

Ex-offenders volunteering - analysis

The analysis of the literature review is based on the 3 'talent' components as follows:

Commitment

1. There are a number of ways of reassuring ex-offenders that they will be treated fairly once they enquire about volunteering, however there is limited evidence that this message is promoted to prospective ex-offenders considering volunteering.
2. There appears to be limited focus on engaging with the social/affiliation, status/influence and achievement motivators, and it is likely that opportunities are being lost here.

Competence

1. There is a significant skills and knowledge gap preventing ex-offenders from volunteering, particularly around the concept and relevance of volunteering, the application process and having limited experience/confidence in interacting with others.
2. There is guidance available for volunteer-involving organisations to respond to applications from ex-offenders and assess and manage the associated risks, and generic guidance available for supporting ex-offenders in their volunteering placement. However there is limited accessible evidence that volunteer-involving organisations are well developed in these practices.
3. The support and resources required for ex-offender volunteering is significant, and frequently not realistically available within volunteer-involving organisations.

Contribution

1. Ex-offenders can be 'helpless victims' in a volunteering context as follows:
 - a) For prospective ex-offender volunteers unable to secure a volunteering placement
 - b) For current ex-offender volunteers feeling unsupported in a volunteering placement

NB There are a number of strategies available for managing this for ex-offender volunteering initiatives, however these tend to relate to situations after prospective volunteers have approached an organisation.

Current staff can also be 'helpless victims' if not supported when working with ex-offenders.

2. To encourage ex-offenders to move from 'bystanders' to 'beneficiaries', there is the need for 'positive action' volunteer recruitment initiatives (targeted at ex-offenders). However, such initiatives are undermined by unwillingness by organisations to be seen as targeting ex-offenders to be involved in the delivery of their services.

In addition, moving ex-offenders to move from 'bystanders' to 'beneficiaries', requires effective partnership-working between prison/probationary services and volunteer-involving organisations. NB Prisons have experience of facilitating volunteering placement for prisoners, but these tend to be internal rather than community-based.

3. The role of 'sponsors' is not well-documented in research. This undermines the development and promotion of ex-offender volunteering initiatives, which is further compounded by the lack of evidence that could provide a business case for such initiatives.

In addition, the lack of sponsors means that ex-offender volunteering policies tend not to get written, as the concerns of the 'blockers' outweigh the benefits of involving ex-offenders as volunteers.

4. There are limited strategies in place to move 'beneficiaries' to 'sponsors' (although there is evidence of success stories being documented). Potential sponsors could be influential members of the community who have benefited from an ex-offender volunteering initiative.
5. The efforts of individual programmes and organisations have the potential to act as 'positive influences', however these are undermined by a lack of wider joined up thinking and action.

Overall comments

Ex-offending volunteering initiatives tend to have a different set of issues to most other inclusive volunteering programmes, in that there are more 'blockers' and 'negative influencers' present. This is much to do with the fear of public perception from organisations, and aside from those volunteer-involving organisations that exist to support the rehabilitation of ex-offenders, there are very few organisations that consider engaging with ex-offenders a valid or relevant organisational strategy.

This situation is compounded by:

- The restrictions on placing prisoners or ex-offenders in volunteering placements in the community.
- The additional resources and support required for facilitating this.
- The limited progress made to date in 'end-to-end offender management', and the associated lack of joined up thinking and sharing of knowledge and practice

Clearly, the government have recognised the need to develop a more holistic approach, and in time this will provide the opportunity for volunteer-involving organisations to:

- Develop a business case to engage with ex-offenders as volunteers.
- Develop a 'corporate social responsibility' to be part of the solution for society's ex-offenders.

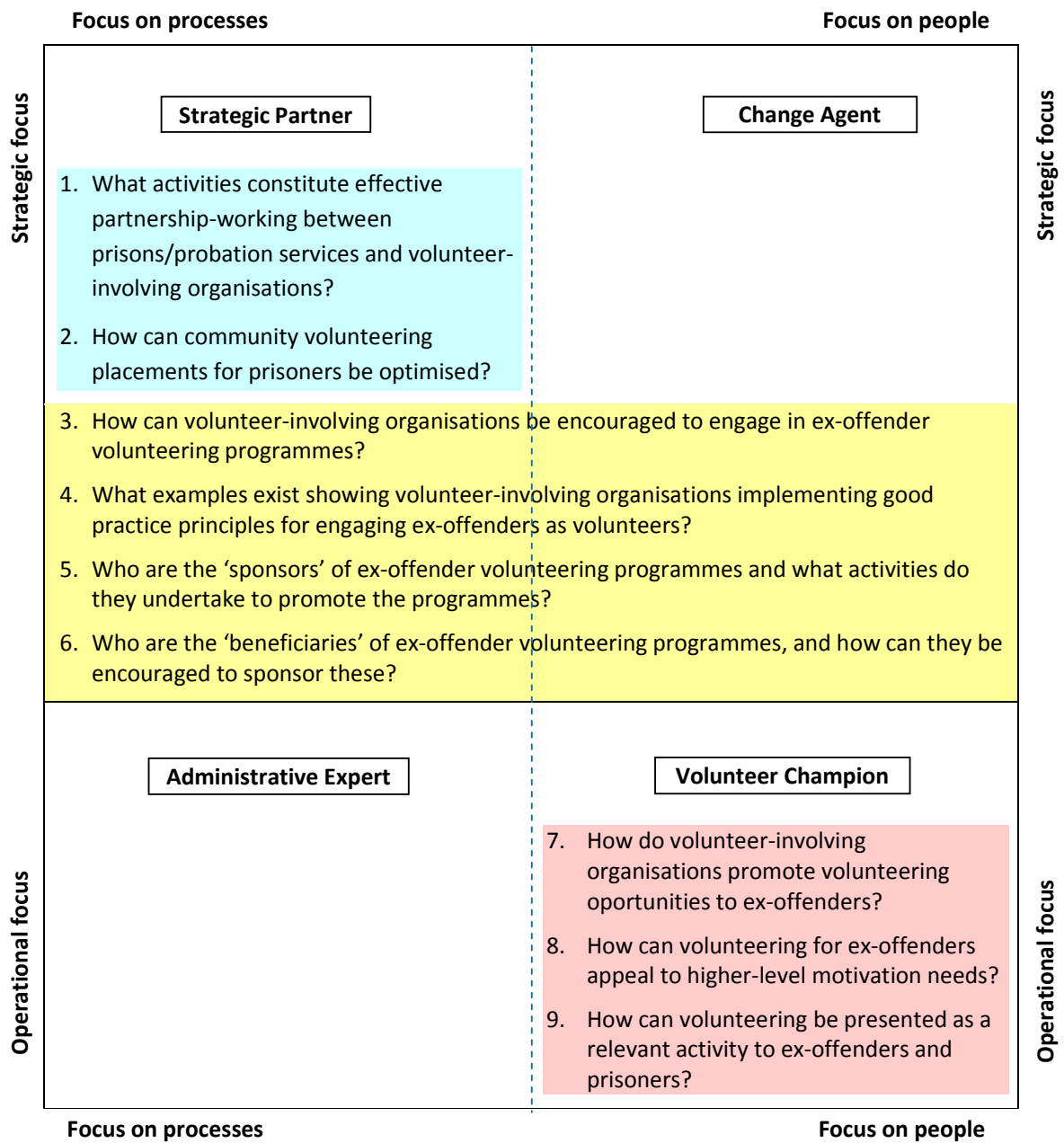
However, the current situation is that volunteering for ex-offenders has few 'sponsors', many 'blockers' and 'negative influencers', and the 'positive influencers' are disjointed.

This means that it will be difficult to both celebrate the benefits and encourage involvement in these programmes.

Ex-offenders volunteering – further research questions

The above analysis has highlighted a number of gaps in research, strategies and initiatives to encourage volunteering for ex-offenders.

These gaps have been framed as further areas of research to be explored with relevant volunteer-involving organisations and practitioners. Further, a model of human resource management (Ulrich 1998) has been adapted to show trends of current gaps in volunteering research, strategies and initiatives for ex-offenders.



Observation:

- For developing commitment of ex-offenders, the role of 'Volunteer Champion' is required