

## **Using Volunteers in Family Support**

**June 2011**

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# Using Volunteers in Family Support Report

## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this report is to:

- To analyse what research and best practice says about using volunteers to support families.
- To review volunteer development and deployment locally.
- To make recommendations about possible further development of the volunteer workforce in the Family Support Sector.

Traditionally services to support vulnerable families have relied on specialist or professional input to support children, parents and/or families. The types of family support can take various forms and reflect centre-based services, parenting education programmes, intensive health visitor support and volunteer and network schemes. Increasingly strategies are being used to strengthen the help and advice available to families informally, whether from their kin, neighbour and friendship networks or through linking families with a volunteer<sup>1</sup>.

In defining the vulnerability of children and families, a new approach has been developed drawn from work of the Efficiency and Innovation Board 'New Models of Service Delivery' group<sup>2,3</sup>, that encompasses the need for prevention, protection and remediation: see figure 1 below.

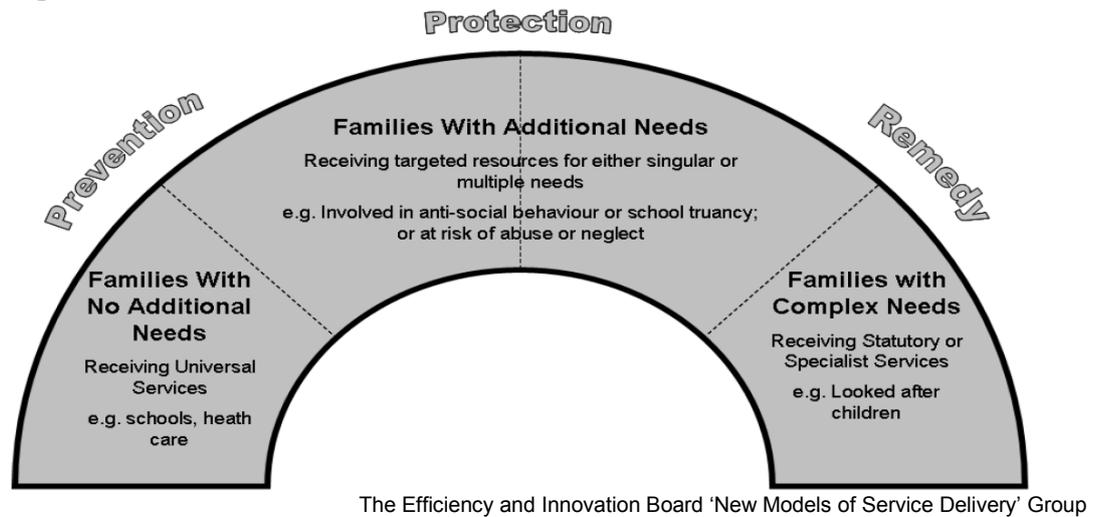
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<sup>1</sup> Armstrong C and Hill M (2001). Support services for vulnerable families with young children. *Child and Family Social Work*; **6**: 351-8.

<sup>2</sup> <http://childpovertysolutions.org.uk/UserFiles/file/FamiliesFirstPhaseIIGuidance.pdf>. (accessed 16/3/2011).

<sup>3</sup> WAG (2011). Child Poverty Strategy for Wales. Information Document 095/2011.

Figure 1



This report will focus on the use of volunteers working with vulnerable families.

## 2 The policy context

In 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government published 'A Strategic Action Plan for the Voluntary Sector Scheme'. This describes the Assembly's commitment and approach to working with the voluntary sector. It begins by defining the voluntary sector:

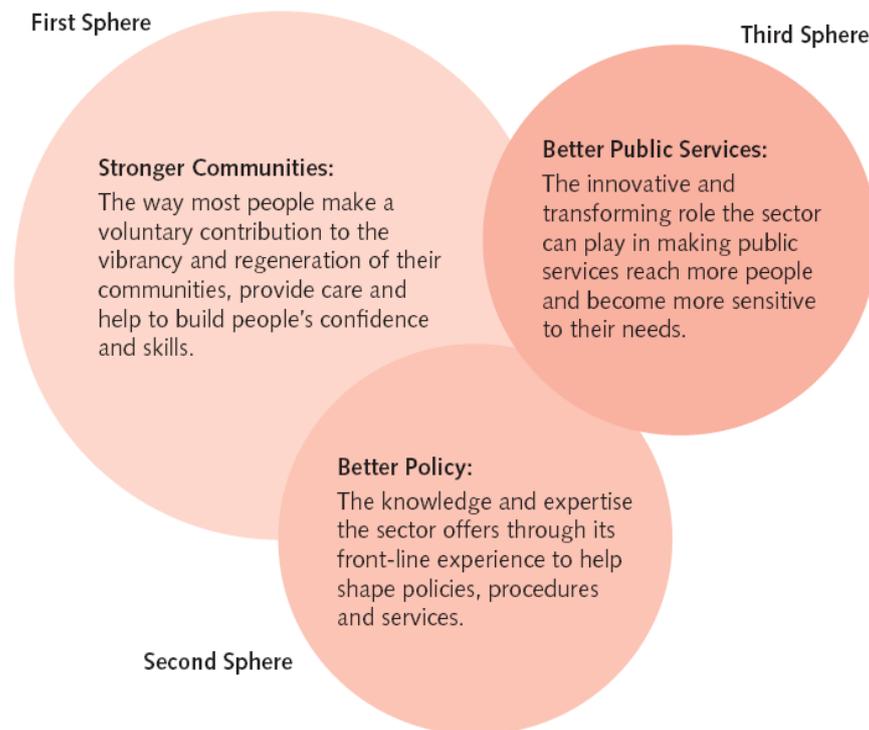
"The third sector is very broad, spanning virtually every facet of human interest. There are community associations, self-help groups, voluntary organisations, charities, faith-based organisations, social enterprises, community businesses, housing associations, co-operatives and mutual organisations. They display a range of institutional forms, including registered and unregistered charities, companies limited by guarantee (which may also be registered charities), Community Interest Companies, Industrial and Provident Societies and unincorporated associations. Each organisation has its own aims, distinctive culture, set of values and way of doing things, but they all share some important characteristics in common, being:

- independent, non-governmental bodies;
- established voluntarily by citizens who choose to organise;
- 'value-driven' and motivated by the desire to further social, cultural or environmental objectives, rather than simply to make a profit; and
- committed to reinvesting their surpluses to further their social, cultural or environmental objectives."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> WAG(2008) The Third Dimension: A strategic action plan for the voluntary sector scheme, p5

The Assembly describes its structural relationship with the voluntary sector using the following diagram:

**Figure 2**



Essentially this describes the role of the voluntary sector in Wales as, primarily, supporting capacity building in locally communities but also having a role in both policy development and the re-shaping of public services.

The commitment to working in partnership with the voluntary sector comes from evidence of positive impact. For example the strategic action plan lists the following strengths:

- Very flexible and responsive, and able to meet needs quickly.
- Non-judgemental, independent and widely trusted, giving it credibility as an effective advocate.
- Caring in its approach and focused on people and their multiple needs, often drawing on direct experience of the issues.
- Capable of achieving a 'virtuous circle' which delivers benefits to the providers of support as well as the beneficiaries.

- Able to penetrate more deeply than others into challenging areas, making public services and resources more widely accessible.
- Able to generate community-ownership, releasing latent talent and energy.
- Excellent at networking and blending a wide range of funds and resources together to meet needs effectively.
- A repository of special skills and expertise not available anywhere else.
- Capable of delivering services that go 'above and beyond' the usual norms.
- Cost-effective, especially in achieving multiple outcomes and helping people to grow and develop as individuals.

### 3 What research has to say about the use of volunteers

#### 3.1 Volunteers working alongside social workers

Volunteers are used to supplement the family support workforce in a number of contexts. Much of the research has looked at how volunteers can complement the work of statutory social workers. For example, Gibbons and Thorpe comment that volunteers can provide a qualitatively different kind of help from that given by paid social workers<sup>5</sup>. Most marked is the difference in time available to be spent with families: in some cases volunteers spend a few hours every week for extended periods of time with families. The nature of the help can also vary with volunteers role being more 'supportive' where as the primary responsibility of the social worker is the protection of the interest of the children. The social workers role may reflect essentially more of a monitoring the welfare of children and the performance of parents' role.

Research has shown that parents were significantly more satisfied with the help from their volunteers than those who received more formal help from social workers<sup>6</sup>. This may be due to the greater time that volunteers can spend with the family and their independence from statutory agencies. Such help may be less expert than professional services, but it is often more acceptable, more flexible and more available<sup>4</sup>. Professional social workers are often viewed with a degree of suspicion and hostility, especially due to their primary focus centred around child protection at the expense of preventative support for families in need<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Gibbons J and Thorpe S (1989). Can voluntary support projects help vulnerable families? The work of Home-Start. *British Journal of Social Work*; **19**: 189-202.

<sup>6</sup> Armstrong C and Hill M (2001). Support services for vulnerable families with young children. *Child and Family Social Work*; **6**: 351-8.

<sup>7</sup> Parrot L et al (2006). Volunteers, families and children in need: an evaluation of family and friends. *Child and Family Social Work*; **11**(2): 147-55.

### 3.2 Volunteers working in other contexts

CWDC has identified, within a number of occupation groups for which it is responsible, where volunteers are most likely to be used<sup>8</sup>:

- Early Years: Children's centres; day nurseries; nursery schools; and nursery classes in primary schools.
- Social Care: Family centres; day centres; residential centres; residential children's homes; and social care support in the community (including outreach of family support workers).
- In-school support: School-based staff who aim at supporting the emotional and social needs of children within a school setting, for example, learning mentors and education welfare assistants.

'The voluntary sector is particularly good at reaching so-called 'hard-to-reach' groups, including recent BME groups, through offering specialist attention. Its impact is likely to be preventative; although it is difficult to measure the impact of this work, the mirror image is that statutory services only become engaged when young people have got into serious trouble. There is therefore not a stigma in interfacing with a voluntary sector organisation - whereas stigma does attach to interfacing with some statutory services'<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, statutory services, in some areas have high thresholds and long waiting lists before they can be accessed.

Trained volunteers properly matched to families in need of support can have a significant role in the UK in enhancing family life and at the extreme preventing statutory intervention<sup>10</sup>.

The provision of alternatives to statutory services is desirable since power is spread and not concentrated in a few big organisations<sup>11</sup>. However, voluntary family support projects and agencies are not totally independent of statutory social services: to a greater or lesser extent they are dependent on the state and local government for financial support.

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<sup>8</sup> CWDC (2008). Establishing a model for estimating the number of volunteers within the 'footprint' of the children's workforce development council (CWDC).

<sup>9</sup> Craig G et al (2008). Every Organisation Matters: Mapping the children and young people's voluntary and community sector.

<sup>10</sup> Parrot L et al (2006). Volunteers, families and children in need: an evaluation of family and friends. *Child and Family Social Work*; **11**(2): 147-55.

<sup>11</sup> Gibbons J and Thorpe S (1989). Can voluntary support projects help vulnerable families? The work of Home-Start. *British Journal of Social Work*; **19**: 189-202.

## 4 Examples of schemes using volunteers

### 4.1 Home-Start

Home-Start is one of the largest providers of support and befriending for parents of young children in the UK, established over 30 years ago. In 2003, there were over 330 Home-Start schemes in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The service provides home visiting by trained volunteers to families under stress where there is at least one child aged under 5 years of age, encouraging families to widen their network of friends in the community and make effective use of available services. An evaluation indicated that Home-Start led to improved emotional wellbeing for half the mothers over 6 months and contributed to more responsive and confident parenting in a similar proportion of cases<sup>12</sup>. Frost et al (2000) found that two out of three mothers, including a high proportion with physical and mental health problems, reported improvements in their well-being<sup>13</sup>.

The aims of Home-Start are<sup>13</sup>:

- To work with families containing children under five, as an independent voluntary organisation. The volunteers should normally be parents themselves.
- To offer support, friendship and practical assistance to families experiencing frustration or difficulties, by visiting families at home and developing a relationship in which time, flexibility of approach and understanding can be shared by the volunteer with the other parent. The emphasis is on encouraging parents' strengths, reassuring them about their capabilities and the common occurrence of difficulties in bringing up children, so that greater parental confidence enhances the development of the children.
- To encourage parents to widen their networks of relationships and use community services effectively.

In working with more vulnerable families, volunteers give significantly more support; undertaking more family support activities than with less vulnerable families. Volunteers were also more likely to carry out acts involving some exercise of authority or influence, and acts of practical help<sup>13</sup>.

Home-Start has been described by professionals as having four main characteristics<sup>14</sup>:

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<sup>12</sup> Armstrong C and Hill M (2001). Support services for vulnerable families with young children. *Child and Family Social Work*; 6: 351-8.

<sup>13</sup> Frost, N., et al. (2000) Home-Start and the Delivery of Family Support, *Children & Society*, 14, 5, pp. 328-342.

<sup>14</sup> Frost, N., et al. (2000) Home-Start and the Delivery of Family Support, *Children & Society*, 14, 5, pp. 328-342.

- A flexible service providing responsive forms of support.
- A non-stigmatising service which was often more acceptable to families than statutory services.
- Providing a service where one would not otherwise be provided.
- A service which is complementary to statutory services.

#### 4.2 Volunteers in child protection

The volunteers in child protection project (ViCP) aims to deliver family support services to families where at least one child is on the Child Protection Register<sup>15</sup>. Volunteers work alongside professional social workers with success. An evaluation of two pilot projects suggested that the full potential of ViCP projects will be best realised in the context of a close and positive working relationship with staff in their 'host' children's services department<sup>12</sup>. Due to the nature of the families worked with there was a rigorous selection process and training programme (a total of 18 hours training) for volunteers<sup>16</sup>. The model was felt could help overcome the negative image of children's social work, especially among users, as being concerned solely with child protection rather than wider family support.

#### 4.3 NEWPIN (New Parent Infant Network)

This programme provides a community support programme based on befriending and giving access to a wider range of services. The programme is specifically targeted at vulnerable mothers where there is a danger of family breakdown. More specifically it is aimed at mothers with depression, social isolation and poverty. As part of the programme new referrals are matched with a befriender who is an established NEWPIN user. An evaluation suggests that most users indicated that the opportunity to meet other women was of most importance<sup>17</sup>.

#### 4.4 Family friends

This is a voluntary organisation based in Wrexham that trains volunteers to support parents who are experiencing stress as a consequence of their children<sup>18</sup>. The volunteers provide regular support, friendship and practical help tailored to the needs of the families who are experiencing difficulties, where at least one child is between the ages of five to eleven. The families

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<sup>15</sup> Tunstill J (2007). Volunteers in Child Protection: A study and evaluation of CSV's pilot projects in Sunderland and Bromley.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/inDepth/ByDiscipline/Social-Care/779935/Feature---Social-Care-Volunteers-child-protection/> (accessed 11/3/11).

<sup>17</sup> Armstrong C and Hill M (2001). Support services for vulnerable families with young children. *Child and Family Social Work*; 6: 351-8.

<sup>18</sup> Parrot L et al (2006). Volunteers, Families and Children in Need: An evaluation of family and friends. *Child and Family Social Work*; 11(2): 147-55.

that have been referred are then matched to home-visiting volunteers who are recruited, trained and supported by the Family Friends Coordinator.

Users of this service describe the value of having someone who 'really' did listen to them, understand what was happening to them and appreciated how it was impacting on them. Many saw this help as distinctly different from the type of assistance provided by statutory agencies, which they saw as controlling, intrusive or surrounded in stigma.

The type of support offered by volunteers can be divided into two main areas<sup>19</sup>:

- The provision of short term respite care of children.
- Emotional support aimed directly at parents, which didn't necessarily involve contact with the children.

#### 4.5 Families First Volunteers

The co-ordinator of this scheme demonstrated considerable commitment and professionalism in describing how she has developed a volunteering programme over the last six months. Of particular interest to this report is the approach to the recruitment, training and supervision of volunteers.

- Volunteers are required to complete an application form and interview process. They are given support if necessary. It provides an early and informal opportunity for the co-ordinator to get to know volunteers.
- Induction takes four sessions, each of which lasts four hours. The timing of the sessions is flexible to enable morning or evening attendance.
- Induction covers: the role of the volunteer, expectations of the volunteer, listening skills, child protection, CAF, parenting skills, safe working, confidentiality and relevant policies.
- Each volunteer is given a handbook that supports and extends the areas covered in the induction.
- Free child care is available to volunteers when they attend training.
- Volunteers receive regular supervision which is recorded.
- There are team meetings every six weeks which always includes a training component.
- The management of volunteers includes coaching and acknowledgement of their contribution to family support.

In general discussion the Families First Volunteer co-ordinator made the following observations:

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<sup>19</sup> Parrot L et al (2006). Volunteers, Families and Children in Need: An evaluation of family and friends. *Child and Family Social Work*; **11**(2): 147-55.

- Clients seem more likely to accept support from volunteers.
- The work of volunteers can support that of statutory and other agencies, for example, a volunteer can support a family as part of an exit strategy.
- The co-ordinator uses a detailed process of assessment and contracting to ensure that the volunteer and family are well matched. This helps to establish a shared understanding of the role of the volunteer, expectations of the volunteer and outcomes being addressed.
- To support safe working the co-ordinator has a weekly timetable of volunteer visits and has provided mobile phones for all volunteers.
- Volunteers receive travel and out of pocket expenses.
- Through good working with partner agencies, volunteers can be deployed to maximum effect.

## **5 Schemes using volunteers in the locality**

### **5.1 The Youth Offending Team**

The YOT trains 20 to 25 volunteers each year as part of its preventative work. The volunteers are aged between 18 and 60 and come from a range of backgrounds. There is usually a waiting list of people wanting to join the volunteer scheme.

Appendices 1 and 2 show the YOT's strong strategic approach to recruiting and deploying volunteers. Its policy is particularly clear in setting out the role and expectation of volunteers and, also, the responsibility that the YOT takes in developing and supervising volunteers. Its recruitment process is transparent and supportive of the potential volunteer, while focused on recruiting appropriate people.

One of the striking features of the YOT's work with volunteers was the Prevention Manager's personal commitment to making the scheme work. The energy and enthusiasm she displayed in ensuring that appropriate volunteers are recruited, trained and monitored was considerable. Yet, this work is additional to her core role.

Another important feature of the scheme is the comprehensive training programme that must be completed by all volunteers. The Youth Justice Board has produced a detailed programme covering areas such as Child Protection, Health and Safety, Domestic Violence and Substance Misuse. This has been personalised to the specific County Borough Council by the addition of local examples. It was also evident from the very positive feedback from participants, that the trainers delivering the programme in the locality have given considerable attention to ensuring that it is accessible and engaging.

In discussing the challenges and risks of using volunteers, the following issues were highlighted:

- There is a rapid turn-over in volunteers, often because the more effective volunteers go on to get paid work.
- There needs to be real clarity about the parameters of the role.
- Volunteers need supervising and their quality assuring. This can be challenging for managers when, for example, there is under-performance to be addressed.
- Time and resources need to be allocated to running an effective volunteer scheme.

## 5.2 Voluntary Action Team

Colleagues from the Voluntary Action Team were generous in sharing their time, expertise and enthusiasm for the role and impact of volunteers. They provided examples of a number of schemes using volunteers. The key points will be highlighted.

### 5.2.1 The Pyramid Club

This initiative runs in schools to support vulnerable children. Volunteers are recruited through a range of awareness-raising activities via, for example, the University of Glamorgan and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

Potential volunteers are interviewed informally, followed by a 20 hour intensive induction. The timing of the induction is flexible and runs over weekends, during the evenings as well as during the day.

The training programme is delivered by a local worker who has completed extensive 'train the trainer' work. The programme itself was developed nationally by Pyramid. The areas covered include: emotional well-being, child protection, counselling skills, attachment theories, policies and procedures for club leaders, roles and responsibilities of club leaders. Volunteers can access additional training if they wish.

All volunteers are subject to CRB checks and references are always taken. At the end of each session there is a 20 minute debrief and all volunteers receive individual supervision on a monthly basis.

The Pyramid Clubs have been well received in local schools and can demonstrate positive outcomes for children and young people.

Colleagues noted that a number of volunteers have moved into paid work after the experience of volunteering. It was felt that this resulted from enhanced self-confidence and skills development.

### 5.2.2 Evolve

This initiative deploys volunteers to befriend vulnerable adults. Of particular relevance is the Investors in Volunteering status achieved by Evolve. To achieve this award an organisation must demonstrate good practice in relation to the recruitment, induction, training and support and supervision of volunteers. There must also be evidence of compliance with relevant legislation.

### 5.2.3 Homestart

The national Homestart scheme is described earlier in this report. Colleagues from the locality highlighted the following:

- The national standards are a key tool informing the training and supervision of volunteers.
- There is a national training package which offers extensive development opportunities for volunteers.
- The standards offer an effective mechanism for quality assuring Homestart schemes.
- There is significant turn-over of volunteers as a number move on to paid work.

### 5.2.4 General discussion

- The voluntary and community sector can be responsive to the needs of particular client groups when responding to commissioners' requests for services.
- In relation to the workforce, paid and unpaid, short term funding can be unsettling.
- It's important to acknowledge the contribution of volunteers, for example, through running an 'awards night'.
- Using quality standards offered by schemes such as Investors in Volunteering, Investors in People or Picasso is important.

## 6 Possible Implications for Family Support in the locality

In considering the possible further development of the use of volunteers in Family Support, it is recommended that further consultation takes place. This might look at the following areas / questions:

Area / Question	Possible product / action
Do we have a complete understanding of where volunteers are being used to support vulnerable families in the locality?	*Mapping the use of volunteers across the family support sector, including description of role(s) and arrangements for recruitment, training and management.
What is the role of the volunteer in family support?	*Develop a volunteering policy for the local Family Support Sector. *Devise a common job description. *Develop a set of volunteer standards.
Should we co-ordinate the recruitment of volunteers across the family support sector?	*Determine whether a range of agencies would welcome this. *Describe the possible nature and scope of co-ordination. *Identify possible resources available. *Develop a consistent and transparent approach to the recruitment process.
What training and development can volunteers in the local family support sector expect?	*Consider the use of common induction and what this might include. *Describe a training offer. *Identify resources to deliver training and development activity.
How will we ensure safe practice?	*Require CRB checks on all volunteers. *Develop a common supervision protocol. *Plan and deliver training for managers on how to supervise and quality assure volunteers.
How will we evaluate the impact of volunteers?	*Consider how service users / volunteers / paid professionals might comment on a volunteer scheme for the local Family Support Sector.

