

## Set 4

## InfoSheet 4.1

# Support to Volunteers

## Giving Support to Volunteers and keeping them

Remember that volunteers don't just need supervision; they also need support. This means making sure that there is always someone around for them, even if they are only on the end of the phone. If it is impossible for you to always have a staff member on hand, then you could think about pairing volunteers with a 'buddy' who they can go to if they need to talk about their work. If you have a group of volunteers, they may benefit from forming a volunteer support group together. Problems and ideas that they may feel embarrassed about raising individually can then be voiced in the safety of a group. You may want to give some of your volunteers extra training in running such a group, so that it provides a space exclusively for volunteers.

You can also support volunteers by showing that they are appreciated and are an important part of the organisation. This can be as simple as saying thank-you to them at the end of the day, or as big as entering them for one of the major volunteer awards (contact the National Centre for Volunteering for information – see Appendix V). Remember to include volunteers in your Annual Report and to invite them to your AGM. You can also show that they are a vital part of the organisation by keeping them informed about what is happening and involving them in any decision-making groups. Not all volunteers will want to contribute to decision-making, but by showing them that you are interested in their opinion, you are signalling that they are important and that they have as big a stake in the ownership of the organisation as paid staff.

Don't forget that a lot of support happens completely informally as part of normal day-to-day activities. Take the time to chat to your volunteers about what they did last night or where they went for lunch. Getting to know your volunteers, what is important to them and what makes them tick is invaluable if you are going to have a good working relationship. Also make sure that volunteers have the opportunity to mix socially, which will help to make them feel that the organisation is really part of their lives. However, when you are organising socials do make an effort to arrange different things so that everyone can get involved. Some people may not be comfortable going to the pub or may not be able to afford to go for a meal. If you organise a variety of social activities, then you will enable more people to get involved. But remember, do respect people's wishes - if someone really doesn't want to come to volunteer socials, then they don't have to!

### Tips for motivating and keeping your volunteers

Keeping volunteers satisfied with their position and the group or organisation is an on-going responsibility for the volunteer co-ordinator and the staff working with volunteers. Here are some tips to keep them motivated. They do not cost much, either.

- Set up rotating meetings with the head of your group or organisation. These are not gripe sessions (make this clear). Ask the person to share information about how the group or organisation is successful, what the future holds, and how the people volunteering are contributing.

- Send letters to the families/partners of volunteers. Thank them for being supportive of the volunteer's efforts to provide assistance. Give examples of how the work of volunteers impacts on others.
- When clients, members, groups or organisations write a letter commending the work of volunteers, frame them. Keep an honor wall with a steady stream of letters of praise for staff and volunteers.
- Continue to lobby for more money to do recognition activities that cost money -certificates, printed post-it-notes for use by supervisors, organisational thank-you cards. These small acts of generosity carry a powerful message to the volunteers about the value that is placed on their work!

*This InfoSheet is based on information from the National Centre for Volunteering and the Brighton and Hove Working Together Project.*