



Cass CCE Newsletter – Guest Article – July 2017

“Oh brave new world that has such people in it” – raising resources to meet our full potential

Recent devastating events such as the fire at Grenfell Tower and the attacks in London and Manchester have shown what we in the charity sector know to be true – that volunteering and community engagement is and remains a universally strong spirit. People, without being asked to step in, came forward to give their time and share their skills, to provide practical assistance, comfort and support; ultimately creating a sense of resilience and strength. In order to support these initiatives and enable people to contribute effectively it is vital to think about how to develop and provide the relevant set up. Evidence has shown that without appropriate infrastructure and support to co-ordinate efforts and offers of help, community action can dissipate rather than proliferate.

Reflecting on this whilst attending the latest of the Centre for Charity Effectiveness Charity Talk sessions on ‘changing ahead of the curve’, it seemed clear that charities need to adapt in order to navigate the changing environment. And, as Julie Bentley (CE of Girlguiding) so eloquently did in the talk, this is the time to promote the important issue of how the sector benefits from volunteering. The power of engaging individuals and communities to give their time may seem self-evident, but a recent report from New Philanthropy Capital (NPC): *‘Charities taking charge: transforming to face a changing world’* showed that only 51% of the charity leaders surveyed thought that volunteer resource was very important to achieving their mission – and indeed 6% thought that volunteers were not at all important in doing so!

If we are going to efficiently address some of the changes which are coming, and to do so ahead of the curve, I would argue that we need to think more widely and creatively about how we raise resources in the broadest sense, rather than merely funds – such as the assets which people themselves can bring. The narrative of the impact and value of giving time needs to be more developed and articulated. We are getting better at acknowledging volunteering as something of real value - to people who use a service, the individual who is giving their time themselves, the organisation, and society as a whole. Andy Haldane, the Chief Economist of the Bank of England, has calculated that the economic benefit of volunteering could exceed £50 billion a year and he has spoken about capturing it within the country’s GDP; which is an interesting proposal. Whilst the economic value of volunteering is clearly immense, as big as the energy sector, the social value of volunteering is even greater. As evidenced by the reaction to the Grenfell Tower fire, volunteers, as members of a local community, can help address needs which statutory services or organisations on their own cannot reach.

There is a wide spectrum of ways and reasons for giving time, energy and experience and people do so in many ways – including to a variety of sectors as well as to none. For example, as well as for the more traditional charity, people volunteer with the statutory sector such as NHS, schools and prisons and also as individuals informally or within a whole host

of small community groups that aren't registered as charities. It is important that each sector shares its assets to make the biggest differences to society. We need to consider the 'whole ecosystem' as Caroline Copeman put it in the charity talk. Boundaries are being increasingly blurred between the sectors, most obviously with social enterprises, and those who want to do something to make a difference want to do just that; so it is our responsibility to help facilitate that as much as possible. Bringing groups and organisations together in a whole system response will provide a better, more impactful outcome and also tap into the motivations and assets of the wider community in a way which can make change more sustainable.

Volunteer management is the golden thread that enables people giving their time to be engaged, supported and motivated and ensuring that volunteer management is recognised as a skill and a valued profession – as fundraising is – is essential to the continued flourishing of volunteers and indeed volunteering. At a time when charities have been under scrutiny, the value and impact which volunteers bring, extending the reach and resources and developing services and interventions which resonate within the community, really matters. Empowering everyone who works with volunteers to feel confident in their abilities and knowledgeable about how to work with an individual's and community's existing assets is essential – and this includes ensuring we are having the conversation across the sector about the strategic importance of involving volunteers as well as generating income.

July 2017

Ruth Leonard

**Head of Volunteering Development, Macmillan Cancer Support
and Director of Association of Volunteer Managers (AVM)**

If you are interested in submitting guest articles to our quarterly newsletter, we'd love to hear from you. Please email us at CassCCE@city.ac.uk to express an interest.