



Central
Bedfordshire
Together



Volunteering Strategy

2012-2016

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Foreword



This Volunteering Strategy sets out a coherent partnership approach to promoting and sustaining volunteering and improving the volunteering experience for everyone in the community. It has been developed by Central Bedfordshire Together's partners from the voluntary, community and public sectors. The strategy has been developed through consultation with many of our volunteer involving organisations and with individual volunteers.

In 2010 Central Bedfordshire Together produced its first Sustainable Community Strategy. This sets out the Partnership's ambitions, vision, priorities and targets for change over the next few years.

Why we have a Volunteering Strategy

Central Bedfordshire Together recognises the value of volunteering and the benefits volunteers bring to people's quality of life. It also recognises the contribution volunteers make to the economic, environmental and social life of the area and has decided that a Volunteering Strategy is essential to ensure that people willing to volunteer do so in a nurturing and supportive environment.

Through the Volunteering Strategy the partnership is promoting volunteering, social action and communities doing more for themselves. It is responding to a number of national drivers, such as the Localism Act, the Government's Big Society agenda and pressures on the delivery of local services.

In Central Bedfordshire volunteers of all ages add great value to the delivery of many local services (delivered by the public, voluntary and community sectors), which many vulnerable people are dependant upon. It is vital that the partnership has in place a strategy to give direction to supporting the demand for and supply of volunteers in areas such as health, social care, the environment, sport, the arts, education and learning, provision of information and advice services, housing, youth work, community development, community transport and many others.

Voluntary organisations and community groups across Central Bedfordshire engage with volunteers to deliver their activities. Volunteers are also widely used in the public sector: in local health services, countryside parks, schools, the Fire and Rescue Service, by the Police and in the Courts. In all of these roles volunteers are contributing to the delivery of priorities and outcomes included in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

We need to recruit volunteers of all ages from all the diverse communities of Central Bedfordshire by promoting the diversity of volunteering opportunities available and minimising the barriers for entry into volunteering.

Evidence¹ shows that the quality of volunteering experience varies enormously. If volunteers have a poor volunteering experience they are likely to give up volunteering and be very difficult to attract back into it.

Purpose of the Volunteering Strategy

The strategy identifies a number of challenges and barriers to volunteering and seeks to address them in order to make volunteering in Central Bedfordshire a good experience.

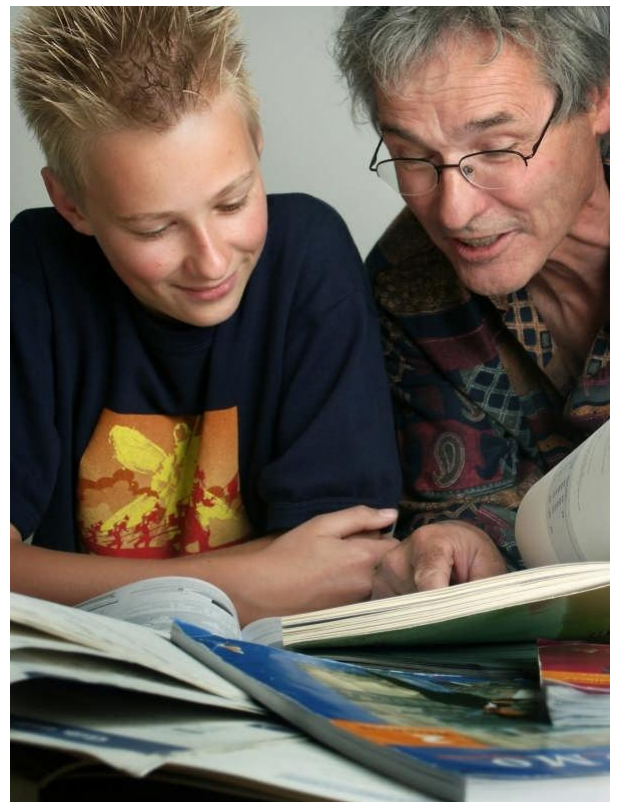
The strategy recognises that people of all ages volunteer; it is therefore important to think of the priorities, activities and outcomes, set out in this strategy, in terms of *everyone* as well as *specific groups*. These include young people; older people; those who are unemployed, disabled or from a Black and ethnic community; and those who volunteer through employer supported programmes, timebanking or other schemes.

Through this strategy we want to encourage all partners in the public, private, voluntary and community sectors in Central Bedfordshire to recognise the importance and the value of volunteering; and to commit to working together so that everyone who wants to can become a volunteer, quickly and easily, and find their volunteering experience a rewarding and fulfilling one.

John Gelder

Vice-Chair, Central Bedfordshire Together & Director of Voluntary and Community Action

1. *Management Matters: A National Survey of Volunteer Management Capacity* published by the Institute for Volunteering Research, 2008.



Vision and Priorities

Central Bedfordshire is a place where people feel inspired to volunteer, have the opportunity to do so, and have excellent volunteering experiences.

To achieve this vision, the following priorities need to be in place:

1. People are inspired to volunteer
2. People have the opportunity to volunteer
3. People have excellent volunteering experiences.

Definition of Volunteering

Volunteering is the giving of unpaid help and a commitment of time and energy by individuals for the benefit of society, the community or the environment.

Formal volunteering is defined as giving unpaid help through groups, clubs or organisations.

Informal volunteering is defined as giving unpaid help as an individual to someone who is not a relative.



Priority 1: People are inspired to volunteer

Where are we now?

- There is a fragmented approach to the promotion of volunteering and the recruitment of volunteers.
- The Volunteer Centres actively promote volunteering through local campaigns, the media, on-line and at community events.
- Some volunteer-involving organisations are better at promoting volunteering than others.
- People perceive *The Big Society* as telling people they must volunteer.
- There is little or no coordinated promotion of employer supported volunteering and employers are unaware of the benefits of volunteering.
- There is a lack of resources to actively promote volunteering across Central Bedfordshire and to local communities.



Where do we want to be?

- Volunteering has a wider appeal and more people volunteer as a result.
- Volunteering is actively promoted through all effective channels, including greater use of social media.
- Different forms of volunteering; such as time banking, micro volunteering, residential volunteering, youth action, student volunteering and employer supported volunteering; are promoted and appeal to potential volunteers.
- Recognition of volunteering, and those who volunteer, through national and local awards is used to inspire others.
- Companies fully recognise that employer supported volunteering benefits the company, the workforce and the community; and can aid the professional development of employees.



Priority 2:

People have the opportunity to volunteer

Where are we now?

- There is a lack of volunteering opportunities for some groups of people wanting to volunteer.
- Some opportunities remain unfilled for long periods of time because they do not clearly define the role, meet volunteers' expectations or are uninspiring to those wanting to volunteer.
- Some volunteer involving organisations do not pay enough attention to matching the skills of potential volunteers with the opportunities available.
- People who know what they want to do in terms of volunteering will often go direct to organisations they know.
- People needing help to find suitable volunteering opportunities can get expert advice and guidance from the Volunteer Centres.
- Some volunteer involving organisations' response to volunteer referrals and enquires is slow; this gives prospective volunteers a poor impression and may put them off from volunteering.
- Employer supported volunteering is generally confined to the 'one day team challenge'.



Where do we want to be?

- People know how and where they can access volunteering and are aware of the help available from the Volunteer Centres.
- Volunteer involving organisations are able to create inspiring volunteering opportunities.
- Volunteer involving organisations develop strategies to promote volunteer recruitment and have in place a simple and clear process to recruit volunteers.
- Volunteering opportunities are clearly defined in terms of what the role will entail and what skills, knowledge and experience are required.
- All volunteer involving organisations respond to volunteer referrals and enquiries in a timely and welcoming manner that encourages prospective volunteers to take-up volunteering.
- Volunteers' skills, knowledge and experience are carefully matched against suitable opportunities.
- The provision of travel expenses enables a greater diversity of people to take up volunteering.
- Volunteers' extra support needs are taken account of when they are placed/take up volunteering.
- Employer supported volunteering is more widely accessible to the workforce and makes a significant contribution to the delivery of local volunteering initiatives.

Priority 3:

People have excellent volunteering experiences

Where are we now?

- Induction programmes exist in most organisations; these vary in content, style and standards.
- Guidance, support and training for supervisors of volunteers varies across organisations.
- Some volunteer involving organisations recognise the need to have someone responsible for volunteer management, but all too often those responsible for volunteers have multiple responsibilities and do not have the time to ensure they can offer quality volunteering experiences; some organisations may also lack capacity and resources to provide such a role.
- Regular networking events and workshops for Volunteer Managers take place; they help to inform and develop good practice, as well as provide one-to-one support.
- Many organisations provide informal recognition to their volunteers by saying *thank you* and some may do this through special events to celebrate and recognise the contribution of volunteers to their organisation's work.
- There is little coordinated training progression for those volunteers who wish to gain accreditation/qualifications to support future employment.
- The Volunteer Centres are recognised for the services they offer through the Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation, awarded by Volunteering England.

Where do we want to be?

- Volunteer involving organisations across the voluntary, community, public and private sectors recognise the importance of providing good volunteer management and appoint people to undertake this role.
- Volunteer Managers are enabled to gain the skills and knowledge that they need to carry out their role.
- All volunteer-involving organisations have their own Volunteering Policy in place.
- Every volunteer has access to an induction programme, ongoing training and support appropriate to the organisation and their role.
- Volunteers gain the skills and knowledge that they need to carry out their work and, where possible, have the opportunity to gain an appropriate qualification if they wish to.
- Volunteers remain engaged and motivated in their role as a result of the support they receive.
- The efforts of volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are recognised, valued and rewarded.
- People who engage in volunteering can have their involvement recognised through a local or national volunteering award or a v:inspired award (as appropriate).
- Greater use is made of Volunteers Week to celebrate and recognise the contribution of volunteers.

Delivering the Strategy

A delivery plan will be put in place to take forward the priorities and outcomes set out in this strategy. This will be monitored through the Stronger Communities Partnership on behalf of the Central Bedfordshire Partnership Board.

We acknowledge that volunteers are not 'free'; there are costs associated with their recruitment, training and support, and with the management of volunteer programmes. We also recognise that lack of resources is an issue.

Collectively we already put a considerable amount of resource into the promotion of volunteering, recruiting and selection of volunteers, supporting, supervising and training them. The strategy is based on the idea that working collectively we can make better use of the resources we have in order to implement some of the ideas in this strategy.

The Bedfordshire and Luton Compact sets out the principles of good practice for partnership working, policy development and the allocation of resources.



To enable more effective partnership working, partners will:

- build the vision for volunteering, priorities and outcomes, set out in this Strategy, into their own strategies and plans;
- assess community capacity and consider where this might be strengthened and built on when making strategic and service delivery decisions;
- work with the Volunteer Centres to strengthen approaches to promote and support volunteering;
- involve volunteer involving organisations and volunteer representatives in the design and development of local services where these use and/or rely on volunteers for delivery;
- work with the Volunteer Centres and volunteer involving organisations to develop and implement good practice in volunteer management, both within the voluntary and community sector and across the public sector.

Resourcing Volunteering

The sustainability of funding for volunteer involving organisations impacts on the degree to which they can effectively develop their volunteer involvement and support. Commissioners need to be aware of the potential for this when developing local commissioning frameworks and service and tender specifications.

To enable more effective commissioning partners will:

- seek to invest in volunteer involving organisations and in volunteering wherever this has the potential to deliver better value for money by promoting effective volunteer involvement that helps to improve services and deliver better outcomes for local citizens; and
- ensure that relevant funding agreements and contracts take account of the need to support volunteering and volunteers.

Assessing the Impact of Volunteering

Volunteering achieves a great deal, albeit difficult to measure. There is currently an emphasis on measuring the outputs of volunteering, rather than assessing impact of volunteering.

Measurement of the impact of volunteering varies considerably from organisation to organisation; there is no coordinated approach.

It is recognised that effective monitoring and assessment systems are crucial to:

- determining whether, and to what extent, the work of volunteer involving organisations is achieving its desired outcomes, and whether the right things are being monitored and assessed;
- providing an important feedback mechanism for volunteers so that problems with volunteer supervision, management and support can be flagged up and remedied;
- building up a body of evidence about volunteering to inform future development.

To enable more effective monitoring and assessment partners will:

- raise awareness of the value in assessing the impact of volunteering and encourage volunteer involving organisations to have effective and relevant monitoring systems in place;
- place a focus on the impact that volunteering has on volunteers, as well as the outcome of volunteers' work in the community and with individuals;
- deliver training on assessing the impact of volunteering and develop a toolkit containing a range of techniques e.g. case studies, customer feedback surveys and user forums.

About Central Bedfordshire Together

Central Bedfordshire Together provides the vision and strategic direction to improve the quality of life for all in Central Bedfordshire, by encouraging local partnership working across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors.

If you want to know more about the Central Bedfordshire Together Partnership Board
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