Delivering public services in the mixed economy of welfare: the role of volunteers in the voluntary and community sector in England

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Focus and structure of presentation

• Focus: volunteering, and the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in England
• Structure
  - Public policy: the ‘benefits’ of Volunteering
  - Public policy: service delivery by the VCS
  - Qualitative experience of volunteering – English experience, case study of volunteering in a deprived community
  - Public service delivery by the VCS
  - Concluding comments
Policy context: Volunteering to ‘get on’

- Individual rewards of volunteering as much as or more than the contribution that they can make to the wellbeing of others.
- Individual benefits in terms of ‘getting on’ in terms of paid work.
- Government driven strategies to expand and diversify volunteering across all three sectors of the economy
- Key policy agenda: improving employability, promoting social cohesion, and reversing disconnection from the public realm.
- Create more volunteering opportunities, especially for young people and ‘hard to reach’ groups

Voluntary work, voluntary organisations

- Volunteering ‘transforms’ individuals into better citizens
- Communities and wider society, it is claimed, benefit through building social capital.
- Volunteering is often conflated with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) - around three fifths of individuals who volunteer in England volunteer for organisations within the VCS.
- Other settings for volunteering include the NHS, private companies and higher education institutions.
- Between 40 and 50 per cent of the adult population participates in volunteering at least occasionally.
- Many volunteers are ‘beyond’ the labour market for reasons of age, disability or care responsibilities.
Voluntary work

- Historical roots - philanthropy and mutual aid
- Volunteering - is situated at, and builds bridges between: the community, the voluntary organisation and the individual.
- Volunteers, volunteer efforts and many voluntary organisations are embedded in a community context.
- Volunteering becoming more work-like
- Volunteer roles
  - professional: committee work, advice and representation
  - Clerical – raising money, administrative and organisational work
  - Personal services – service delivery, visiting, driving etc

The mixed economy of welfare

- Service delivery is high profile it is not essentially new.
- The 1990 NHS and Community Care Act.
- Growth post 1997 with New Labour
Public service delivery: social care and welfare

- VCS – role in drive to improve public service delivery because they:
  - have direct experience;
  - are located within communities;
  - are responsive to the needs of service users;
  - and they can innovate.
- VCS gains fee income (over one third of the sector’s funding now comes from statutory sources), can improve services, and can influence policy
- But they may weaken their distinctive organisational values and become more like agencies of the state, or more like for-profit businesses.

VCS – the innovator

- History of innovative service delivery, e.g.:
  - since establishment of the Welfare State (Children’s hospices)
  - with services for older people - ‘low-level’ services that fill in gaps between specialist and universal public services.
- Research by Osborne et al (2008) argues that commissioning processes dominated by local authority approaches to risk management that privilege the tried and tested over the innovative.
- Retaining the innovative capacity of the sector is a significant concern for central government and the Office of Third Sector is developing a £1.2 million Innovation Exchange programme to support the sector’s capacity to innovate (Audit Commission 2007)
VCS and trust

- Greater ability to engage with and understand the needs of individual service users and communities.
- 'Comparative advantage' of VCS because of 'stakeholder ambiguity' (roles of employer, employee, provider, recipient, volunteer, and others) ... leads to flexible, responsive organisation.
- But VCS now more regulated, more competitive and more output driven.
- Early 1990s study few VCOs that took on service delivery at that time had clear strategies to ensure that users had a voice (Taylor 1997).
- Later study presented a more positive and nuanced picture of VCS practices in securing meaningful participation of service users (Robson 2004).
- Commissioning opportunities may tempt underfunded VCOs to re-orient themselves from social to market goals.

Cost and value

- 2007 Audit Commission study found that:
  - two-thirds of all funding agreements are currently for one year only.
  - one in eight charities delivering public services achieve full cost recovery all of the time.
- Calculating service delivery costs only in monetary terms emphasises economic value rather than the value of the service in a holistic way.
- Value for money/ 'added value'?
- Calls for more strategic commissioning and greater emphasis on added social value in contract design and evaluation (eg social clauses).
Doing one’s duty project

• A study of the ‘work’ of volunteering and the ways in which voluntary action is now linked to improving individual, household and community wellbeing.

• How people understand and manage volunteering alongside - or instead of - participation in the labour market and other unpaid work such as informal neighbouring and caring within the family and community.

• Case study approach within an East Midlands community ‘Brightville’ beset by loss of employment

Brightville

• Industrial village of Brightville developed in the nineteenth century

• Diverse industrial base spanning coal mining and textiles.

• Brightville’s residents retain a strong sense of a separate identity

• Economic decline, local residents have borne the brunt of social deprivation and unemployment.

• Brightville remains a white working class community.
Qualitative experience of volunteering

- Understand variety in the fundamental variation in motivation for, and meanings attached to, volunteering;
- Cultural Theory – often called Grid and Group – as a heuristic devise for explaining the multiple positions people take up with regard to voluntary work
- The ways in which different people and social groups respond to threats and opportunities.
- Grid - degree to which individuals’ choices are circumscribed by their position in society.
- Group - degree of solidarity among members of the society.
- Holistic perspective, a more textured and complex picture of people’s ‘work’ practices, choices and constraints

Table 1: Summary of the study organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Client Group</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Support Charity (FSC)</td>
<td>Families with a child under 5</td>
<td>Volunteers: 63</td>
<td>Support families under stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Project (CP)</td>
<td>All residents</td>
<td>Volunteers: 103</td>
<td>Provide services to support the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Government Project (NGP)</td>
<td>Families with a child under 5</td>
<td>Volunteers: 27</td>
<td>Parenting support and education, and training for employability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Community Centre (LCC)</td>
<td>All residents</td>
<td>Volunteers: a pool of 3-4</td>
<td>Raise skills and employability in the community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Typology of explanations for volunteering

Social regulation

Fatalist
“Get by”
Weak social ties;
Reacting to personal need

Hierarchy
“Give aims”
Structured networks
Altruism to outsiders

Social integration

Individualism
“get on”
Instrumental
Respond to targeted incentives

Egalitarian
“Give to each other”
Mutual aid
Don’t rely on others;
Shared values within community

Case studies of volunteering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type / pseudonym</th>
<th>Brighton &amp; Hove organisation</th>
<th>Household structure/ residence</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>Other unpaid activity</th>
<th>Explanation for volunteering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giving alms</td>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>Community Project</td>
<td>Living alone Irontown</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>Retired after 32 years with Health Service</td>
<td>Active grandparent, church worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving to each other</td>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Community Project</td>
<td>Mother Brighton</td>
<td>Late 20s</td>
<td>On Incapacity Benefit because of ill health</td>
<td>History of voluntary work, doing some skills updating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting on</td>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>Community Project</td>
<td>Single mother of 4, cares for disabled brother Brighton</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Studying at local college, on nursing access course</td>
<td>Homecare, informal volunteer to neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting by</td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Family Charity</td>
<td>Living alone Irontown</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Full-time manager, public sector</td>
<td>History of voluntary work, close to daughter and parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age Concern project

A 6 month (Aug 2007-Jan 2008) project funded by Age Concern West Midlands, East Midlands, East of England and ACE

Overall objective:
“To evaluate the impact on the quality of life and well-being of older people aged 70+ living in very rural areas, of community-based services and activities, to inform future service development and planning”.

Six projects (two from each region) under consideration

The six services under consideration

Project 1 – Community Warden Service: Community warden giving emotional/practical support to housebound/lonely, bereaved, and people convalescing after hospitalisation in dispersed villages in remote part of a county

Project 2 – Mobilising Local Communities: Rural county-wide initiative to grow community self help networks, analysis centred on a neighbourhood lunch club held in a parish centre

Project 3 – Accessing Welfare Rights: Helping older residents access entitlements in a tightly defined area (former mining communities and rural villages in part of a county)

Project 4 – Befriending Services: Two linked befriending projects which provide a regular social visit for clients living alone or in isolated settings

Project 5 – Information and Advice Service: Service offering information and advice on benefits and services to older people in dispersed rural areas including a dedicated worker to visit older people in their homes to help clients access welfare entitlements

Project 6 – Lunch club/ Mobile Care Service: Combines a regular social event and meal with delivery of mobile hand, foot and hair care to older people living in very rural settings
Themes and research questions

Themes: Social inclusion/exclusion, Well-being/welfare, the impact of very rural settings

Questions:
1. To what extent are the welfare needs of older people living in very rural areas being adequately met?
2. What is the relative importance of formal and informal community-based welfare services and activities in meeting such needs?
3. What roles do gender and ethnicity play in mediating access to village services for older people living in very rural areas?
4. How effective is current service delivery in improving the quality of life of older people in very rural areas?

Methodology/fieldwork

Qualitative user participatory approach
Abductive method, involve older volunteers on projects in aspects of fieldwork, £10 vouchers to older users who took part in the research

Fieldwork interviews
44 older service users: Age: 58 to 93 (4 under 70) Gender: 32 women and 12 men Ethnicity: White
18 service users were interviewed in four focus groups, 16 were interviewed individually and 10 in pairs as married couples or as requested by users
25 key informants i.e. routinely AC manager, volunteer, paid worker and a funder for each service

Analysis
Interviews transcribed verbatim, data analysed using a Nudist 6 software package
The concerns of key informants: funding and sustaining services

- We've had six years funding out of the Lottery, which is the max[sic] you can get basically. So we're now looking for other avenues of funding (KI1).

- What we've never been good at in the voluntary sector is...full cost recovery. So if somebody says, we've got £20k, we can do it. That's what we've always done in the past. Instead of thinking, actually for that serviced to run properly and efficiently it's going to cost... (KI9).

- [Funding] hasn't changed in 4 years (KI10).

- Approximately 10 per cent cutback each year since we started... over three years it's been cutback (KI14).

The concerns of key informants: funding and sustaining services

- So it can be difficult to get workers and volunteers. Simply providing the service is difficult. Its also very expensive you have to have transport to get around to visit somebody's home. You can be talking about a farm track a mile and a half off the next tarmac road (KI10).

- Within the next 2 years all the services, all services commissioned by social services will have to be tendered for. One problem in... is that they have set their limit for tendering I think ludicrously low...services under £50k a year we won't tender for because its not worth the costs of the tendering process (KI10).

- We are not going to let our clients suffer just because somebody is not giving us the money. But that I suppose is part of the people we are as well. That can't continue forever can it? (KI9).
Delivery of services: importance of volunteers

- Without those 187 volunteers...Age Concern would not exist (KI1).
- We match a volunteer to a befriender... they tend to live physically closer to the people that they befriend (KI10).
- I need the befriending service almost as much as it needs me (KI8).

Delivery of services: perspectives of paid staff

- A lot of my job is spent finding...pots of money, building up relationships with trusts... trying to find a way of keeping the service going (KI22).
- Working above contracted hours, "they theoretically work part-time... they put an enormous amount more in" (KI10).
- The worst thing about the job is the travel and the stress and it made me feel ill. There were targets, lots of stats to collect (KI23).
- Blurring professional boundaries
- Giving added value
Concluding comments: volunteering

- Positive aspects:
  - enhanced the levels of active citizenship and community spirit in an area and helped build up people’s sense of belonging to a place.
  - self-confidence and provides a structure for daily life – getting them out of the house and interacting within the community.
  - provides the sense of meaning and identity that many people find in a satisfying job.

- Diversity of styles of volunteering
- Diverse volunteer base

Concluding comments: public service delivery

- Village services are **highly valued** by users – they fear losing them
- Village services should be viewed as providing excellent **value for money** – but they are under funded and subsidised by Age Concern as an organisation and individual workers/volunteers