

Supporting volunteers with mental health needs

Workshop evaluation

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the three workshops that were delivered by Attend Academy on behalf of the Time for Health partnership as part of the Volunteering for All initiative, funded through The Office of the Third Sector (The Cabinet Office) and CSIP (Care Services Improvement Partnership). This training session focused on providing delegates the opportunity to gain a clear understanding of the changing nature of volunteering and implications of failing to manage and embrace change effectively at operational and strategic levels.

The report seeks to:

- Identify the key strengths and areas for development of the workshop design and delivery
- Establish the benefits to the individuals who attended
- Establish how the learning can be applied in volunteering programmes.

This workshop was delivered in three locations and was attended by a total of 74 delegates.

NB. Five further Volunteer Services Managers (VSMs) wished to attend the workshops, but were unable due to prior commitments and the limited notice available. These VSMs were added to the distribution list and received a write-up of the sessions and additional follow-up resources.

This evaluation is based on an abridged version of Hamblin et al's model of training and development evaluation. The following levels are considered in turn:

1. Reactions of delegates

This focuses on the content of the course together with venue and quality of delivery.

2. Impact on learning/job behaviour

This can be broken down further to establish the effect of the workshop on delegates' knowledge and skills and confidence in applying learning within their volunteering programme.

3. Impact on the department/organisation

Assuming there is an effect on job behaviour, it is likely that this will contribute to department/organisational goals.

Questionnaires were distributed prior to the close of the workshop a 43% response rate was achieved.

Also, additional interviews were undertaken two months after the workshops to explore issues in further depth. The questions focused around:

- Have thoughts and ideas of engaging volunteer diversity been developed around volunteering programme(s)
- Has there been anything carried out differently as a result of anything learned from this training session
- Has there been an any impact and benefits developing practice/service delivery.

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Section A – Content

1. Of the sessions that were included in your workshop, please could you rank them in order of usefulness (5 = high, 1= low)

	Manchester	Leeds	London
Practical Exercises	5	3.5	5
Presentations	4	4	4.5
Discussion with other delegates	5	3.5	5
Handouts and other information provided	4.5	4	5

(the above averages have been calculated from 32 completed questionnaires)

2. On reflection, do you feel there should be any additions/deletions to the subject areas covered at the workshops you attended?

Any specific comments?

I thought it was really useful across all aspects. x2 *London*

We would like more information on solutions and breaking down barriers. *London*

Making a quiz would've been useful. *London*

Impressed that people could contact the Mental Health lead at Attend for further follow up assistance and advice.

London

Very well balanced session. *Manchester*

Good specialised knowledge from speakers. *London*

Section B – Venue

3. How suitable was the location for this workshop?

Very Good	Good overall	Fair	Poor
60%	30%	10%	0%
Manchester 55%	Manchester 30%	Manchester 15%	Manchester 0%
London 65%	London 30%	London 10%	London 0%
Leeds 60%	Leeds 35%	Leeds 5%	Leeds 0%

Any specific comments?

Easy to get to – very convenient as near tube. *London*

Leeds hotel would have been better with their own car park. *Leeds*

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4. How suitable was the venue for this workshop?

Very Good	Good overall	Fair	Poor
50%	40%	10%	0%
Manchester 45%	Manchester 50%	Manchester 5%	Manchester 0%
London 60%	London 30%	London 10%	London 0%
Leeds 55%	Leeds 35%	Leeds 10%	Leeds 0%

Any specific comments?

Hotel undergoing renovation work, occasionally noisy. *Manchester*

Excellent hot lunches. *All venues*

Layout and refreshments very good – very comfortable and relaxing. *Leeds*

Room temperature varied. *Manchester*

Amazing level of care and hospitality. *London*

Lovely, relaxed, comfortable environment. *London*

5. To what extent do you feel learning was enhanced by working with other delegates?

Significantly	In many areas	In some areas	Limited overall
60%	35%	5%	0%

Any specific comments?

Great to meet others in this field and learn about other similar projects. *London*

Sharing practical experience is so much better than theory. *x2 Manchester*

The varied backgrounds of delegates was a major learning benefit to all delegates. *Manchester*

Felt lucky to be surrounded by so many knowledgeable and experienced people who offered great advice. *Manchester*

Section C – Relevance/Impact in the Workplace

6. How would you rate the potential impact of the workshop on your volunteer programme?

a. Identify potential opportunities to engage volunteers with mental health needs

Positive impact	Some impact	Little impact
60%	35%	5%

Any specific comments?

Especially interested in doing more about Mental Health in volunteer inductions. *London*

Would still like to have more specific training. *London*

I now have three strategies I would like to implement this year. *Manchester*

Sharing with other colleagues was useful. *Leeds*

Has helped me to think of a framework to work to on achieving more involvement with mental health volunteers. *London*

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I am working towards organising a Mental Health support group and all information has been useful to assist me. *Manchester*

I have recently started working with a volunteer who has Mental Health needs and going away from today I know I can support him with new skills and techniques. *Manchester*

b. Analysing the interests of those affected by this engagement

Positive impact	Some impact	Little impact
60%	35%	5%

Any specific comments?

First hand knowledge passed on was invaluable. *London*

c. Implementing initiatives to engage with volunteers with mental health needs

Positive impact	Some impact	Little impact
55%	45%	0%

Any specific comments?

Informative access – dealing with good practice, volunteer awareness. *London*

Has given me lots of issues to look at. *London*

Has given me positive suggestions to some key problems I have experienced. *London*

Toolkit and other information will be very useful. *Leeds*

Feel much more confident and knowledgeable about this area. *Manchester*

Some of the information was too general. *Leeds*

Section D – Benefits to the Individual

7. How beneficial did you find the workshop?

a. Knowledge/skills

Updated knowledge in a range of areas	Update knowledge in some areas	Limited updating to knowledge overall
50%	35%	5%

Any specific comments?

The combined theory with case studies was ideal. *x4 London*

Discussions very useful and informative. *London*

Some of us already knew the background theory but always good to be refreshed and pick up information on new ideas and strategies. *Manchester*

I realise how easy to judge people and label them so always looking to extend my knowledge. *Leeds*

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b. Confidence to manage and engage volunteers with mental health needs

Greater	Slightly more	Indifferent
60%	35%	5%

8. Are there any additional comments you would like to pass on about the workshop?

Great networking opportunity. *x5 All venues*

My confidence has increased as I have realised the issues I have are shared with other delegates in a similar position, so I took an interest in the proposed solutions. *London*

The panel running and leading were very open and informing. *x2 Manchester*

The quiz was a good way proving some of us really do lack basic knowledge around mental health. *Manchester*

A few delegates were overpowering, talking over the presenters on occasions. The facilitator being very highly patient and professional handled this very well indeed. *Leeds*

Brilliant at enlightening us on the key issues that we have faced for years but not proactively sought advice. *London*

Significant cross-sections of interests and opinions were highlighted which benefited the learning of us all. *Manchester*

Very popular learning experience tackling a difficult subject. *London*

On occasions a few specific delegates were missing the point and speaking out irrationally when there is simply no need to. *Leeds*

Glad to get some reassurance that what we have implemented has been on the right track. *London*

Following this session I look forward to the 'younger people' training event in a few weeks time. *London*

Would like to be kept up-to-date about future training workshops. *Manchester*

Timely session for me to attend – learning will be put to use with immediate effect! *Manchester*

Learning the politically correct language is very important and that was a key part of my learning today. *Leeds*

Follow-up interviews with delegates

Interview one

1. Please briefly describe if your thoughts and ideas of engaging with volunteers with mental health needs have been developed since the session?

Since I attended the workshop I have had many ideas of how I can work with and engage volunteers with mental health needs. The trust I work for is a very large organisation and many people are a little overwhelmed. So a person with mental health needs would feel this much more so.

2. Can you highlight if you have implemented any new strategies/plans to explore and develop opportunities to engage volunteers with mental health needs as a result of the training?

As a result of the workshop I arranged a meeting for last week with our director for Occupational Health and my immediate line manager to discuss the options available to us. The meeting was very successful as I have had three people with mental health needs who have applied recently and was extremely worried that they may find it quite hard being placed in a clinical environment. We decided, where possible to encourage the support of their 'key workers' and to adopt a buddy system so they would feel supported in their role. We also decided that to single volunteers out with mental health needs and any other specific need would be quite inappropriate. Therefore all our volunteers will from 1st April next week go through the same orientation and placement programme. All volunteers will wayfind and meet and greet within the hospital for a period of time and when they are ready/confident to move on they will be placed in different areas. Volunteers with mental health needs will however be placed in areas that are not quite as busy as this will help with confidence etc. It also helped to boost my confidence at the meeting as I could give examples of places that had successfully placed volunteers with mental health needs. The roles we have on offer are quite varied and we may have to create more roles for mental health patients – such as managing notice boards in the hospital/delivering leaflets to wards etc. What came across at the workshop was to work with the individual and focus on what they can do rather than what they can't do and define boundaries.

I am also starting a volunteer within the office to help with admin. etc. from the LGBT community – this will free up some of my time and I will be out and about a lot more within the hospital.

I am also devising a training package/toolkit for staff, to they have much more knowledge of volunteers and what they can/can't do and what is expected from the staff to support volunteers. This will be delivered in formal training, but will also be available on the Trust intranet for information

Follow-up interviews with delegates

3. Are you able to highlight any impact and benefits gained to your organisation in developing a proactive approach at engaging volunteers from this diverse group?

I think it is a little too early to comment on any impact that they may have. Contact me again in a few months. I am not actively recruiting volunteers from this group, but will not turn any away. To have a handful that I can concentrate I feel is much better rather than be inundated and not be able to cope.

Ursula Thomas
Volunteer Services Coordinator
Central Manchester and Manchester Children's NHS University Trust

Interview two

1. Please briefly describe if your thoughts and ideas of engaging with volunteers with mental health needs have been developed since the session?

I am currently looking to work with a colleague from the drugs and alcohol team to develop, organise and support a group of people with Mental Health needs.

2. Can you highlight if you have implemented any new strategies/plans to explore and develop opportunities to engage volunteers with mental health needs as a result of the training?

The purpose of the group is to engage in a holistic manner to support and provide basic skills and, more importantly, confidence and social skills, with a view to supported working. The information on the course will be helpful with regard to other experienced agencies that we can refer to when we need advice and guidance.

This project will be our first attempt at working with a group of mental health service users, I feel that just getting them through the recruitment and selection process will be difficult at times. However, in preparation for this I have explored the possibility of my colleague and myself completing all of the paperwork between us with the individual volunteers, including the CRB's and task descriptions, looking at the risks involved etc. A big piece of work for when we get the room to start.

Follow-up interviews with delegates

3. Are you able to highlight any impact and benefits gained to your organisation in developing a proactive approach at engaging volunteers from this diverse group?

It is difficult to say what the impact and benefits to the organisation will be at this point, although we have the organisations approval, to do this piece of work, what we hope will happen and what will happen might not be the same.

Linda Gorham
Volunteer Services Manager
Wirral PCT

Interview three

1. Please briefly describe if your thoughts and ideas of engaging with volunteers with mental health needs have been developed since the session?

The course heightened my awareness that mental health issues can affect anyone at any time throughout their life and that for some individuals mental health issues can return, for a variety of reasons.

Myself and my colleagues are, therefore, mindful of this and reassurance is given that if a volunteer becomes unwell and unable to volunteer for a time, be it for either weeks or months (as was the case recently), that we keep their job open for them. I discreetly keep in touch while they are off, ensuring they are aware that they are very welcome to return at their own pace when they feel ready and well enough.

2. Can you highlight if you have implemented any new strategies/plans to explore and develop opportunities to engage volunteers with mental health needs as a result of the training?

Being relatively new to my role, the training day for me personally was a very good "taster" day of mental health/volunteer issues. I found it a good incentive in motivating me to want to learn more/network with other organisations, etc.

As a result of this incentive, during March and April I have met with representatives from HUBB, Rethink, Mascall Park Hospital, HAVCO and attended a local Voluntary Sector Services Lunch Event.

The above meetings/visits have given me the opportunity to engage with potential volunteers who have mental health issues and this contact has led directly to my recruiting three volunteers within the last two months and also making further contacts, etc.

I am also in the process of booking a further course "Mental Health in Later Life" due to take place later this year.

Follow-up interviews with delegates

3. Are you able to highlight any impact and benefits gained to your organisation in developing a proactive approach at engaging volunteers from this diverse group?

I believe that Age Concern are continuing to develop and grow in relation to all aspects of diversity, including mental health. Managers, staff, volunteers and service users can see for themselves the positive results achieved by supporting and working alongside diversity and the invaluable assistance that the organisation has been given by recruiting from many diverse groups, including individuals with mental health issues.

Carol Gibson
Capital Volunteer Support Worker
Age Concern Havering

Analysis of findings

Reactions of delegates

Course content

- Delegates valued the opportunity to explore the correct usage of language in this area
- This area of volunteer diversity highlighted it was an increasingly important subject and not commonly covered in training programmes they have attended
- The combination of presentations and activities were all conducive to learning
- The combined theory with case studies was ideal for this session
- Presenters shared vital information and good practice guidance to support the session
- On occasions, some delegates found the contribution of others detracted from the workshop.

Venues

- Overall the venues were suitable in terms of location and facilities.

Networking

- The opportunity to meet other volunteer services managers was most welcomed as many were able to draw on the experiences of their fellow delegates. Delegates also welcomed the distribution of email addresses to follow up the session to enhance idea sharing and potential partnership working.

Impact on learning/job behaviour

- The workshop had a significant positive impact on the confidence of delegates to work with others in similar roles across other organisations to engage more in their volunteering programmes to engage with volunteers with mental health needs
- The learning was applicable in other sectors well as healthcare
- Many ideas developed at the workshops can immediately will play an important role in volunteer diversification.

Impact on the department/organisation

- Overall, delegates perceived that attending the workshop would have a positive impact on working practices
- It is much easier to demonstrate the organisations inclusivity to key stakeholders and key funders.

Analysis of findings

Findings from interviews

The strategies and ideas for supporting volunteer with mental health needs are:

- Have developed creative solutions and approach to place volunteers with mental health needs
- Met with other stakeholders and other 3rd sector for partnership working opportunities
- Designing a buddying system to assist with engaging volunteers in the hospital
- Developed induction programme to support volunteers with Mental Health needs but rolled out to all volunteers to avoid singling people out. This initiative is beneficial to all volunteers
- Have developed training support for staff who engage with volunteers with Mental Health needs
- These new initiatives are supporting the organisations diversity and inclusiveness strategy.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

- The workshop was delivered at the right level and engaged delegates with an appropriate mix of activities. The discussions between delegates added value and it was clearly apparent that many were facing similar types of issues in their volunteering programmes in the health and social sectors as well as others.
- Delegates have implemented a range of initiatives to improve the quality of the volunteering experience following this workshop.
- These initiatives support wider organisational diversity strategies.
- There were occasions where some delegates showed a limited appreciation of the remit for this workshop.
- The opportunity to network was particularly welcomed in this topic.

Recommendations

1. Repeat the delivery of workshops in other locations with suitable promotion and notice given to VSM networks.
2. Continue exploring partnership-working opportunities between mental health organisations and the Time for Health Partnership.
3. Link the workshop to an accrediting body so it can be developed into a module and support the professional development of volunteer services managers.
4. Ensure the purpose of this workshop is clearly marketed to potential delegates in the future.
5. Develop a bank of case studies to include a full range of mental health related issues to capture successful practice and develop 'toolkits' for dissemination.
6. Undertake further research to explore the impact of engaging with volunteers with mental health needs on organisational goals.
7. Seek funding to deliver this workshop in other volunteering sectors.
8. Explore how to promote effective ongoing networking in this area of volunteer management.