**Blackburn with Darwen Volunteering Strategy 2012 – 2017**

The strategy has been developed using findings from the consultation process in September – October 2012. This involved questionnaires to volunteers, support groups and volunteer-involving groups, network/ consultation events with volunteers and volunteer managers and strategic consultation with the LSP Connected group and the Strategic Reference Group for Think Family.

**PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY; To improve volunteering in the Borough of Blackburn with Darwen.**

**VISION; That Blackburn with Darwen will be a vibrant community that encourages positive volunteering experiences for all ages and backgrounds and throughout the community.**

**AIM; A strong partnership to drive volunteering in the borough**

The contribution volunteers make to our society is hard to overstate. From the most local neighbourhood project to our essential public services, volunteers play a critical role – championing, cajoling, campaigning, collaborating – and generally making things work better and improving and enriching the lives of individuals and communities.

Volunteering encourages greater social activity in our borough and helps to engage local communities and bring people together. Volunteering provides an intercultural space for diverse people to work together on issues of common concern. Volunteers provide a wide range of services which impact on important issues for all us; community cohesion, health, crime reduction, culture, education and many more. Whilst people volunteer for their community, it can be a great experience for the volunteer who benefits from increasing confidence, acquiring new skills, and developing friendships. Volunteering also offers the opportunity to gain much needed employability skills and experience, leading to potential paid employment.

Volunteering benefits our whole community;

**To the Individual**

Skills and Experience

Enhanced Employment Opportunities

Personal Development

Social Connectivity

Health and Well being

Pride and Achievement

Respect and Responsibility

**To the Community**

Community Cohesion

Reduced worklessness

Improved health reducing reliance on services

Reduced crime

Community Engagement

Social Capital

Belongingness

Community Resilience

**To the Business and Commercial Sector**

Motivated empowered workforce

Corporate Social Responsibility

Strong links with community

Stronger links with local community

Improved public perception

Developing employee skills

Team building

Understanding of local customers/community

**To Voluntary and Public Sector Organisations**

Expansion of Services

Added Value to Services

Greater impact on the community

Empowerment ad community participation

Increased flexibility and quality on service provision

Sustainable service delivery

Expansion of services

The Benefits of Volunteering

for the Whole Community

Volunteering can be either formal or informal.

Formal volunteering refers to organised activities; be it a small community group consisting entirely of volunteers, or through major organisations such as Health Trusts or national voluntary organisations.

Formal volunteering in this strategy is defined as "giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations to benefit other people or the environment".

Informal volunteering, which can be one component of social capital, refers to a wide range of different kinds of mutual help and co-operation between individuals within communities, for example babysitting for a friend or checking on an elderly neighbour.

Informal volunteering, in this strategy is defined as "giving unpaid help as an individual to people who are not relatives"

Volunteering underpins and contributes towards all LSP priorities. It brings people from all ages and backgrounds together to create stronger and more interconnected social networks. It generates social capital for more resilient communities. Volunteering impacts on those who are most isolated and at risk in society; gaining positive outcomes as volunteers themselves, or by benefiting from the help of volunteers.

**Objectives**

1. **Raising the profile of volunteering**
2. **Positive Outcomes for Volunteers**
3. **Quality volunteer programmes - volunteers are retained**
4. **A growing number and diverse range of volunteering opportunities**
5. **Volunteering for all; ease of access and support where needed**

**OBJECTIVE 1; Raising the Profile of Volunteering**

From the BwD residents survey Nov 2011 only 11.7% of residents stated they volunteer once a month or more. Clearly more needs to be done to support volunteering, both formal and informal. This strategy aims to bring about a significant increase in the quality and quantity of volunteering in the borough, through a series of focussed actions all of which require a high level of collaboration between the public, social and commercial economies.

**It is crucial that at the highest strategic level, there is understanding that volunteering does not ‘just happen’. It is not cost free and does require support and development.**

 ***“It was an absolute pleasure to hear about unsung heroes in our community and about different community projects”*** Quote from a participant in the LSP Borough Volunteers Week Celebration Event 2010. In the consultation there was strong support for another Borough-wide Volunteers Week celebration event as well as events for groups to reward and recognise their own volunteers.

It was also felt that a variety of methods to promote volunteering should be undertaken including a ‘centre’ for people to come to, to find out about volunteering, as on-line applications do not suit everybody.

There is significant scope/ need for collaboration in developing a mechanism by which CRB checks could be transferable in the Borough.

**OBJECTIVE 2; Positive Outcomes for Volunteers**

***“I love meeting new people, I have made new friends through volunteering and love being part of the team. I like to know that I am making a difference. Volunteering makes you feel good and has helped to build my self-esteem”.***

***“Volunteering has helped me to gain the confidence to apply for jobs, having been out of work for over ten years. I have now been successful in gaining employment and think that volunteering has helped me to do this. I believe in myself and this contributed to me getting a job and a better lifestyle”.***

There is mounting evidence that volunteering can help increase an individual’s employability – by offering a chance to learn or refine both hard and soft skills which will better position someone in their search for work. Perhaps most crucially volunteering offers those people who have never worked, or who have been out of work for some time, experience of the discipline and structure of work which will be crucial in landing a job. In Blackburn with Darwen, volunteering is playing a significant role in supporting people through the economic downturn, providing valuable opportunities for people to gain experience, develop new skills and remain work- ready.

The consultation responses recognised that not everyone comes to volunteering to build their skills but, where they do, volunteering infrastructure

should examine ways to ensure that learning opportunities are provided and volunteers are able, where appropriate, to get recognised accreditation for the

skills developed. In the strategy consultation, both volunteers and volunteer managers felt that access to generic training in volunteering

would enhance positive outcomes for volunteers and complement the experiences and skills that volunteer involving groups were enabling their

volunteers to gain.

**OBJECTIVE 3**; **Quality Volunteer Programmes- volunteers are retained**

 ***“In the last Volunteer Organisers group meeting, 23 Volunteer Organisers from small and large community groups and statutory organisations attended.  People left reassured with learning around some of the challenges, with new contacts and the confidence to get in touch with them and with offers of help to one another”.*** Jo is the CVS Volunteer Centre trainer supporting groups that involve volunteers in Blackburn with Darwen.

Volunteers want to feel welcome, secure, respected, informed, well-used and well-managed. Since they do not have the incentive of a pay packet, rewards must be supplied in other ways by the organisation. The task for volunteer managers/ organisers is to take full account of the mix of characteristics, motivations and needs within the volunteer workforce; and the needs of service users and context in which service provision is carried out.

In consultation volunteer organisers felt that they valued networking and training events, as well as access to resources for what is a complex and demanding task, often undertaken by an individual who is managing volunteers on top of other responsibilities. The actions in the strategy will provide much needed support to volunteer organisers as well as increase the likelihood of volunteers being retained.

The development of a simple Code of Practice for all groups to sign up to, aims to drive up the quality of experience of volunteering, and generate an agreed standard of practice for all volunteer programmes in the borough.

**OBJECTIVE 4; A growing number and diverse range of volunteering opportunities**

Volunteering infrastructure is under an increasingly difficult challenge to meet the public and political demand for their services. As well as a huge increase in prospective volunteers coming through the door, they are in demand from Work Programme providers and government agencies that recognise the role of volunteering in helping people into work.Many of these prospective volunteers are vulnerable themselves and would benefit from more ‘flexible’ and taster type experiences before fully committing to volunteer. This would also help volunteer-involving groups who due to funding cuts are feeling increasingly squeezed while at the same time, they are feeling the pressure of ‘supporting’ volunteers who may not ready to volunteer fully independantly. Local employers can offer their support to help volunteer-involving groups to enhance their service provision and benefit from the valuable skills of local professionals.

In the consultation, the following were identified as needs;

* A coordinated approach to identify gaps in the type of volunteering opportunities available and/or where demand is greater than availability
* More short term/ easy to access opportunites
* Taster opportunities for volunteers and volunteer-involving groups
* Development of employer supported volunteering in the public and private sector.

**OBJECTIVE 5; Volunteering For All; Ease of access and support where needed**

 ***“Being a Volunteer Recovery Support worker, I am really enjoying the project. I was an addict myself, but now that I have been clean for more than 2 years I want to give back the things that the community gave me… I’m really loving my life at the moment and that’s what I want to give out to everyone who’s in need of that. The project has given me all the support i.e. courses, training so that at the end of the line I can achieve what I want, that is to become a drug and alcohol worker within the community”.***

In developing this strategy it has been important to understand the reasons why people don't or find it difficult to volunteer and also what barriers are faced by volunteer involving organisations. The table below provides a summary of the main barriers to volunteering that were identified during the consultation, and the actions are aiming to address these barriers.

| Awareness | Personal Constraints | Practical Issues | Image and Perceptions |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| * Not aware of opportunities
* Lack of accessible information
 | * Perceived lack of time
* No childcare
* Financial cost
* Lack of skills
* Lack of transport
* Lack of confidence
* Disability
 | * Red tape (CRB in particular)
* Lack of expenses
* Lack of training opportunities
* Poor management of volunteers/lack of support
* Age restrictions
* Organisational funding/resources/time
* Lack of "one off" or short term opportunities
 | * Certain backgrounds stigmatised – fear of being judged
* Lack of recognition
* Previous bad experiences
* Fear of benefits affected by volunteering
 |

**ACTIONS**

**OBJECTIVE 1**

**Raising the profile of volunteering**

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| Actions |
| 1. Commissioners to consider added value of using volunteers in service delivery when designing frameworks
 |
| 1. Commissioners understand the health and well being benefits of volunteering for service users.
 |
| 1. Recognition across the economies that the development, organisation and support of volunteering is not cost free.
 |
| 1. Secure CVS Volunteer Centre as central ‘hub’ for volunteering \* (currently at risk– funding ends October 13’)
 |
| 1. Small grants programme to support local volunteer initiatives.
 |
| 1. LSP CRB checks - transferable in the Borough
 |
| 1. Agree process to collect data on volunteering
 |
| 1. Volunteers provide tailored support for families with complex problems
 |
| 1. Marketing of volunteering using a range of methods including face to face, Social media, Web portal, E bulletins
 |
| 1. Work with other volunteering initiatives including Your Call
 |
| 1. Funding for Borough-wide Volunteers Week Event
 |
| 1. Volunteer-involving groups arrange own reward and recognition mechanisms for individual volunteers.
 |

\* the Community CVS Volunteer Centre is the nationally accredited ‘hub’ in the borough in supporting and developing volunteering and promote equality of access to volunteer opportunities for all people in the borough. Amongst its roles, the Volunteer Centre offers:

* A brokerage service for people who are looking to volunteer to find a role that interests them, and to help promote organisations volunteering opportunities.
* Targeted support for those facing disadvantages ; Volunteering on Prescription ( mental health), Offenders re-integration support, Fast 4wd (recovery from substance misuse) , disability support, Volunteering in Care Homes
* Volunteer Passport Scheme – 8 module training programme
* To inform people in Blackburn with Darwen about the potential of volunteering to benefit both themselves and their communities
* To promote the development of good practice in relation to the involvement of volunteers among volunteer involving organisations through training, networking and policy development.
* To take an active role in the strategic development of volunteering and on national and local issues that affect volunteering.

**OBJECTIVE 2; Positive Outcomes through Volunteering**

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| Actions |
| 1. Pre-volunteering workshops
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| 1. Generic training programme for volunteers that any group can access
 |
| 1. Employability development support for volunteers
 |
| 1. Develop Code of Practice to include measuring outcomes for volunteers
 |
| 1. Borough certificate/ Passport scheme
 |

**OBJECTIVE 3 Quality volunteer programmes – volunteers are retained**

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| Actions |
| 1. Charter/ Code of practice and self assessment tool for volunteer-involving groups
 |
| 1. Develop simplified volunteer management resources for volunteer organisers
 |
| 1. Volunteer Organisers Network
 |
| 1. Tailored development support for small community groups
 |
| 1. Website, with good practice resources/ links/ E-learning
 |
| 1. Regular Volunteer Organisers ‘surgery ‘
 |
| 1. Peer support/ exchange
 |
| 1. Regular training programme on working with volunteers
 |
| 1. Seek accredited training for volunteer organisers
 |
| 1. Online forum/ networking site for volunteer organisers
 |
| 1. Explore mechanisms for the sharing of resources between volunteer – involving groups
 |

**OBJECTIVE 4; A Growing Number and Diversity of Volunteering Opportunities**

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| Actions |
| 1. Explore ways to identify short term, easy to access volunteering opportunities
 |
| 1. Maintain face to face service to match prospective volunteers to local opportunities (not just on-line.)
 |
| 1. Maintain local database/directory of opportunities with regular E;bulletins on latest volunteering opportunities
 |
| 1. Develop pilot employer supported volunteering programme in the public sector
 |
| 1. Foster development of Employer Supported Volunteering in the private sector
 |

**OBJECTIVE 5; Volunteering for All; Ease of access and support where needed.**

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| Actions |
| 1. Explore ways to make volunteering accessible to people from the whole community
 |
| 1. Provide additional support to volunteers that face barriers due to disability, ex-offenders, mental health, substance misuse issues.
 |
| 1. Taster Opportunities for volunteers and organisations
 |
| 1. Provide training to volunteer organisers on removing barriers
 |