



Recognising the value of volunteer fundraisers

Volunteering continues to be a top Government priority: engaging the public in volunteering to increase outputs to the sector and improve civil society more generally is key to many public policy agendas. Yet despite all this energy, there continues to be a distinct lack of recognition of fundraising as a valid and valuable volunteering activity or similar support for volunteer fundraising initiatives.

The 2008 NCVO Civil Society Almanac recognises that approximately two thirds of volunteers in voluntary and community sector organisations are engaged in raising and handling money. In real numbers this equates to an equivalent of 660,000 full time workers engaged in volunteer fundraising and significant funds raised for their respective organisations.

The value of fundraising volunteers should never be overlooked as a way of attracting volunteers and engaging them with voluntary and community sector organisations. In many cases, individuals' first interaction with the third sector is through some sort of fundraising activity, be it sponsoring a friend to run a marathon or attending a fundraising ball. This provides organisations with the opportunity to engage them in their work and cause further, perhaps through embarking on further voluntary fundraising or supporting the organisation through other aspects of volunteering.

The efforts of several volunteer fundraisers, each who have raised vast amounts of money for voluntary and community sector organisations, were acknowledged by the Prime Minister at a Downing Street "Everyday Heroes" reception towards the end of July. This goes to show how significant and valued the contribution of volunteer fundraisers is. Yet despite the demonstrated potential, Government initiatives have, almost exclusively, focused on the caring and befriending aspect of volunteering, concentrating on opportunities for volunteers to delivery services to beneficiaries rather than those opportunities to raise the money to facilitate service delivery.

The recently published Department of Health led consultation "Towards a strategy to support volunteering in health and social care" illustrates the point all too pertinently. The consultation focuses for the most part on supporting

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individual volunteers, identifying obstacles to successful volunteering and asks what an infrastructure of volunteer management might look like. Despite the enormous amounts of fundraising that are undertaken within health settings on an unpaid basis by volunteers, patient groups and NHS staff, to mention but a few, fundraising fails to get much of a mention, much less an acknowledgement, as a significant volunteering activity. While I don't doubt that there are a plethora of opportunities for volunteering in a more care-based capacity in health and social care organisations, these organisations are frequently heavily dependent on fundraised income and volunteer fundraisers. On behalf of the recently re-launched Institute of Fundraising Hospital Special Interest Group, the Institute will be making this representation in the course of its response to Department of Health consultation.

This consultation is likely to have wider ramifications across the sector. While focusing on volunteers within a health and social care setting, the outcomes and recommendations that stem from this consultation will also provide a blueprint that will be used to inform other Government-led volunteering initiatives. It should therefore be of significant concern to fundraisers and fundraising organisations that in the course of the "Towards a strategy to support volunteering in health and social care" consultation, the role and contribution of volunteer fundraising activity is notably absent.

At the most fundamental level, the importance of the fundraising that is undertaken by volunteer fundraisers is evident by the income that is generated. For the most part, service delivery cannot be undertaken without raising the funds to facilitate it and in many organisations, those funds are delivered through the efforts of volunteer fundraisers. The Institute will argue that one of the outcomes of this consultation must be for investment in volunteering, not only as a service delivery activity, but to develop volunteer fundraisers that support the fundraising and income generation capacity of an organisation. Fundraising IS a valuable volunteering activity so lets get it recognised as such.