



Bangladeshi Woman's Project

The Challenge:

To improve the quantity and quality of volunteering opportunities for women from the Bangladeshi Community within the Ipswich and District area.

The Participants:

Ipswich and District Volunteer Centre
Support worker
Voluntary Organisations
Bangladeshi community

For Further Information:

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The Response:

Identify your objectives and contacts

The Bangladeshi Women's project was set up in March 2003 by Ipswich and District Volunteer Centre. The main objectives of the project are:

- To improve the quality of the volunteering experience and the organisation they are placed with.
- To improve the skills and personal confidence of the volunteers to improve prospects of further learning and potential employment prospects for the future.

Through funding, the Ipswich and District Volunteer Centre were able to employ a support worker to carry out the objectives. Visits and contacts were made with members of the Bangladeshi community by the support worker, to raise awareness about volunteering opportunities available to the Bangladeshi community and to encourage Bangladeshi women into volunteering to improve their skills and integrate them within their local community.

Some of the Bangladeshi women who were approached, are learning English as a second language and volunteering provided an opportunity for them to practice what they had learnt and improve their self confidence.

Identifying and overcoming barriers

As many have their own children to look after or other commitments at home, volunteering opportunities needed to be flexible. Discussions were held with various voluntary organisations and agencies to liaise and build relationships with them and to identify suitable work placements for the volunteers, to match their needs and those of the organisation offering the placement.

Help and support was given to the volunteers to help them fill out forms, and understand the role they would be playing. A buddy would attend the first day of volunteering with them to help them settle in, learn all the rules and regulations of the organisation and feel comfortable about asking any questions about the role. The buddy then provided on going support where needed.

With about 180 various organisations registered, the volunteer centre can provide over 300 different volunteering opportunities for volunteers. The areas of volunteering work they can choose range from admin/office work, working with animals, arts and crafts to working in a hospital, conservation and many more.

The most popular work placement choice for the Bangladeshi ladies by far, has been with children in schools. Many see a comparison between themselves trying volunteering and children being educated at school. Both are learning and developing new skills in their life to build up confidence meet new people and develop a future in the working world. Other popular areas of interest have included charity shops.

Expanding the service to others

During the first year of the project, 36 volunteers have been interviewed and over half of these have already become volunteers, with some currently on placement and some hoping to volunteer in the near future. One young lady has found paid employment through volunteering and has benefited from this project. With the project proving its success, the volunteers leaflet has been translated into Bengali to encourage others to take part.

Although the project's primary aim was to support Bangladeshi women, it also has had enquires from other Asian women and some Asian men as to how they can volunteer in the community. Ipswich and District Volunteer Centre are looking to expand the project in the future to include other BME communities.

Diversity Lessons Learnt:

- Identify the people and organisations who can help you to reach those who may not access mainstream support.
- Visit the community you wish to involve to raise awareness of your project.
- Identify the barriers between them and volunteering, what could be preventing them from taking part.
- Build in discussion time with other voluntary organisations and agencies to identify flexible work placements.
- Offer help and support with filling out forms.
- Provide additional support by teaming up new volunteers with a buddy to provide on going support.
- Provide materials, such as leaflets in their own language.
- Identify other opportunities to expand the project.