

# Employer Supported Volunteering

## Guidance to NHS Scotland Boards

July 2010



## **1. Introduction**

This information about employer supported volunteering has been produced as part of the Scottish Government's Refreshed Strategy for Volunteering in NHS Scotland (CEL 10 2008) and is intended to help NHS Boards, through the Nominated Leads on Volunteering, to consider what actions, if any, they could take on employer supported volunteering.

Given NHS Scotland's involvement of members of the public as volunteers in its work and its appreciation of the benefits people can gain by volunteering it is reasonable for a NHS Board to consider options on how it could appropriately support its own staff to volunteer.

This document contains:

- a description of employer supported volunteering;
- the findings of a short survey of NHS Boards about current employer supported volunteering policies;
- three approaches to employer supported volunteering and some examples of practical actions that NHS Boards could take to further employer supported volunteering;
- the benefits that can be gained from employer supported volunteering for NHS Boards, NHS staff and the wider community;
- suggested next steps; and
- information about further support and advice.

## **2. What is Employer Supported Volunteering?**

Employer Supported Volunteering is any action taken by an employer which enables its employees to more readily participate in volunteering. It encompasses a wide spectrum of action ranging from simple no cost or low cost steps for example advertising local volunteer opportunities on internal email to encouraging staff to volunteer in their spare time through to more formal programmes which explicitly link volunteering activities to staff learning and development.

There are three important points of clarification to be stated at the outset:

a) Employer Supported Volunteering should not be confused with NHS staff choosing to do unpaid overtime in the area in which they are employed. That said it may be that NHS staff choose to volunteer in other parts of their NHS Board, perhaps doing something quite different to their paid job. That said Employer Supported Volunteering predominately involves employees volunteering outwith their paid employer.

b) Many NHS employees will already volunteer in their own time. Some might welcome additional support from their employer but others might wish to keep their volunteering private and separate from their employer. The choice to accept or reject support from a person's employer in this respect must be a matter for that individual.

c) Employer Supported Volunteering must embrace the key principles of volunteering – that is undertaken as a matter of free will and it should bring benefit to others outwith ones immediate family.

### **3. Findings of a survey of NHS Boards on employer supported volunteering**

A short survey of all NHS Boards was undertaken by Volunteer Development Scotland in November 2008 which asked if an Employer Supported Volunteering policy existed either as a stand alone policy or as part of another policy.

From the survey responses four NHS Boards have a policy statement, three of which are currently in draft, on Employer Supported Volunteering.

Three of the Boards policies identified that they would:

- increase staff awareness of the opportunities for volunteering through advertising in Board bulletins, pre-retirement courses etc;
- acknowledge the value of staff volunteering activity, and the development opportunity it represents; and
- consider access to help in kind, for example premises, use of equipment, for staff members who were involved in volunteering.

One of the above Board policies also included:

- senior managers will support, promote and encourage the involvement of staff in volunteering.

One Board has a single statement as follows:

- the Board recognises, values and supports the important part that their own staff who already volunteer play and will support where possible employees who are involved in volunteering or who may consider volunteering in the future.

### **4. Approaches to Employer Supported Volunteering**

There are three approaches that employers can take to Employer Supported Volunteering:

- the general promotion of volunteering to staff;
- providing practical support to help staff volunteer; and
- running formal employer supported volunteering programmes linked to staff learning/development and/or utilising skills and knowledge which help them to better achieve organisational aims.

## **4.1 General Promotion of Volunteering to Staff**

This is the most straight forward approach to Employer Supported Volunteering. It aims to raise awareness of staff about the benefits volunteering could bring to them and to direct them towards information about volunteer opportunities.

Turning this approach into action - examples include:

- promote articles about volunteering opportunities in NHS newsletters;
- promote articles about NHS staff volunteering in NHS newsletters;
- invite volunteer centres/ voluntary organisations to run information/recruitment stalls in for example staff canteens;
- include short messages about volunteering periodically on staff payslips;
- promote the [www.volunteerscotland.org](http://www.volunteerscotland.org) website, which contains information on thousands of volunteer opportunities to staff;
- advertise volunteer opportunities on internal email; and
- include information about volunteering in pre-retirement courses.

## **4.2 Practical Support to help Staff Volunteer**

A more developed approach to Employer Supported Volunteering integrates the general promotion of volunteering with some practical support.

Turning this approach into action – examples include:

- allow staff who volunteer to request help in kind, for example use of equipment or premises;
- allow staff to volunteer from their workplace during work breaks, for example staff with access to a computer could design a charity's annual report or join an e-mentoring project run by a charity to help young unemployed people move into jobs;
- allow staff close to retirement small amounts of time to check out volunteering opportunities; and
- negotiating with, for example, the local volunteer centre/Voluntary Services Managers to provide face to face advice sessions at NHS work places for NHS staff interested in volunteering.

## **4.3 Employer Supported Volunteering Programmes linked to Staff Development**

This approach places more emphasis between the volunteering undertaken by staff, the learning/development they achieve through volunteering and how that learning/development enhances their ability to be more effective in their paid role.

Successful employer supported volunteering programmes fulfill three key criteria:

•**Addressing community needs.** NHS Boards can play an important part in helping to solve community problems.

•**Reflecting employee interests and skills.** This can make a real difference to how employees feel about themselves and their employer.

•**Meeting NHS Board priorities.** A programme that is in line with these priorities can bring tangible benefits to the NHS.

The diagram below illustrates how these three criteria underpin a successful Employer Supported volunteering Programme.

**Diagram 1: Successful Employer Supported Volunteering**



Employer Supported Volunteering programmes can be undertaken by groups of staff, sometimes called Team Challenges, or by individual staff members.

Team challenges usually involve staff members undertaking short one-off projects for example helping to tidy part of a river bank or helping out at a playscheme annual outing. Challenges can be organised in conjunction with existing local community organisations. Volunteer Centres can help to identify groups for example Community Service Volunteers and the British Trust of Conservation Volunteers that are interested in being part of Team Challenges. As well as benefiting local people Team Challenges can help staff to develop team work skills, communication skills and planning skills and at the same time learn more about the local community and the issues it faces.

Team Challenges can help existing teams to strengthen but are also useful experiences for helping new teams to bond more quickly.

Employer Supported Volunteering programmes for individual staff members work well when:

- the individual and his/her line manager discuss and agree what learning the individual is trying to achieve that is linked to skills that relate directly to the persons paid job;
- the individual and line manager work together, perhaps through the local volunteer centre, to find a suitable community organisation that needs help;
- the individual has a regular opportunity to reflect on the learning s/he is achieving from the experience; and
- at the end of the programme the individual, community group and line manager reflect on the experience and the learning that has been achieved.

## **5. Benefits of Employer Supported Volunteering**

### **5.1 Benefits of Employer Supported Volunteering to a NHS Board**

By supporting Employer Supported Volunteering NHSScotland could gain real benefits that make it and its staff stronger and more in touch with the communities they serve. NHSScotland needs a highly skilled and motivated workforce, with an emphasis on team working, interpersonal skills and flexibility – all amply provided by many volunteering opportunities. In more structured approaches to Employer Supported Volunteering NHS employee volunteers are in effect NHSScotland ambassadors and can enhance the reputation of NHSScotland in the community.

Employer Supported Volunteering can help NHSScotland's:

- reputation and credibility;
- recruitment and staff retention;
- staff morale and work performance; and
- training and development.

### **5.2 Benefits of Employer Supported Volunteering to the Employee**

Employer Supported Volunteering offers a whole range of benefits to NHS employees:

- a chance to develop personal skills such as time management, communication and presentation skills;
- an opportunity to work in a completely new environment and develop transferable skills;
- the chance to meet and work with people from other departments;
- an extra dimension to life by providing new experiences outside the usual work and social environment; and
- the opportunity to contribute to an issue that they really care about.

Volunteering can give staff an early opportunity to lead projects and have responsibility for motivating others. And it can expose them to a much wider range of tasks than they would get in their day jobs, including planning, budgeting, staff and time management and evaluation.

Employers increasingly recognise these development benefits by enabling individuals to relate what they do in a voluntary capacity to their professional development.

Finally, and not least, most employees enjoy volunteering enormously, seeing it as an opportunity to do something completely different from their day job.

### **5.3 Benefits of Employer Supported Volunteering to the Community**

The needs of some communities present challenges that cannot be solved by governments alone. It is now commonly accepted that the skills and resources of employees can help to support many of these communities in positive ways. Employers getting involved in the community are joining a well-established movement and can become a vital component in broader programmes to create healthier communities. Employers can work in partnerships to tackle specific public policy and community issues such as education, health, crime and regeneration.

Employer Supported Volunteers can have the opportunity to utilise new or existing skills for example:

- produce business plans for voluntary organisations;
- create a long-term funding strategy;
- advise voluntary organisations in matters of contractual agreements;
- provide IT training;
- assist with marketing and PR;
- provide a new and fresh perspective for community organisations;
- lay the ground for longer-term partnerships between the NHS and the voluntary sector; and
- increase the awareness of community issues among NHS staff employees and among the general public.

The opportunity to utilise skills is a key strand of the Scottish Governments Skills Strategy.

## **6. Suggested Next Steps**

Nominated Leads on Volunteering should:

- seek discussion about employer supported volunteering from appropriate colleagues including human resources and staff/trade union representatives;
- consider surveying a sample of staff to ask for their views about employer supported volunteering;
- discuss possible brokerage arrangements between the NHS Board and local community groups with the local volunteer centre;
- prepare a paper on employer supported volunteering for Board consideration.

## **7. Available Support**

Volunteer Development Scotland is available to provide NHS Boards with further advice and guidance on Employer Supported Volunteering. Please contact Volunteer Development Scotland, Jubilee House, Forthside Way, Stirling, FK8 1QZ. Telephone number 01786 479593.