socially constructed perspectives:
2. Personal matters; mainly relating to health and finance:
3. Organisational issues; reflecting organisational culture, policies & procedures:
4. Social and public policy; including issues surrounding welfare benefits and policies relating to healthcare provision:
5. Wider social issues; shaped by socially constructed attitudes towards race and gender, as well as other socially and economically based determinants.

The main body of the paper draws attention as to how such influences may result in various practical and attitudinal difficulties for disabled volunteers and should thus be considered by those responsible for volunteer recruitment and management.

The Recruitment of Disabled Volunteers:

In considering each of the above influences consecutively this section of the paper provides detailed suggestions pertaining to the recruitment of disabled volunteers. It suggests how volunteer managers might attract more disabled volunteers and offers practical advice regarding what actions need to be taken both prior to, and during, the recruitment process. Issues discussed range from matters relating to physical access and transportation to the payment of out-of-pocket expenses. The need for volunteer managers to take account of individual disability related needs before placing a disabled volunteer within a particular role is also raised. Furthermore, it is suggested that when recruiting disabled volunteers, it is important for volunteer managers to adopt a non-bureaucratic approach and fit the voluntary post to the volunteer (and not the other way around).

The Management of Disabled Volunteers:

In focusing upon the management of disabled volunteers, this section of the paper shows how the 5 influences identified in earlier paragraphs impact upon issues surrounding organisational administration and governance. It draws attention to various practical and attitudinal problems faced by disabled volunteers during the course of volunteering and suggests practical methods that volunteer managers may take in order to alleviate such difficulties. In addition to this the paper highlights the important role played by Disability Awareness Training in combating various misconceptions regarding disability. It proposes that such training should be made available to all staff and volunteers including those living with physical and mental disabilities.

Conclusion:

The conclusion draws together recommendations made pertaining to the recruitment and management of disabled volunteers. It notes how some of the universal problems faced by disabled volunteers and those responsible for their management cannot be addressed at organisational level – but require legislative action by government to address wider socially constructed attitudinal and practical difficulties. The paper concludes by noting that the disabled population form a largely untapped and unrecognised pool of volunteer labour; moreover when given the opportunity disabled volunteers can and do represent a valuable resource to their organisations, adding both diversity and richness to the third-sector as a whole.

References:

Brudney J.L. (1990). *Fostering Volunteer Programs in the Public Sector*. San Francisco.

Brudney J.L. (2001). Voluntarism. In Ott J.S. (ed). *Understanding Nonprofit Organizations: Governance,*

Leadership and Management. Oxford. Westview Press.

Brudney J.L. & Gazeley B. (2002). Testing the Conventional Wisdom Regarding Volunteer Programs: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Service Corps of Retired Executives and the U.S. Small Business Administration. *Nonprofit & Third Sector Quarterly*. 31. 4. pp 525-548.

Brudney J.L. & Kellough J.E. (2002). Volunteers in State Government: Involvement, Management & Benefits. *Nonprofit & Third Sector Quarterly*. 29. 1. pp 111-130.

Clary E.G. & Snyder M. (1991). A Functional Analysis of Altruism and Prosocial Behavior: The Case of Volunteerism. In Clark M. (ed). *Prosocial Behavior*. pp 119-148. Sage. CA.

Cnaan R.A., Handy F. & Wadsworth M. (1996). Defining Who Is a Volunteer: Conceptual and Empirical Considerations. *Nonprofit & Third Sector Quarterly*. 25. 3. pp 364-383.

Davis Smith J. (1992). What We Know About Volunteering: Information From the Surveys. In Hedley R. & Davis Smith J. (eds). *Volunteering & Society: Principles and Practice*. pp 75-84. London. NCVO.

Gaskin K. & Davis Smith J. (1995). *A Civic New Europe: A Study of the Extent & Role of Volunteering*, London. Volunteer Centre UK.

Glaser B.G. & Strauss A.L. (1968). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. London. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Handy F. & Narasimhan S. (2004). Valuing Volunteers: An Economic Evaluation of the Net Benefits of Hospital Benefits. *Nonprofit & Third Sector Quarterly*. 31. 1. pp 28-54.

Mason D.E. (1996). *Leading & Managing the Expressive Dimension: Harnessing the Hidden Power of the Nonprofit Sector*. San Francisco. Jossey Bass.

Steinberg K.S., Rooney P.M. & Chin W. (2001). Measurement of Volunteering: A Methodological Study Using Indiana as a Test Case. *Nonprofit & Third Sector Quarterly*. 31. 4. pp 484-501.

Wardell F., Lishman J. & Whalley L.J.(2000). Who Volunteers?. *British Journal of Social Work*. 30. pp 227-248.