

Parent / Carer Sounding Board May 2011

Making volunteering work for parents/carers and for services

What did we do?

We met and consulted with 26 parents and carers who were involved in some form of volunteering across the county. Between them they did 180 hours of volunteering a week. The three main areas of volunteering were children centres, youth centres and drug outreach support services.

Key Themes

1 The benefits of volunteering for parents/carers

a) Being able to give something back

"I love seeing the smile on the children's faces."

"Helping to keep other dads going."

b) Professional development

"It really helps you with getting back into work, the training, qualifications and references are invaluable."

"I only learnt how to switch on a computer yesterday and I am 43."

"Gaining different knowledge of religious groups."

"Learning from the children and young people."



c) Personal development

"You meet other people and develop networks and start to feel valued again and as if you have something to offer."

"It gets me out of the house and stops me getting depressed."

"Gaining confidence and being welcomed back into society."

"Routine for your children and your self."

"People in the community trust you because you're volunteering."

"Getting your opinion heard."

"Volunteering for the youth forum as a young dad keeps me out of trouble and in touch with positive people."

2 The benefits of volunteering for children and family

The ripple effect:

"You can rescue a family by giving the parent an opportunity to volunteer."

"It instils a good work ethic in your children – they see me put my work T-Shirt on and they want to come with me."

"It helps you see and find new opportunities for children and young people as a result of the knowledge."

"The networks you develop helps you keep your children safe."

"By volunteering it makes it easier to ask for help."

“My son has seen too much in his life, and now he sees me getting up and going to work he is so proud of me, and he has stopped getting into trouble and turned his life around – I am so proud of him too.”

“You gain confidence as a parent so become a better happier parent.”

“I get access to courses and knowledge, and learn new skills which helps me to do the homework with the kids, use the internet and it makes me feel so useful.”

“It helps us to understand the system and takes away the ignorance and the fear around it.”

“I have a lot of time on my hand as an OAP and it is lovely to be able to go and feel like I am valued and I get to meet lots of the young mums and their children who live on my estate.”

“Helps me with my budgeting skills and stops me getting into more debt.”

“Our children can see what we are doing and hopefully it instils values in them.”

3 The challenges of volunteering

a) Costs

- Childcare
- Travel
- Expenses
- Impact on benefits

b) Bureaucracy

- Health and Safety
- CRB checks

c) Gaining confidence

- Feeling accepted
- Feeling welcome

- Needing a good induction – to understand boundaries / support
- Having a good mentor

4 What makes volunteering work?

a) The right support

- Mentoring encapsulating time
- Reflection
- Clear structures and boundaries
- Being thanked
- Being respected
- Feeling part of a team
- Knowing your full potential

b) The opportunity for progression

- Building a future
- Accreditation
- Training
- Planned next steps
- Identifying opportunities
- Moving into paid work

“Clarity around what you can and can’t do.”

“Local support in the setting from someone who knows and believes in you, they can help you see your goal and take steps to get to your goal.”

“It’s important to have a mentor who helps you to set limits, because you want to do it all and you just can’t, by setting limits you don’t fall at the first hurdle.”

“Gestures to make you feel valued.”

5 Benefits to people and families in the community

- Easier to engage isolated dads
- Supporting other dads to maintain contact with their kids

“I’ve been there and know how hard it is to keep battling to see your kids. Some days you just want to give up and mess it all up.”

- Reducing stigma

“When I go to meet a parent with a drug and alcohol problem they can see through meeting me that they can recover and can be invited back into society and can be a person again and accepted into society.”

- Overcoming fear

“When you are suffering domestic abuse you feel so ashamed and useless and when a volunteer can talk about their experiences openly and honestly it makes you see that you could reach out for help – if they can do it you have some hope that you could do it. Also they know how careful you have to be when going for support from services to keep safe from your partner they understand the hold they have over you.”

“Volunteering was my start to reaching for the stars.”

- Building Networks

“The volunteer who set up the Arabic mums group didn’t realise the fruits of what she had created. I was new to the country with my 2 children I knew no one and I was told about this group and now through this group I have learnt English, learnt to understand the ways of the British culture. I also have now got a community of friends and support that I would never have dreamt of having, my life is much happier due to this group.”

- Breaking down boundaries

“By being invited by another Bangladeshi mum to this group I knew that I would be safe and accepted, they understood my culture and how I live my life. I am able to through this group become a part of the children centre community which then means I can learn about other faiths and they can learn about mine. We sometimes have events all together and I feel like I belong.”

“Starting off in your own cultural language group then gives confidence to then widen horizons and join other groups.”

Actions

a) Joined up guidelines for volunteering

The Workforce Initiatives Manager for Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) is joining up the guidelines for volunteering, and will incorporate the Sounding Board findings in the Big Society Guidelines. They aim to run welcome events for volunteers delivering county council services, aimed at private individuals to give them knowledge of the Volunteer Policy and how the council works.



They also want to provide an opportunity for volunteers to give feedback and raise queries about their role in relation to the Council. They will be including the top tips from the Volunteers in this training for professionals. The following sections will be incorporated:

Induction for all volunteers

- Do's and don'ts
- Flexibility / insurance
- Information on the places available to volunteer
- Boundaries
- How to protect yourself re work levels, confidentiality, guidelines
- Understand the systems
- How settings recognise volunteers
- Volunteers rights – travel / child care / expenses
- Support / mentoring / staff

Training

- Time allocated for staff supporting the volunteers
- Ongoing tailored training, and common training
- Staff training
- Accreditation
- Progression
- Being able to try out different roles

Celebrate and Promote

- Awards
- Events
- Volunteer OCC Choice Awards
- Outings

- Fun days
- Volunteer rewards
- Lunches
- Gestures – flowers etc

b) Benefits Agency clarification

Clear information on volunteering and how it impacts on state benefits will be available at children's centres.

c) Sharing good practise

There is a Children Centre review in 2012 which will include identifying volunteering and its benefits in children's centres and ensuring that good practise is shared and mirrored in all centres.

d) Volunteer Coordinator post

The early Intervention Service has created a post of Volunteer Coordinator which will ensure that the learning from this Sounding Board is developed and shared and good practise for volunteers is modelled in all the Hubs.

"I would love to bottle what has happened in this room today and share it." Jan Paine

This is a Participation & Play publication. For the full report and minutes please email: toni.bremble@oxfordshire.gov.uk

