Homeless volunteering - analysis

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

Commitment

1. There is limited evidence of how organisations communicate to prospective homeless volunteers that expenses will be met and that the lack of a contact address can be managed.

2. The issues of homeless people feeling their life situation and health are too unstable to consider volunteering appear to have no creative solutions in place.

3. There is a significant opportunity to engage with homeless volunteers who are in temporary housing/hostels.

4. The potential to engage with social and achievement needs of homeless people appears under-explored (e.g. meeting people, developing skills, making a community contribution, helping less fortunate etc.)

Competence

1. There is support cited to develop prospective homeless volunteers' level of knowledge to engage as a volunteer, however there are limited examples of this support being provided in practice

2. There is limited direct evidence that volunteer development agencies have resources in place that support volunteering for homeless people.

3. Homeless volunteers need structured support, but also desire flexibility in a volunteering placement. This present a significant challenge to the volunteer management function, and examples of how volunteer management activities celebrate both discipline and freedom for homeless volunteers would be helpful.

4. How the initial application process is planned and implemented appears to be of critical importance to successfully engage with homeless volunteers, and examples of this being managed in practice would be helpful.

5. Involving volunteers with a personal background in homelessness appears to have a lot to offer in terms of engaging with and supporting homeless volunteers.

6. The organisation needs to clearly understand their remit of providing support to help homeless people volunteer and that relating to their social exclusion.

Contribution

1. Both homeless people and paid staff can be 'helpless victims' if there is tension in the development of a homeless volunteering initiative, and that tension remains unresolved. There does not appear to be much guidance or evidence of how to this situation can be managed.

2. There are a number of strategies in place to encourage homeless people to move from 'bystanders' to 'beneficiaries', however there are limited examples of these being implemented in practice.

    In addition, there is an added complication of engaging with homeless people who are disengaged from support agencies.

3. The concept of homeless volunteering is significantly undermined by the range of potential 'sponsors' not currently engaged with developing a positive climate for homeless volunteering. These include homelessness organisations, Job Centres, volunteer development agencies, the DWP and prime-providers. Most of these organisations have competing priorities and agendas, and the potential for volunteering to be part of an integrated pathway appears to be frequently overlooked.

4. The various 'beneficiaries' of homeless volunteering projects appear largely un-explored, and could include a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. Some focus in establishing who these are and how they benefit, will encourage the development of more 'sponsors' for homeless volunteering.

Homeless volunteering – further research questions

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

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 homeless people.

Focus on processes   **Focus on people**

Strategic focus

Strategic Partner

1. How do organisations agree/clarify the extent of support provision for homeless volunteers?

2. What resources do volunteer development agencies have in place to support homeless volunteering?

3. How can the various stakeholders of homeless volunteering benefit and be encouraged to support homeless volunteering initiatives?

4. Where do volunteer-involving organisations take advantage of engaging with homeless volunteers who are in temporary housing/hostels?

5. How do organisations provide both structure and flexibility in volunteer management?

6. What practical examples exist of homeless volunteers being made aware of the potential opportunity of volunteering, including those who are disengaged from support services?

Change Agent

7. How are internal tensions relating to homeless people volunteering resolved?

8. How can volunteer-involving organisations tap into the social and achievement-related aspirations of homeless people?

9. How can organisations optimise the involvement and value of volunteers with a personal background in homelessness?

10. What good practice examples exist of planning and implementing the initial application process?

11. How do volunteer-involving organisations seek to engage with prospective volunteers who may feel in an unstable situation?

12. How do volunteer-involving organisations communicate prospective homeless volunteers that expenses will be met and that the lack of a contact address can be managed?

Operational focus

Administrative Expert

Volunteer Champion

Focus on processes   **Focus on people**