



Volunteering & Employability –

Feedback from VMN discussion groups

14 November 2013

Participants were asked to comment on an outline idea for formalising and improving how we support volunteers interested in moving into employment.

Key elements would include:

- An accredited employability certificate for volunteers;
- Backed by appropriate employability training;
- Volunteer opportunity relevant to interests and needs;
- Keyworker role to help people access other support;
- Support to gain and retain employment.

Using a hot air balloon model we asked for feedback on what issues might hold this idea back, what might blow it off course, who should be on board and what would make it successful.

The outcomes of the discussions are summarised into key themes below:

What would hold it back/blow it off course?

- Lack of childcare provision and people's mistrust of childcare services
- Money:
 - Covering transport costs
 - Ensuring people's benefits aren't threatened
 - Forthcoming changes to the benefits system
- Lack of self-esteem and confidence of participants and motivation. People need to be supported from as early as possible to see the opportunities for them
- Some may have chaotic lifestyles and face other issues such as substance misuse
- Lack of time within volunteering organisations to help with employability issues
- Need to make sure that an employability certificate doesn't become a barrier in itself: e.g. you aren't considered for a job if you haven't completed one.

We then asked people 'Who should be on board?' responses included:

- It should have a joined up multi-agency approach
- Voluntary organisations and volunteer co-ordinators
- Existing volunteers with life experience to support and encourage others
- Wider families, communities and the older generation

And finally 'What would make it a success?'

- Be clear this is only for those volunteers who are interested in gaining employment and for whom a certificate/employment support would add value
- Ensure balance of focus on 'life' improvements not just employability
- Adopt a keyworker approach to help people overcome other barriers
- Develop something like 'activity agreements' with JobCentre Plus so that people on benefits will not be penalised for volunteering if it is seen as a stepping stone to work
- Ensure attendance flexibility for those signing on at particular times
- Cover travel costs
- Ensure the certificate is transferrable so that people can move between opportunities and continue to make progress. Can have bite-sized units. Take time
- Provide support to voluntary organisations who want to be involved to minimise impact on their stretched resources. Consider an 'employability lite' approach for small organisations
- Have a database of organisations interested in providing this kind of volunteer opportunity
- Make sure it links to other sources of funding such as the Employability Fund
- Use nurture centres and existing community hubs for provision of support as they are trusted
- Publicise this to potential volunteers through organisations that involve volunteers as well as through FVA

We would like to thank everyone who took part in these discussions for their valued input which we will factor into further development work.

Thanks,
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