

Capacity Building Project



GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

Case Study 9

The Organisation:

Ipswich and District Volunteer Centre

The Challenge:

To engage Bangladeshi women in volunteering as a way to improve their English and promote integration within the Ipswich community

The Response:

A Bangladeshi Women's Project aimed at promoting volunteering and providing better volunteer support

Examples of Good Practice:

1. Promoting volunteering in the Bangladeshi community
2. Identifying and overcoming barriers
3. Providing volunteer support

Date:

21 April 2006

Supported by:



Part of the Department
for Work and Pensions



EUROPEAN UNION
European Social Fund

The Organisation: Ipswich and District Volunteer Centre

Established in 1971, the Ipswich and District Volunteer Centre promotes volunteering to the public within Ipswich and surrounding areas, in particular helping individuals find volunteering placements which match their interests, abilities and available time. With about 160 organisations registered, the Volunteer Centre is able to provide, on average, 500 different volunteering opportunities each year. The areas of work that volunteers can choose from include administrative and office work, working with animals, conservation, community transport, working in a hospital, arts and crafts, befriending older people and mentoring young people, to name just a few.

Volunteering is open to all sections of the community. Volunteers are usually aged 16 and over but there are no restrictions in terms of gender, employment status, ability, ethnicity or sexual preference. When it comes to volunteering, the Volunteer Centre believes everyone has something to offer.

The Challenge: To engage Bangladeshi women in volunteering as a way to improve their English and promote integration within the Ipswich community

Historically, the Volunteer Centre has found that people from minority ethnic communities have not tended to get involved in formal volunteering. Volunteering should be open to all people, but sometimes it is assumed by an organisation that certain people do not wish to get involved in volunteering, rather than taking the time to identify the barriers to participation. Some members of minority communities do not understand the word “volunteering” while others who want to get involved in volunteer work don’t know who to approach to get more information.

Very few women from the Bangladeshi community have been involved in volunteering, missing out on valuable opportunities to improve their English and other skills and integrate into the wider Ipswich community. The Volunteer Centre therefore needed to promote volunteering in the Bangladeshi community and identify and overcome the barriers between the Bangladeshi women who might benefit from volunteering and the organisations offering volunteer opportunities.

The Response: A Bangladeshi Women’s Project aimed at promoting volunteering and providing better volunteer support

The Volunteer Centre secured funding for its Bangladeshi Women’s Project and employed a Support Worker. Her role is to liaise with key members of the Bangladeshi community, arrange volunteer placements, induct and support volunteers and act as a “buddy” to new volunteers. The support worker is ideally placed to support the Bangladeshi women into volunteering as she is from the Bangladeshi community herself and speaks their language, Sylheti.

The support worker developed networks in the Bangladeshi community, contacting community leaders and people working within the community in order to raise awareness about volunteering opportunities

available to the Bangladeshi community and to encourage Bangladeshi women into volunteering. Networking helped to identify some of the barriers to participation in volunteering. Voluntary organisations were also approached in order to find appropriate volunteer opportunities for Bangladeshi women, which would be supportive and flexible enough to meet their particular needs.

Examples of Good Practice:

The Ipswich Volunteer Centre has a great deal of experience placing volunteers from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds within Ipswich's voluntary sector. They understand how to promote volunteering to Ipswich's diverse community and are very aware of the barriers faced by people from different cultures who wish to volunteer. They work in close partnership with voluntary groups in order to meet the needs of these volunteers, improving the volunteering experience for the volunteers and ensuring they can make a valuable contribution to the organisations where they are placed.

1. Promoting volunteering in the Bangladeshi community

The Support Worker has promoted volunteering amongst people from the Bangladeshi community using a range of communication methods. Networking with the Bangladeshi community was aimed at raising awareness about volunteering opportunities and encouraging Bangladeshi women into volunteering to improve their English and work skills and to become more integrated into the wider Ipswich community. Volunteering was also promoted through the media (radio and newspapers), through stalls at volunteering fairs and a charity bike ride. A leaflet about volunteering has also been translated into Sylheti, providing accessible information and encouraging people to get involved in volunteering.

Making contact with people who are already working within minority communities is a good way of exploring their methods of communicating. The way that some minority communities communicate may be different to our own methods; for example, the language spoken may not have words equivalent to English and the best method of publicity may be "word of mouth". By asking about other people's knowledge of the community that you wish to work with, you can identify appropriate methods of communication and find out what information and other resources to include with your publicity.

2. Identifying and overcoming barriers

Several Bangladeshi women, who were studying English, wanted to do volunteer work but had difficulties in finding placements because of language barriers. The language barriers are being overcome through English lessons and also through the support of the Sylheti speaking support worker. Many of the Bangladeshi women have children to look after and other commitments at home, including their religious activities. Expectations on Bangladeshi women from their families are high, leaving them limited opportunities to get involved in the wider community. Volunteer placements therefore needed to be flexible enough to fit in with these women's commitments.

Another barrier to be overcome was the perception that Bangladeshi women had of volunteering. Social participation in their own community revolves around the extended family and the concept of formal volunteering was unfamiliar to many of these women. Not surprisingly, there is not even a word in the Sylheti language for "volunteer". An important role for the project Support Worker was therefore to communicate to Bangladeshi women their roles and responsibilities as volunteers.

The Ipswich Volunteer Centre held discussions with various voluntary organisations and agencies to build relationships with them and identify suitable work placements for Bangladeshi volunteers,

matching the volunteers' needs with those of organisations offering placements. The project has now successfully placed Bangladeshi women as volunteers with a range of organisations such as charity shops, schools and childcare groups. This has enabled them to participate in the mainstream Ipswich community where they have many opportunities to improve their English language skills.

3. Providing volunteer support

The Ipswich Volunteer Centre provides special support to the Bangladeshi volunteers, helping them to fill in forms and understand their roles as volunteers. The Bangladeshi support worker acts as a “buddy” to new Bangladeshi volunteers, helping them with any language barriers they may be experiencing and attending the first day of volunteering with them to help them settle in, understand the policies and procedures of the organisation and help them to feel comfortable about asking questions. The support worker then provides on-going support when needed. All volunteers receive on the job training from the organisation where they are volunteering, which helps to build their skills and confidence.

Identifying the support needed for volunteers is an important process for all voluntary groups. Making new volunteers feel welcomed and supported will help them to settle in and adjust to their new roles. Those members of your organisation who have been well supported and trained are possibly the most proactive and are more likely to share knowledge and offer ideas to help your organisation to advance. Providing volunteers with support also improves the level of trust between people and creates a positive atmosphere to work in.

Sharing the Learning:

The Ipswich and District Volunteer Centre has demonstrated good practice in the way it has engaged members of the Bangladeshi community in volunteering. Building networks was important for promoting volunteering while identifying and overcoming barriers to participation has encouraged people to get involved. Volunteers are well supported, giving them a positive experience of volunteering.

Lessons Learnt

Building networks within minority ethnic communities enables engagement of those communities in volunteering

Organisations wanting to engage volunteers in their work need to identify and overcome any barriers to volunteering

When publicising your activities, materials should aim to attract people from minority ethnic communities

Supporting volunteers has benefits for your organisation and for the volunteers

Questions To Consider

- Who are the leaders and key contacts in the communities you wish to engage?
- How can you take advantage of networks to promote your activities?
- What barriers to participation can you identify and how can these be overcome?
- Can your organisation be flexible to meet the needs of the volunteers?
- What are the most effective publicity methods to reach a diverse cross-section of society?
- Do materials need to be translated into other languages?
- What format should publicity material take, e.g. written or audio format?
- What particular support do people need to get involved in volunteering?