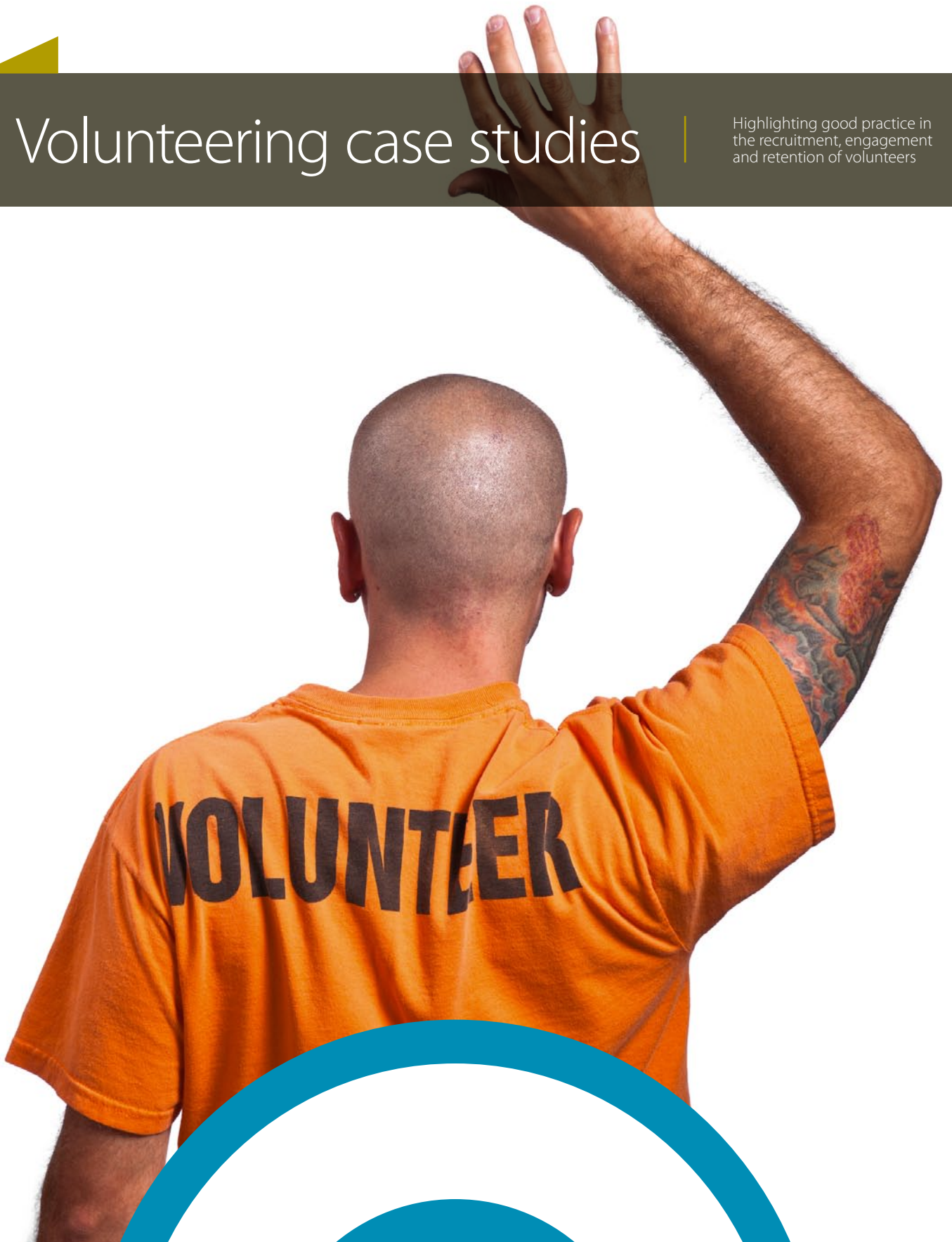


# Volunteering case studies

Highlighting good practice in  
the recruitment, engagement  
and retention of volunteers



# Volunteering case studies

## Contents

■ Introduction	4
■ Case Study: Nilaari Agency	7
■ Spotlight: Volunteer engagement and retention	10
■ Case Study: Signpost & Right Direkshon	12
■ Spotlight: Volunteer engagement and retention	14
■ Case Study: Women MATTA	15
■ Spotlight: Volunteer engagement and retention	19
■ Spotlight: Volunteer interactions	21
■ Case Study: WomenCentre, Calderdale & Kirklees: Evolve	23
■ Spotlight: The work of volunteers	27
■ Useful links	30



VOLUNTEER

Written by Ben Jarman | Published by Clinks, 2012

© Clinks, 2012

Unless otherwise indicated, no part of this publication may be stored in a retrievable system or reproduced in any form without prior written permission from Clinks. Clinks will give sympathetic consideration to requests from small organisations for permission to reproduce this publication in whole or in part but terms upon which such reproduction may be permitted will remain at Clinks' discretion.

**Acknowledgments** | Many thanks to staff, volunteers and service users at the four organisations whose work form the subject of these case studies, in particular Jean Smith, Tish Bell and Daniel at Nilaari, Hilary Banks and Stephen Williams at Signpost & Rite Direkshon, Kate Fraser, Steph Champion, Laura E, Joanne Bates, Jane Turner, Abigail Lewis and Pauline Omoboye at Women MATTA, and Claire Jones, Helen Hird, Sobiya Din, Payal Vyas, Holly Hammond and Chloe Jones at WomenCentre. All of these people were generous with their time and welcomed Clinks to their projects while we were researching the case studies, and also helped with comments and follow-up information. Thanks also to Richard Nicholls and Kate Aldous at Clinks for their comments on the drafts, and to Nathan Dick for his input on the structure and focus of the case studies.



# Here are just some of the roles that volunteers undertake within the Criminal Justice System...

## Youth justice

- Appropriate adult
- Mentor
- Youth Offender Panel member

## Restorative justice

- Victim-offender mediator
  - Family group conference facilitator
  - Community Justice Panel member

## Victims

- Witness Service volunteers in Crown and Magistrates' Courts
- Victim Support volunteer
- Helpline advisor
- Counselling

## Probation

- Probation Board member
- Teaching literacy and numeracy volunteer tutor
- Supporting training courses
- Mentor
- Probation volunteer

## Prisons

- Official prison visitor
- Custody visitor
- Prison visitors' centre (support and advice, assisting with practical tasks)
- Play worker for children during prison visits
- Literacy, numeracy and basic skills volunteer tutor
- Chaplaincy (from the main world faiths)
- Volunteer orchestra leader

## Police

- Special Constable
- Police Cadet
- Independent custody visitors
- Police support volunteer
- Crimestoppers volunteer
- Crime Prevention Panel member
- Diamond Initiative volunteer

## Other

- Independent Monitoring Board member
- MAPP (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) lay advisor
- Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator
- Magistrate or Justice of the Peace
- Providing helpdesks in Magistrates' Courts
- Raising awareness of Prisons Week and Prisoners' Sunday
- Community Chaplain
- Circles of Support member (working with sex offenders to reduce the risk of re-offending)
- Fundraiser for charities and voluntary and community organisations that support offenders, ex-offenders, prisoners, those at risk of offending or the victims of crime
- Volunteer for charities and voluntary and community organisations that support offenders, ex-offenders, prisoners, those at risk of offending or the victims of crime
- Campaigner
- Hate Crime Scrutiny Panel member
- Educating young people and promoting preventative measures
- Courts Board member
- Community Justice Panel member
- LCJB (Local Criminal Justice Boards) Independent Advisory Group member
- Trustee

## Volunteer roles for prisoners

- Participating in park regeneration schemes
- Providing Braille transcriptions for blind people
- Creating artworks for hospices
- Making wheelchairs
- Citizens' Advisor (in conjunction with Citizens Advice Bureau)
- Peer-advisers
- The Samaritans listeners
- Acting in plays
- Timebanking

# Introduction

**Organisations in the Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) play a vital role in reducing reoffending and changing lives. The work of voluntary and community organisations makes a vital contribution to policies around the Criminal Justice System (CJS), and delivers high-quality services to offenders and their families. Clinks' role is to support VCS organisations who are engaged in this work, and we are aware of many examples of good practice from organisations in the sector.**

The role of the VCS is particularly important when working with hard-to-reach groups. Clinks' recent report 'Double Trouble', dealt specifically with this issue in reference to the resettlement needs of BAME prisoners. People with multiple and complex needs often lack the trust necessary to engage with statutory services and organisations that appear to be in a position of authority. VCS organisations can mediate this experience and better connect them to the support they need.

Clinks' current research in its Volunteer Impact Assessment project suggests that volunteers may have a particularly important role to play in working with hard-to-reach groups. Some volunteers may bring direct personal experience of the issues faced by service users. Early findings from our project indicate that some service users feel this brings instant credibility to their advice. The same research also suggests that some service users also feel that the mere fact that someone is a volunteer means they can be trusted as having the service user's best interests at heart. Clearly, then, there are major benefits to working with volunteers.

The Ministry of Justice has asked Clinks to produce case studies that promote and support good practice in VCS work with volunteers. These case studies describe four organisations who use volunteers successfully. We have chosen to focus particularly on how they recruit and retain volunteers.

The main purpose of this case study is to showcase the good practice rather than to offer comprehensive guidance on starting and managing a volunteering programme. Much more detailed advice can be found in the Clinks Volunteering Guides, available from the [Clinks website](#).

## Why use volunteers?

It is important for organisations to consider carefully why they wish to use volunteers. Organisations then need to consider how best to coordinate, support and develop volunteers.

The motivations of individual volunteers will be different. The conversations with volunteers in these case studies suggest that some are motivated by their own past experience while others want to 'give something back', or support others by sharing their experiences. Other volunteers wish to gain a better chance of paid employment in the field, through the experience and training that may be available to them as volunteers. Still others may volunteer through a sense of personal commitment to the mission of the organisation. Others may volunteer for the sense of belonging that comes from a shared commitment to work on a difficult issue. Others again may volunteer because it offers them a broader range of social and personal connections.

While some volunteers may be looking for a structured experience and training, others may simply want a chance to be involved. The crucial thing is that organisations get to know their volunteers - what motivates them, what they are hoping to gain from the experience, what their skills and interests are, and what other commitments they have in life.

Organisations will need to consider:

- What the volunteers' roles will be
- Their ideas, skills and abilities
- What volunteers feel are their development needs

- How volunteers will be managed and supervised
- Whether staff at the organisation have the skills and capacity to manage volunteers
- What boundaries are appropriate to place around the work of volunteers
- What the relationship will be between volunteers and paid staff in the organisation
- How, and to what extent, volunteers' out-of-pocket expenses incurred whilst volunteering will be reimbursed

## Volunteer recruitment

There is no single best method when it comes to volunteer recruitment. The organisations who are the subjects of these case studies all said they found that volunteers came to them, and they did not have specific recruitment drives. There may be many reasons for this, but the most important was the excellent reputation those organisations had, both for doing high-quality work, and for providing volunteers with a high-quality experience. All of the organisations also had deep roots in their respective communities.

It seems that all the organisations concerned were actually doing more recruiting than they realised. This did not necessarily take the form it might for a paid employee: a formalised process involving advertising a vacancy, receiving applications, selecting interviewees, interviewing them, and offering the post.

Nilaari and Signpost & Rite Direkshon told us that volunteers tend to come forward based on an existing knowledge of the organisation's work, wishing to get involved because of the organisation's reputation. Indeed, Nilaari told us that they have far more interest from potential volunteers than they can offer placements; if they recruited by advertising widely, they would be 'inundated' by more interest than they could manage. While they do not formally advertise, both organisations

said that community knowledge of their work was based on a variety of means of outreach:

- Raising the organisation's profile in the local community with events such as family fun days
- Having an existing profile in the community because of the work they are already doing
- Celebrating the contribution of volunteers in publicity materials and at events
- Involving volunteers in shaping the organisation's work
- Where appropriate, pointing service users towards opportunities to get involved as volunteers
- Contact with other local VCS organisations who sometimes refer clients on to them.

Having volunteers come forward for roles without needing to advertise widely will not be possible or appropriate for all organisations. Organisations who are starting out and need to generate sufficient volunteer interest to get a programme started may find that they need to advertise more widely. Organisations which need a specific role fulfilled may not find that the skills they want are readily available within their normal volunteer pool. In either case, registration with the local Volunteer Centre would be a good idea. The case studies here suggest that there are real benefits to having strong links to the local community. This suggests that community outreach work is an important activity for organisations who want to attract volunteers.

## Volunteer training, engagement and retention

Having first attracted interest from potential volunteers, both of the Bristol organisations tailor the work of individual volunteers around a core programme of induction and training. These are either carried out separately or run in parallel to some form of shadowing, during which volunteers can observe an employee or a more experienced volunteer as they undertake their work.

Volunteers in both organisations cited the responsiveness of the organisation to their own needs and interests to be a major factor that motivated them, and kept them coming back. Even where volunteers are working on core tasks rather than individual projects, they said that the organisation's willingness to respond to their individual needs – by helping with a job application form, for example – was key in keeping them motivated. Both of these organisations show the importance of making a firm commitment to volunteers, whilst helping volunteers understand what is expected from them. The organisations have committed to developing volunteers and enabling them to play a full part in the organisation, and in return volunteers agree to work within the organisation's policies and boundaries, and are willing to learn.

Management and ongoing supervision of volunteers is important, to help identify areas

for development and further training, and allow volunteers to shape the future direction of the programme. This can take different forms, with different organisations finding their own ways to carry out supervision and feedback. In some cases, volunteers set the agenda for regular meetings at which they can discuss the programme and their own development needs. Elsewhere, volunteers work and are managed within the same structure as employees meaning that these objectives can be met during regular supervision meetings.

In all of these organisations, volunteers made significant contributions to the organisation's work, but also helped to shape and develop that work. The experience of these organisations suggests that even where resources are severely constrained, it is possible to retain volunteers.

# Nilaari Agency

## The service

The Nilaari Agency is a community-based drug treatment provider that provides culturally appropriate counselling, advocacy, and support primarily to Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) adults and young people in Bristol, who are involved in, or at risk of misusing, drugs and/or alcohol. However, anyone in need can access their services. Nilaari came into existence during the 1990s after spontaneous concern from BAME communities in the Easton and St Paul's districts of the city about drug misuse and crime in those areas. Consultation with BAME people who were misusing drugs revealed their feeling that existing provision was not meeting their needs, and Nilaari was created as a result. The agency now operates across Bristol and is funded by the city's substance misuse team.

## The place of volunteers in the organisation

Nilaari involves volunteers in different aspects of its work, including running a drop-in centre for BAME stimulant users. Volunteers work part-time and on individualised programmes, and are paid out-of-pocket expenses for their work. They are involved, and considered, as full members of the staff team, and Nilaari has put in place a full induction programme, regular one-to-one supervision sessions, ongoing training and professional backup in their work. The volunteers are typically from a BAME background, and have some experience of substance misuse themselves. Their role is not specifically intended to be as mentors; they will spend an initial period after starting at Nilaari merely observing others doing their work, but move towards being trained and assessed to work directly with

Nilaari's clients. They are also given a specific project, on which they work with a manager.

## Recruitment, selection, and training of volunteers

Nilaari has never advertised for volunteers, finding that they receive more expressions of interest from people who have come forward than they have the capacity to accept. Those who come forward tend to be BAME individuals who have experience of substance misuse, but this is not always the case. The volunteering programme in the organisation is not funded separately, and so has evolved incrementally. Because demand exceeds Nilaari's capacity to offer volunteer placements, Nilaari will take information about a prospective volunteer's skills and interests and will always try to suggest contacts in other organisations who might be more suitable. They don't offer a timescale for when there will next be an opening available, because they believe it is important to allow current volunteers time to develop in, and gain from, their work with the organisation.

The selection process focuses from the beginning on ensuring that there is a good match between the individual's and Nilaari's skills and development needs. To be eligible, volunteers must have been clean of the drug that was creating problems for them for at least two years. The prospective volunteer will be invited in for a meeting with the organisation's Director and another member of staff. Nilaari takes the attitude that a prospective volunteer's motivation and commitment are more important than their existing skills base, and so the meeting will focus on why they are interested in the position more than it will on assessing a



specific set of competences. Volunteers who are not successful at this stage are also given a suggestion for a further contact to try.

Nilaari's knowledge of, and relationship with, its local community is also important in the process of selecting volunteers. One example offered in illustration of this point was that while past problems with drug misuse are not a barrier to volunteers, a past history of dealing drugs in the local area would be. Much of Nilaari's success rests on its close links with, and reputation in, the local communities, and so there are some people for whom a volunteer placement would not be appropriate. Even so, in the past Nilaari has felt that someone who was not appropriate to volunteer had a worthwhile contribution to make elsewhere, and so invited that person to speak at a conference, for example.

Induction and basic training is initially carried out through a work programme lasting 4-6 weeks, depending on the volunteer's hours. This covers policies, boundaries, working practices and the values of the organisation, and volunteers work towards an assignment based on what they have covered. After this programme is complete, volunteers then observe staff who are carrying out assessment and triage with new service users. Once volunteers are familiar with the agency and how it works, and Nilaari has had the time to understand where their skills and interests may lie, volunteers are assigned specific projects where they work with one or more paid staff to improve a policy or area of practice. Recent projects have included a serving prisoner who volunteers with Nilaari on day release, and who has been using his knowledge of prison to help develop a tailored prison resettlement programme.

Most training after the initial induction programme takes place on the job and through close shadowing of more experienced staff by volunteers. Nilaari has had a larger training budget in the past than it does today, but there are occasionally free offers of training in Bristol which the organisation monitors for potentially interesting offers. However, most further training is carried out ad hoc and on the job, with regular progress review and the identification of further need being carried out in supervision meetings. Nilaari have found that training and development needs tend to have more to do with confidence than innate ability; the individual volunteer projects were intended as a means of giving volunteers a specific piece of 'owned' work, which, it is found, usually motivates them to persevere and learn as they go along. Other common issues chiefly circulate around the expectations made of a professional working in an office environment, and these can be addressed through supervision.

Nilaari told us that though it would be nice to have volunteers who came with all the necessary skills, it was more important that they showed commitment and a willingness to learn, and that they trusted the organisation to work for their progression.

### Retention and continued engagement of volunteers

Volunteers tend to remain with Nilaari for a minimum of several months, though some have remained for as long as two years. One of the aims of the volunteering programme has always been to move volunteers on to a situation where they will be ready for full-time work. All volunteers who have gone on to employment since Nilaari started taking



on volunteers have moved to advice and guidance jobs in one or another form – in housing, drugs and alcohol misuse, and similar fields, which the organisation counts as a significant success. However, Nilaari has encountered some difficulties with getting volunteers to ‘fly the nest’, and the organisation has amended its volunteer agreement to cover expectations about how and when volunteers will be ready to move on.

The volunteer case studies below indicate that engagement and retention of volunteers at Nilaari is clearly a result of their feeling involved and feeling that they are gaining from the experience, as well as having the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the organisation. Nilaari point out that their volunteers are fully-integrated members of the staff team, and they feel a sense of pride at being involved in this way. In their interactions with other members of staff, and with service users, no distinction is made between employees and volunteers. However, it has been noticed that the volunteers often have more of a connection with the service user groups, not because they are volunteers but because they have understanding of the issues service users are facing. Volunteers sometimes do pass on the information that they are volunteering, and that they have direct experience of substance misuse, but they are not required to do so.

When volunteers have moved on, it is usually because they have found another job or have enrolled in an educational course. Two former volunteers now work as employees of Nilaari.

# Volunteer engagement and retention

## Volunteer | Tish Bell

“ I first got involved with Nilaari while I was living in supported housing in Bristol back in 2007. I was involved there with a service user group called UFO (Users Feedback Organisation). I was invited to speak at their conference as a service user. By then I had moved forward with my drug use and my understanding of life. I wanted to give something back and help others.

At the time I had wanted to go down the criminal justice route but my CRB was taking a long time and the service I was trying to involve myself with was changing. Nilaari was the next agency that I knew in Bristol; I knew them and was familiar with their work, so approached them. I'd never done any volunteering before.

The training and education and the experience were vital factors for me, right from the start. Being a volunteer meant I had a personal passion to help Nilaari's client group. But you can't get by on passion alone, you need training and experience of how the service works. Once I had been accepted, I started coming in three days a week as a volunteer. I first gained my NVQ Level 2, and then went on to training in motivational interviewing, node mapping, addiction dependency and change, mental health, first aid, assessment, safeguarding adults, hidden harms, and on benefits and welfare entitlements and access. I was able to share what I was learning immediately with clients, but it also helped me, because I was on benefits and recovering from addiction at the time. I was gaining an understanding of my own situation.

Personally, I have also gained an understanding of structure, punctuality, self-respect: all kinds of things which come through work. My drug use took me to places where I felt worthless and useless, and I never believed I would be able to do what I do today. I am such a different person, and it's volunteering that has done that for me. It's good because it's so hands-

on. Being in a working environment, not in college, and soaking it all in like a sponge, was so important to me. Volunteering is the best way forward if you have been out of work for a long time. You are giving up your time but what you get is so powerful, and what you give out is just as powerful. Another thing I liked was that I was classed as a colleague which allowed me to feel even more valued.

As for telling clients about past problems of mine, it depends on the person. If I sense that a client is not being open and honest about themselves, sometimes I believe that revealing something about me helps them to open it up. One guy that I worked with said that if I had not been so honest about my addiction he would not have come back.

What keeps me coming back is my passion for the work and the structure of coming somewhere that I am valued. Learning from that, and comparing it to the place I have come from is so important to me. What volunteering has done for me, personally – I can't find words for it. There are no ways to describe it.

I am happy to face challenging or difficult situations today as I am passionate and have learned so many skills. When I first started, it was all difficult, because I'd never done it before. Now, if it's a challenge then I take it calmly and work through it and get it done. There is always support and guidance if something is difficult.

## Volunteer | Daniel Roberts

“ When I started volunteering with Nilaari I was serving the end of my sentence at an open prison. In the last 12 months you can work through the gate. Lots of people go on projects at a vinegar factory, supermarkets, a hotel – it's all pay-the-bills stuff, and it didn't interest me. There are also voluntary jobs like charity shops. I was hoping to find something that would lead to

work in the drug rehabilitation field. Before my own prison sentence, I had worked in a drug and alcohol agency in prisons. I wanted to start that again. I found out about Nilaari and made contact with them.

It took some time to get the support of the prison, because they hadn't sent anyone to this kind of work before, and it's not what they are used to. I think it's difficult for them to find things that are suitable for individuals, but I made contact with Nilaari on my own initiative, and I believed in this as a cause that I wanted to work for, so I just kept on raising it, being above board and honest, and pushing, pushing, pushing. Nilaari is like a family. They were welcoming and supportive, and willing to come into the prison to do a disclosure meeting where I told them all the details of my offence. That had to be done for the risk assessment. Eventually the prison were won over, and I worked at Nilaari on voluntary placement for a day a week. I had not done voluntary work before but I did supervise volunteers as part of my job before I was in prison.

I worked with Nilaari to develop a resettlement package for prisoners. They wanted to get referrals from category B prisons in Bristol, and meet prisoners who were out on licence. The plan included some group work before and after release, and we wanted to find the clients work placements for two or three days a week, with time left over that we could talk to them about their aspirations and long-term plans, and see how we could set them on the paths they wanted to be on. I also did some work with clients – shadowing triages, then learning to do them myself, that kind of thing.

Volunteering there brought me up to date as a drugs professional. It's a great organisation, with a family spirit. I sometimes told people that I was a volunteer – or a prisoner – but I didn't make a point of it. Nilaari knew best about when that is appropriate, so I followed their lead. It wasn't obvious that I was a volunteer. We had occasional open days where I

met probation officers. They found me informative and open, and were sometimes surprised when they find out about my background, so I talked first about my work – the emphasis was on that. That way around, they see you as part of Nilaari, and if or when they find out you're not on a wage, they know about your work and they are still going to see someone who's doing a job. Even then, professionals were usually a bit more surprised than clients.

I have definitely suggested to others in the prison that they should find volunteer placements like this. Whilst working in the prison advice centre I met guys who have no faith in the system because they feel the doors have been closed on them, again and again. Prison puts punishment before your needs, and that's why people are resistant and don't engage with it. I used to say to other prisoners that if there's something you want to do, and it's not on the menu, find a reason why you want to do it, make the argument politely, firmly and constantly, and don't give in. Work your way around it. It's about being positive and making the most of the system you're in.

# Signpost & Rite Direkshon

## The service

Signpost & Rite Direkshon is based in Bristol. They connect socially excluded people of African and Caribbean heritage to services that may be able to help them - 'signposting' them into the 'rite direkshon'. The project has worked for several years with HMPYOI Ashfield, near Bristol. The service works with young men of African and Caribbean origin who are not engaging with the prison. Signpost & Rite Direkshon designed a programme looking at African and Caribbean culture and heritage. Through this framework, it encourages participants to talk about issues and topics that are difficult, how to handle crisis in prison, how to respond positively to conflict, and how to think about self-image and change.

Currently the course is delivered by six volunteers, working in pairs, over an eight-week cycle. Besides the regular courses, Signpost & Rite Direkshon also run twice-yearly meals where an outside chef is commissioned to come into the prison and prepare African and Caribbean food for 40 of the inmates. Signpost & Rite Direkshon find that these sessions are a valuable chance to build relationships with prison staff, who are also invited. The meals relax prisoners and sometimes reveal issues and information that have not been obvious in the context of the classes.

## The place of volunteers in the organisation

The service is defined and governed by a Service Level Agreement, and is run for groups of between ten and 20 prisoners, by a minimum of two trained volunteers. Signpost & Rite Direkshon also involve volunteers who do not have security clearance, who help prepare the programme by researching, designing and

updating course materials. Separate to the work in HMPYOI Ashfield, there are also volunteers who work in the office on specific projects.

## Recruitment, selection, and training of volunteers

Signpost & Rite Direkshon don't advertise opportunities to volunteer, finding that potential candidates come forward through having prior knowledge of the organisation and its work. Some volunteers are former users of the services, either in prison or outside in the community. Others come to events organised by the organisation, such as the annual summer Family Fun Day, which is promoted by radio advertisements, and attended by around 1,500 people. Signpost & Rite Direkshon always publicise what is being done by their volunteers at these events, and collect information from potential volunteers about their skills, also giving them a volunteering pack containing a statement of Volunteer Rights. Signpost & Rite Direkshon told us that the key questions to ask firstly concerned existing skills and interests; secondly, it was crucial to ask volunteers about their long-term ambitions. This helps to make clear from the start that the organisation was interested in developing, and investing in, the volunteer.

Volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds but are always from African and Caribbean communities. Some have prior experience of prison; others have had successful careers but want to put something back into their community; some are looking to make a career change and want to get relevant experience.

Training for volunteers who will be working as tutors in HMPYOI Ashfield is delivered over four sessions in the Signpost & Rite Direkshon office. The programme aims to introduce volunteers



to the history and values of the organisation, to the contents of the Service Level Agreement in the prison, the boundaries volunteers are expected to observe, and the content of the sessions that volunteers will deliver and how they should deliver it. There are opportunities to practice the delivery methods with other, more experienced, volunteers. Subsequent training in the prison covers an introduction to the particular challenges of the environment, health and safety policy, and other matters such as breakout training.

Training also allows Signpost & Rite Direkshon to observe volunteers and identify potential problems. On rare occasions, potential volunteers have displayed attitudes or beliefs that are not in keeping with the organisation's values, or have shown that they are not prepared to work within boundaries that have been agreed between the organisation and the prison.

Signpost & Rite Direkshon told us that the quality they look for the most in the HMPYOI Ashfield volunteers is the right attitude, which can be summed up as a genuine commitment to working sensitively with young people who can sometimes be challenging. If there are issues with a volunteer's skills, they can be picked up in monthly volunteer meetings and perhaps addressed by training, but Hilary Banks, the Director, said that training can rarely change someone's attitude.

### Retention and continued engagement of volunteers

Signpost & Rite Direkshon find that keeping volunteers involved in the development and planning of their programme is essential to maintaining their motivation and sustaining their engagement. This is done by ensuring that their work is well-documented and that there are structured opportunities for reflection

and follow-up. Volunteers keep notes on how individual sessions have gone and on the progress of students on the course. This information is recorded so that issues or information can be followed up, by other volunteers if necessary, during later sessions. It also helps to refine the course materials and the Service Level Agreement.

Information from these notes is also sometimes used to identify situations in which there is a possible need to follow up an issue with an individual prisoner; in the past the prison has also asked Signpost & Rite Direkshon staff to work with individuals when there have been fights or similar problems in the prison. Volunteers are also involved in the development of the organisation's wider work through a volunteer forum. Signpost & Rite Direkshon had funding for a volunteer coordinator for a period of time, but felt that the post represented a change from the volunteer-led approach that they had had before funding that post, and so they did not seek to renew the funding when it finished.

Volunteers undergo considerable training to be part of the programme, and generally stay with Signpost & Rite Direkshon for between six months and two years. The organisation told us that the most common reason for volunteers to finish their work with Signpost & Rite Direkshon was that they had taken on other commitments, for example by finding employment. The classes at HMPYOI Ashfield can only take place between 6pm and 8pm, and not all potential volunteers are able to fit this, along with keeping the necessary written records of the sessions, into their working routines. When possible, an exit interview will be conducted with volunteers who are leaving, though these usually reveal changes in that person's circumstances rather than things that Signpost & Rite Direkshon can change – for example, altering the time of the classes at HMPYOI Ashfield has been investigated, but has not been possible.

# Volunteer engagement and retention

## Volunteer | Stephen Williams



I first got involved with Signpost & Rite Direkshon after I was released from prison. My brother had done some work with them before, and I had done some of their courses while I was in prison. They are in my area - only about five minutes from my house, so I went in one day to see what they were all about. The volunteering just happened from there, really. I liked what I saw - the atmosphere, the fact that they were helping people - and so I wanted to be involved. It took me off the streets and it was a positive atmosphere.

I started by doing some research to help develop the course materials that were used in prisons - finding information for a specific course that was being used during Black History Month. I got interested in being a tutor on the course in prison because I got talking to staff in the office about some of my experiences in prison, and I felt that I could add something because of my experience. I did the training to become a volunteer in prison, but while I was waiting for the security clearance, I got a job. I needed some paid work and since I am now working shifts, it wasn't going to be possible for me to get into prison in time. I hope in the future I'll be able to make the commitment, because I'm definitely interested in doing that kind of thing. For now, I'm staying involved in whatever way I can. I'm doing less than I was, but I am doing what I can, and I stay in touch with them that way. I hope I can do the prison volunteering in the future.

I want to keep going back because I get so much out of going there. I'd definitely recommend volunteering to someone else. The not being paid aspect, that might put some people off, but I know it's about gaining beyond money. I learned how to work in an office and deal with people professionally. I learned routine: I was working there three days a week from nine to five, before I got

employed. It gave me a real head start. I learned to use a computer, but while I was doing that I was benefitting Signpost & Rite Direkshon as well. I was giving something back but I was getting support as well - through learning, through the help they gave me with references and job applications.

It changed my view of myself. I didn't think I was capable of working for free unless the courts told me to. I didn't think I had the oomph to do it. But it was really good. The knowledge was what I was getting out of it, that was the reward, really. Helping others was another. It was a win-win situation. When I came out of prison, I was back to an empty flat, no furniture, no fridge - I was struggling. Signpost doesn't have a huge budget but they show you can come together and help each other. It's not ticking boxes, not formal: in prison you did things because you had to, but here I felt they were interested in me. Other people in my situation need that as well.

# Women MATTA

## The service

Women MATTA (Manchester And Trafford Taking Action) has provided intensive, holistic support to women who are involved in the CJS since December 2009. The service covers women who are at risk of offending, those on community sentences, those sentenced to six months or less in custody, and others who are released into the community on licence and who are at risk of being recalled to prison. The service is a partnership between the Pankhurst Centre, a women's community centre in Manchester, and Women in Prison, a national charity which supports and campaigns for women who are affected by the CJS. Prior to 2009, the Pankhurst Centre had existed and run women's drop-in services, but the Women MATTA partnership was the first service there which focused specifically on the CJS.

## The place of volunteers in the organisation

The service involves a large number of volunteers alongside paid staff, including four project workers and a volunteer coordinator. Volunteers are trained for, and carry out, a large number of roles. The service received around 120 referrals from criminal justice agencies last year, but 687 came into the service through the drop-in centre at the Pankhurst Centre. The employed project workers support women who are assessed as needing intensive support. This means that a great deal of Women MATTA's work with women who need lower-intensity support, as well as a lot of their work in the community and outreach work, is planned and carried out by volunteers. Volunteers also support project workers in their work with clients. Women who have lower or less intensive support needs are signposted to

classes running at the drop-ins in the Pankhurst Centre, which is now entirely run by volunteers. If other needs emerge from these sessions, they may be assigned a trained volunteer to work with them on one particular issue, or may be referred to a project worker if necessary.

At the time of Clinks' visit in February 2012, there were 37 active volunteers, 13 students on placement, and nine volunteers in the process of being inducted into the work. Currently, around 40% of the volunteers have some personal experience of involvement in the CJS. Women MATTA has found that the range of volunteers they have raises the chance that service users will find someone they relate to within the service. The volunteers are all women, from a diverse group of different ages, ethnicities and sexualities.

## Recruitment, selection, and training of volunteers

Women MATTA do not actively recruit by advertising positions, but they make clear in all their publicity and outreach work that the project involves volunteers in its work and that it welcomes new people and their skills. They run stalls at multi-agency forums, for example, to publicise their work, and do outreach while visiting other organisations, for example supported housing groups and women's probation groups. Women MATTA does have a more formalised relationship with the local universities, and while some student volunteers come in for longer placements, some are recruited to work in the short term on specific projects. Volunteers who have experience of the CJS tend to come in through having been users of the service in the past, but the project does have a relationship with Styal prison which means that women

prisoners who are eligible for Release on Temporary Licence (RoTL) sometimes volunteer in the community with Women MATTA.

Applications from prospective volunteers are received on an ongoing basis, but there is only one volunteer coordinator, who works part time, so induction and training are done in batches. Induction and training are based on a core programme with optional extras, depending on the role that an individual is going to perform. The process begins with an open evening, themed around the factors that volunteers need to consider to be sure that they are ready to take on the commitment and responsibility involved. At this event, staff explain the different roles that are available and circulate role descriptions and, where possible, have current volunteers in that role present to talk about their experiences. Women MATTA say that at this stage it is of paramount importance to be honest about the level of commitment involved with a particular role, and not to hesitate in telling a prospective volunteer if the organisation feels they are not ready to make that commitment.

If volunteers are ready to commit to a role, the core training covers the boundaries volunteers are expected to observe, the law governing safeguarding, and key aspects of how the project's administration takes place, specifically covering how to fill out Women MATTA's referral form. The core training also includes a module that aims to give an overview of the situation for women who are involved in the CJS, the issues they face, and the needs that they tend to present with. This core training takes a total of about three hours. Volunteers are then given specific training covering the role that they are taking on: courts training for volunteers who will work as supporters in the

courts; or in another case, four afternoons of training covering debt and benefits, mental health, challenging behaviour, and housing (for volunteers who will be providing practical support at the drop-in centre). Training sessions are usually an hour each. Some volunteers are also offered training on practical things like listening skills, depending on the individual concerned. Women MATTA said that by the end of the training programme, both sides know each other well and have had the chances to decide whether the voluntary role on offer is right for both sides.

Training is carried out over several short sessions because Women MATTA learned in its first year that intensive full-day training was not always appropriate. Some volunteers did not have time for it, and others were felt not to have needed it, preferring instead to shadow, and receive support and supervision while performing the role. Volunteers said that they preferred staggered training and opportunities to meet other volunteers and watch them going about their roles, so this was reflected when the training programme was reviewed.

Ongoing training is provided in two main ways. There is a monthly volunteer meeting where external organisations are invited to speak on topics of specific relevance or interest. This is popular with volunteers because it is a form of training but takes place in an informal, sociable setting. These meetings also usually involve opportunities for volunteers to share what they have been doing recently, and Women MATTA's volunteer coordinator finds that this is helpful because it often results in support being offered 'horizontally', among volunteers, rather than 'vertically', from staff to volunteers. All volunteers have monthly or bi-monthly one-to-one supervision as well, and these meetings



sometimes result in more formal training (which is always publicised to other volunteers in case there is more than one person who feels they could benefit), but the volunteer meetings are a useful way to share the experience and expertise that exist among volunteers.

Another means of providing on-going training is to ensure that the organisation is familiar with individual volunteers' professional background and specific skills. One volunteer set up the organisation's blog and trained others how to post on it. Another volunteer worked professionally as a counsellor and was able to offer to train others in improving their listening skills. Another, who enjoys creative writing, has done some workshops with service users at the drop-in centre. Women MATTA, whose volunteer coordinator ensures that she knows about volunteers' backgrounds and skills, is therefore able to draw on the specific expertise of volunteers to develop their service beyond the constraints of their training budget.

One volunteer told us that the level of knowledge and commitment this took from staff, and the extent to which it required them to spend time getting to know volunteers, were not trivial. She also commented that it was a result of Women MATTA not having a hierarchical structure, but rather being an organisation where everyone feels responsible for supporting everyone else. This approach was also clear when we asked Women MATTA whether they ever said 'no' to prospective volunteers they did not feel were ready for a particular role. They could only recall two occasions; the rest of the time they offer training and take the approach that someone needs to be supported until they are ready for a role. It is also clear that

the project has considerable permeability between the categories of 'service user' and 'volunteer'; there are service users who move onto volunteering but then find the commitment too much because some external life event has made the challenge much more difficult. In those cases they are encouraged to take a step back and access the project as a service, and then move back into volunteering when they are ready again.

## Retention and continued engagement of volunteers

Volunteers were originally asked to make a minimum commitment of four months, but that has since changed to a year. It is therefore clear from the beginning that the project requires a lengthy commitment, even if some volunteers carry out a relatively small number of hours a month. Of the 37 volunteers who were with the project when Clinks visited, fifteen had been volunteering with Women MATTA since it started in December 2009. The average length of stay is around a year, though a very small number stay for a shorter time on specific short placements, and when volunteers leave before a year is up, it tends to be because they have had to take on another commitment elsewhere in life, such as a job which does not permit them to continue their volunteering. Other reasons have included that volunteers have entered full-time education, or have had to prioritise other things within their own family lives.

There is no formal exit interview to collect information and feedback from volunteers who are leaving, but the volunteer coordinator is in regular contact with volunteers in any case, and a formal structure is not necessary for that reason. There have been one or two

## Women MATTA

prospective volunteers who have dropped out during the training process, and if that happens Women MATTA has tried to follow up to find out why, usually finding that the training process showed the prospective volunteer that the opportunity was not for them (which indicates that the training process also succeeds in its aim in this regard). In general, though, it appears that the ongoing commitment by volunteers is a result of the extent to which they are essential (and feel essential) to the success of the service.

Staff at Women MATTA said precisely this about the contribution of volunteers: that the project would not have the profile it does in the community, or the capacity to do what it does, without the work of volunteers. One comment we heard on our visit to Women MATTA was that the Director wished money for evaluating the contribution made specifically by volunteers had been written into the funding agreement, because although the evaluation conducted in 2010 had revealed many positives, it was hard to recognise formally the work done by a very engaged group of volunteers. She described their contribution as 'completely unique', and other staff cited the diversity and depth of expertise that volunteers brought to their work for Women MATTA. They also suggested that volunteers add a quality of service as well as increasing the amount that the project can do; staff said that service users felt they could be more open with volunteers. There were things, in other words, that service users were comfortable revealing to staff that they would not necessarily share with probation officers; and things that they would reveal to volunteers that they might not to staff.

It appeared that staff were well aware of the importance of volunteers and this is likely to

be a significant factor in their engagement and motivation. Staff explained that while volunteers are working to the same professional boundaries as them, the way they work, and the fact they are volunteers, means that the process of support and befriending is not so formal, and time-pressured, as when it is done by an employee. Staff said that learning to make the most of volunteers in the project had been a learning curve for all of them, and that they had maybe underestimated the contribution that volunteers could make at the start of the project. They had been worried that it might take longer to show a volunteer how to perform a role than it would take to do the role themselves, but staff said that they had become increasingly aware that they couldn't do without the volunteers, and wouldn't want to even if they could. They have actively tried to find ways to show volunteers their appreciation, for example by holding a volunteers' dinner, and inviting statutory sector staff who compliment the work of volunteers to write short articles for the volunteers' newsletter. It seemed highly likely that these efforts pay back in terms of volunteers' commitment.

## Volunteer | Abigail Lewis

“ I’m a student, and part of my degree course is on criminology. Since I was at university I started getting more involved with women’s issues. It’s a time in your life where you start to understand the importance of women’s rights, and of education. I originally heard of Women MATTA by Google searching for opportunities to volunteer with women in the CJS. The way the system works makes me quite angry so I wanted to try and do something about it. It turned out Women MATTA had been at the freshers’ fair, though I didn’t know that at the time.

I only started a couple of months ago so I haven’t done a lot yet. I’ve been here at the drop-in, watching different advisers who have come in, watching them doing their work. I’ve done most of the induction, and I’ve done some informal help at the drop-ins, mainly so that I learn to recognise a few faces and get the hang of things. I will soon be trained on the practical support side of things, and also probably to go and work in the courts.

I volunteered because I wanted to make a difference. I’m older than my peers at university, there is a big gap and I want to get away from what sometimes seems a materialistic culture, and get involved with some sort of community. I think you get more out of helping others than you do by helping yourself. Things aren’t so close-knit as maybe they were, and this is a way to say it can be different; you can tell that there is a sense of community about the place. The women I have met here so far do seem to realise I’m a volunteer and they like that; it feels strange because I haven’t done all that much yet. I’ve been watching and learning and getting the hang of how things work. I can see that people are here because they have all been through things in their lives, and perhaps being around someone who’s here for them, that just helps. I’m looking forward to getting trained, which is the next step. But you need time to acclimatise. It’s a good environment to do that.

## Volunteer | Pauline Omoboye

“ I started volunteering with Women MATTA in 2009 but I had already been volunteering for ten years at the Pankhurst Centre’s women’s drop-in. I was ready to start something with a different focus, though some of the issues facing women in the CJS are the same. It was Kate Fraser’s [Women MATTA’s Director] enthusiasm that initially got me interested, and I thought that I had something to offer. I felt comfortable at the Pankhurst and I thought it was a great idea to allow women in with CJS the chance to benefit from the atmosphere there.

I started by working at the courts – Manchester and Trafford. We support women who are attending court. We have a help desk, and approach women who are coming into court. Most of them have no source of support apart from their solicitors, and they are usually quite frightened. We are there to explain to them what will happen, be with them through the process, offer practical support if and when they need it, even if that is just being present in the court with a box of tissues. We work alongside the witness support team as well. When I was there it was often domestic violence cases, and that is a scary situation to be in, because the verdict will have lots of consequences.

The magistrates have been very supportive and have sometimes come out to thank us for the work we are doing. That has been important, because it means that we found that eventually, the magistrates started saying that Women MATTA were there, and suggesting to people that they seek our help.

Every second week now, I go to the probation office. There, I’m there to do the same thing – support women who are with their probation officer, but also to make sure that there is someone to set the wheels going if they need a referral to Women MATTA for advice on other things – housing, benefits,

and so on. We also deliver something called the NDAR – New Directions Activity Requirement, which is where the courts can require someone to get practical advice as part of their Order. That's a six week rolling programme. Sometimes I also work in the drop-in on Fridays, as well. I like creative writing, and do workshops on that. It's a way for the women there to explore how they are feeling about themselves and the situations they are in.

I get so much out of volunteering. I am disabled, and I have mobility issues. I've been ill for a long time, on and off. I am also the main carer for my mum, who has MS, and who lives with me. So I volunteer because I like to keep my mind active and to do something different. It helps me to help others. In the past I have had to use services like Women's Aid, so I suppose I'm giving something back, too. I see women who come into the centre thinking they are on their own, and then realise that others have been through the same things they have. I like seeing their faces. It's humbling and inspiring to see the strength of women who are rising above what has happened to them.

It's hard work and takes time, but I enjoy it. It helps having people like Steph [Women MATTA's Volunteer Co-ordinator] and Kate, who are supportive and understanding when I am ill. They also understand the financial aspects, and make sure we are not out of pocket from what we do – the expenses get paid. They don't inundate us with work, either.

The women we support know we are volunteers. They value it. Sometimes they need reassuring that we are trained, that we haven't just landed there. Sometimes you get comments like 'I can't believe you're doing it for nothing'. The women we support know we don't have many paid staff, and how much is done by volunteers. I think of it like this: Women MATTA has staff who are volunteers and staff who are paid. We're all staff. The women know I'm a volunteer, but it doesn't say that on my badge: it says what my role is. We attend the meetings, have regular

updates, see Kate or Steph as often as any paid staff, and we have regular training as well. It's brilliant and we can put it on CVs if we need to. We get a lot out of it. They have presentations and training and meals for us as well, and you learn so much through working alongside other people. I encourage others to volunteer with Women MATTA all the time. I feel that's one of my roles – to recruit other people. I tell them about the difference that it makes to the organisation and the women. I have introduced three or four other volunteers, I think, who are still here.

The success of the project and our importance in making that happen, that's what keeps me coming back. I can see that I'm making a difference. As long as that's the case, and I feel my time is being used fairly, and I can see the women who attend are getting something out of it, all that will keep me there. It's always challenging – always – but I like a challenge. The only frustration sometimes is how some outside agencies see us. We have to work with outside agencies and they sometimes aren't as familiar with us as they should be. Probation and the courts are brilliant, but other people sometimes have a wrong perception of our professionalism or our training. We're not just do-gooders; we know what we're doing.



## Women MATTA service user | Jane Turner

“ I committed benefit fraud, that’s why I’m here. I was referred by the courts. I’m glad they did – if they hadn’t, I wouldn’t be here.

I’ve made five visits in total. I’ve had financial advice, and have learned how to get my finances back under control, budgeting, not wasting money away. I’ve got to work on those things now, but I know what I need to be doing, and there’s someone that can help. That’s a godsend. Volunteers care about your welfare; they’re giving care when they don’t have to. The key thing is that they care. If a note had come through my door saying, “this and that service is available”, I wouldn’t have come, but because they are supportive, that keeps me coming back. If they help me, I know I can cope.

Without that help, I work myself up about stupid things. Two weeks ago, I wanted to kill myself. I went to court because of my council tax, and they told me had to go and make an offer at the council office. But they wouldn’t accept it, and I was so stressed, I went mad and hit the desk. Then the security men came over, and I got angrier again, I told them they could get out of my face. But all that was going through my head was fear: I was thinking, “bailiffs, bailiffs, bailiffs”. The woman from the council office said she was going to write me a letter, and I didn’t know what to do – I have about a thousand letters at home, all in a small envelope, I don’t know what to do with them. I texted my husband and said he had to look after the kids when I was gone. I thought I was going to kill myself.

Then Michelle from this place [Women MATTA] phoned to check I was OK. That made me feel mint. She calmed me down. I knew she could help and she explained things to me. She explained it hadn’t gone to the bailiffs. She said there was a budgeting class next week and that would help with prioritising

things, taking control. That’s what I need, is to be calm and make the decisions. Then when the council send me another letter, I can get help sending a reply to it, instead of it going in the envelope with the others.

It really matters that it’s all women here. You feel safe, but they are here to help, as well. They’re not here for money, they’re here to help. It takes me an hour to get here but I’d walk if I had to. I’m still going to come in when my probation order is finished.

## Women MATTA service user | Joanne Bates

“ I was referred here by probation and I’ve been coming here since September 2011 year [the case study visit was conducted in February 2012]. I was in a mess since my dad passed away. I had no money, I was drinking, I was doing that kind of thing for years to deal with stress, and I started shoplifting to try and get by. Here they put me through to an alcohol service, helped me deal with the financial stuff, deal with the bailiffs, generally get things back under control. Coming into the drop-in also got me out of the house; before I was staying in in my pyjamas all day. They made me feel that what I had done didn’t matter – that this was about me taking control and moving forwards.

If you have a long record, like I do, you tend to think that you can’t do anything, so you don’t try. I was thinking about jobs and work, and I love looking after my friend’s children, but I assumed I couldn’t do that because of my record. But here they explained the situation to me, and in fact it’s no barrier. I will have to get a CRB check but I can do the training and the job with the offences I have committed, so that removed a barrier in my own mind.

Even though the centre’s an hour away from home, I love coming in to see the volunteers. You can

talk to them, it calms you down. If you talk to a counsellor, they listen, but they're not really there with you. Some of the volunteers here have been through similar issues. When my dad died I was off my head for a bit, but coming here really helped. Someone said, if you need anything, if you're feeling stressed, just call. If you're feeling bad, we're here.

Probation deal with the offending but not with the problem. Something might happen to you and you snap; that's the problem, and it deals with the offence, but I never had any support. I was dealing with it all alone. The help they can do you here isn't advertised enough. The workshop on money was amazing. They explained exactly what the bailiffs can be sent for, and what you have to pay back first, where you can negotiate. They explained, write a letter to the courts, explain A and B and C, and now it's all manageable again. I pay it in instalments, coming out of my benefits. It's the help I need to get things back to normal, to get to thinking beyond tomorrow. The volunteers here, and the staff, they explain things differently, so that you understand. You can trust them.

I'm not finished here yet but I will start volunteering pretty soon. I want to do child-minding but in the meantime I can volunteer here and get a reference and a routine. Steph broke it all down for me. I'll be helping people who are going to probation or to the courts, or I'll be coming here and helping with the food. I'll get some training. It'll help me with the confidence and with the self-esteem. You feel better for helping others.

## The service

WomenCentre delivers holistic, specialist services for women and children, from its centres and in the community. It offers emotional and practical support on issues like debt, benefits, mental and physical health, domestic violence, counselling, training and development. WomenCentre was formed from the merger, in 2007, of Calderdale Well Women Centre and Womenspace Huddersfield, both of which had, by that time, been running for over 25 years. The Evolve service supports women offenders and those at risk of offending at all points in the CJS, from court to post-sentence support. It has been operating since 2007 out of centres in Halifax and Huddersfield, with a satellite office recently opened in Dewsbury. The service is open to any woman from Kirklees and Calderdale. It also provides through-the-gate services to women who are being released after short prison sentences. The service works in partnership with various criminal justice agencies to support women to make new choices in life.

## The place of volunteers in the organisation

Volunteers are an essential part of Evolve. Evolve staff described the role of volunteers as enabling a more 'wraparound' service, in which caseworkers and senior caseworkers work alongside women offenders who are seen as higher-risk, and volunteers support the caseworkers in these cases and also work with women who present a lower risk. The other key role for volunteers is in mentoring the women that the service supports, and allowing Evolve to offer a more complete range of emotional support and follow-up. One example is in

accompanying women who are using the service to appointments with Citizens Advice and providing emotional support – something that cannot be fitted in by caseworkers, but which allows for a more complete service.

The service deliberately involves former service users as volunteers, both because of the credibility that they, having turned their lives around, bring to the role, but also because continuing to volunteer and be involved with the service can be an excellent support network for those who are no longer the prime targets of the service, but who may still need support with moving a step further from the issues that led to them offending.

In the past three years the service has involved 24 volunteers. Four have found employment; two with WomenCentre and two with other organisations. Two more went on to further education.

## Recruitment, selection, and training of volunteers

WomenCentre was unique among the four organisations that we visited for these case studies, in that staff told us they sometimes advertise for specific positions and skills – elsewhere, this was very much the exception rather than the rule. Even so, there are certain 'steady' sources of volunteers: Evolve makes sure that former service users are aware of opportunities to volunteer, and they advertise opportunities to volunteer with the service among criminology students at Huddersfield and Bradford universities, as well as attending events like fresher's fairs to distribute information about what they do. WomenCentre also hold locally-advertised information sessions in their centres in

Huddersfield and Halifax, at which potential volunteers can hear about what they might be doing with WomenCentre, and how the centre supports the development of its volunteers. Word of mouth is also a channel through which some volunteers come to the organisation, though, and the volunteer coordinator will sometimes receive CVs and applications, in which case an application form will be sent out and an interview arranged. A significant number of volunteers are also recruited through Voluntary Action Kirklees, the local Volunteer Centre, and occasionally the project will use this avenue to seek a volunteer with specific skills, such as languages.

Selection of volunteers is, like with Women MATTA, a question more of commitment and ethos than it is of existing skills. Evolve staff told us that they look for volunteers who understand and value the work of the organisation, its philosophy and its ethos. The volunteer coordinator told us that motivations vary but that they are usually based on a commitment to the kind of work that the centre does. Some of the women who come forward to volunteer may be in quite vulnerable positions themselves, but that they are prepared to make the commitment because they are attached to what WomenCentre stands for. Some other volunteers may be less vulnerable but want to be involved because the centre has a reputation in its area as a community-led organisation forming part of a bigger picture of women's support services.

In cases where the volunteer is more vulnerable, the project thinks carefully about ways in which they can be involved in the work, but sensitively and without putting that person at risk. The volunteer manager gave

the example of volunteers who have direct personal experience of domestic violence. They may be willing to support others facing the same issues, but may remain too close to their own experiences. In other cases, women who are on probation orders may be making good progress and be willing to involve themselves as volunteers. Evolve staff told us that the approach in cases like this is to be up front about the challenges and the commitment involved. Usually, the prospective volunteer will understand what they are and are not comfortable with, and if not, the Evolve team will suggest another means of involvement with WomenCentre's work.

Volunteers who are selected go through an induction in which they meet members of staff, and have a rolling programme of shadowing their work. This shows volunteers the range of things that the service does in its day-to-day work, and gives them a range of ideas about tasks they might wish to take on as a volunteer. Volunteers then undergo core training, which is delivered in-house. This covers awareness of the ethos and history of WomenCentre, and who it supports and how it does so, and the work of caseworkers. Core training also includes some background information on the kinds of women supported and the issues they face. There is a specific part of the course covering chaotic lifestyles, another on domestic violence, and finally a range of policy training sessions covering confidentiality, listening skills, boundaries, equality and diversity, policies and procedures including health and safety, history of the women's centre and the ethos of holistic support, and finally working non-judgmentally. Volunteers have to complete all of the core training before they can begin their work as volunteers.



On-going training is mostly managed and delivered in-house. Within the Evolve service there are specialist volunteers and caseworkers, who have worked on specific issues or with specific client groups, for example women who are in the sex industry. WomenCentre volunteers can also have external training on drugs and alcohol, on debt management, and on safeguarding. These are usually done during the first months of volunteering. Other requests for ongoing training are identified through volunteer supervision meetings, which take place every four to six weeks (though volunteers often receive day-to-day support from other members of staff, and from other volunteers). Training needs can also be identified through discussion at Evolve team meetings and at cross-team meetings with organisations delivering other services (which volunteers can and do attend). If training needs emerge through any of these communication channels, they are usually publicised to staff and volunteers by various means including the Evolve newsletter, so that other people who may be interested in attending training on a particular topic are aware of the opportunity to do so.

Asked whether they ever had any problems finding the quality or quantity of volunteers that they needed, staff at WomenCentre told us that things have eased considerably since the advent of the spending cuts from 2010 onwards, because of the amount of unemployment in the local economy and the resulting number of people who don't have jobs. There are people who may have worked for criminal justice agencies before, or for the NHS, who have taken voluntary redundancy, and increasing numbers of these people have come forward to volunteer with Evolve. This has created a need for the project's

managers to balance this influx of potential talent with the need to ensure that the service remains sufficiently oriented towards the needs of current and former service users.

### Retention and continued engagement of volunteers

Staff at WomenCentre told us that volunteers typically remain with the organisation for around a year, though some have been there for as much as two years. Students and those who are volunteering in spare time around a main job tend to stay for longer, while those who are volunteering while they look for work tend to stay for shorter periods. Volunteers who leave usually do so because they are moving on to other opportunities – work, or education – and not because they are not getting anything from volunteering with Evolve. The Evolve manager compared retaining volunteers to keeping employed staff happy: volunteers who are having their needs met, who are being challenged and developed, and who are clear as to their role and supported to do it, tend to stick around. The service takes a good deal of trouble to involve volunteers as full members of a team, and this includes being clear and open with volunteers from the beginning about what commitment is expected from them. This may be why staff at WomenCentre told us that they experience no significant barriers to the retention of volunteers.

The other element to retention is being clear about what the strengths of volunteers are. Evolve project staff had clear opinions on this subject, citing the way that service users engage with volunteers: words like 'more at ease' came up in this discussion, as did the idea that some service users may see volunteers as more 'on their wavelength' than

WomenCentre staff members. Staff said that service users would receive a completely different service from Evolve were it not for the involvement of volunteers: the additional emotional support and time that volunteers could put into a single case, which staff could not, meant that service users could be moved on towards greater independence more quickly, because they ended up feeling less dependent on the individual caseworker who was working with them.

Another benefit that was cited to volunteer involvement was that it enabled staff to meet individual service user need while also meeting the requirements of a specific funding stream. For example, where a funding stream calls for intensive work over a short period – 12 weeks, for example – the involvement of volunteers means that a service user can be moved over to another programme seamlessly, because the volunteer moves with them. This ensures a greater level of buy-in from service users, without service users feeling that the support they need is at risk of ending.

Retention is therefore another feature of this clarity as to volunteer contribution, because it helps volunteers to feel that they are making a particular, unique and special contribution.

## Evolve volunteer | Chloe Jones

“ I found the place through the internet and then through my university, then came in for an interview. I’m a student at the University of Huddersfield, and I’m studying youth and community work. I was interested in working with offenders and women at risk of offending and this seemed a good fit. I’ve been here since November 2011. I’ve done some volunteering before – I did youth work for two years. But WomenCentre seemed really good because it offered a combination. I have also done some voluntary resettlement work before, with women leaving prison, but I liked the combination that WomenCentre had of a more voluntary atmosphere – the women who come here are here because they want to be – and because the training seemed really well-structured and was a good match for what I wanted to learn.

I haven’t been volunteering here for very long, but I will be supporting women who are trying to find housing or need help with benefits. The service is called Directions. I think what I value about it is the training – they take that seriously here, and volunteering is a really good way to get new experience and new skills. Plus the women we help appreciate that what we’re doing isn’t paid, that we’re giving up our free time. I think that you can get a lot out of volunteering; I encourage the kids at the youth centre where I work some of the time to get out there and do some volunteering.

## Evolve volunteer | Holly Hammond

“ I’m also at university, on the same course as Chloe, and I’ve been volunteering here since December 2011. I’ve been wanting to get involved with volunteering here since long before that. I used to come here as a service user,

when I was experiencing domestic violence. The police referred me here, I had the counselling and the group work and so on. It was really helpful to me when I was here as a service user. So then I wanted to be involved, to give something back. I heard from another student on my course that there were opportunities going here, and that was it, I put in my application. I like the fact that as a volunteer you are helping build a positive around a service that people have to attend. Some people are here because their probation worker tells them they have to be, but as a volunteer you can make the experience different, so they actually come back because they want to.

It’s also fantastic that the staff here are so interested in me as a person. People listen to what you’re interested in and try to help with that. They have been really helpful with my dissertation – they gave me some help and some contacts that I needed to set up interviews in prison.

I’ve worked closely with the probation worker who is based here. She does her core work and passes on cases relating to housing, debt management, referrals to Citizens Advice Bureau, women that are in hostels and homeless, issues with the children – things like that. Things that the probation worker can’t deal with but they are still important. A lot of the women I work with want to find a job, but they don’t know how to go about it. Or they might be looking to get into training or education. The probation staff are good, they see those things as part of their job, but they don’t always have time to deal with those things themselves. And that gives us the chance to gain the experience. So she passes things on to me, and I can help as and when I’m needed.

The women we support really value the fact that we are volunteers, I think. You get some nice compliments – “if it weren’t for you, we wouldn’t know where to go”, that kind of thing. So it’s good to feel that you are doing something for others, giving something back. And there is the training and the fact

that you are gaining really good experience. But there are some challenges as well. Sometimes the women can take a confrontational attitude, or you can find yourself dealing with someone who has a drug problem, and that can be difficult because the centre always explains to be people that they cannot work effectively with someone if they have been drinking or using substances, and asks them not to attend if they have. But they give good training on that here – on how to assess an individual situation and where to seek advice and help – and there is always a member of staff around, so you always feel supported. That's really important for me sometimes. There are times when you don't really know what to do with a client's needs. You want to help but you don't have the experience. But the support is there and you can ask for it, you can ask for training, and they always do their best to provide what you say you need.

And the work with the women we support, that's what it's all about, really. They like the feeling that they are helping you to progress in your course as well. You'll get people telling you, "I'll tell probation that you've helped me today", and they are happy to be supporting you too, in a funny way. It's good to see them make progress, and have a supportive relationship with them.

## Evolve volunteer | Payal Vyas

“ I had just finished university when I started here, studying criminology. I passed on my details to Sobiya [the Evolve project's Volunteer Coordinator], because I had got a job in healthcare, but I also wanted to do some work relating to my degree course. I've now been here for about a year and a half. I've just left that job, and have started another one, but do the volunteering in my spare time, because I really enjoy it. I volunteered with a youth group and with asylum seekers before, and have also worked with probation. WomenCentre was a better fit for me, because it

was a more relaxed environment – less formal than either of those. I liked the fact that when I came here, everything was open and receptive, and I felt that I had the chance to contribute – it wasn't like a 'them and us' feel with staff, like some volunteering I have done before. All the staff are like that.

Most of what I have done has been court work. I have been based in the courts and have worked with women who are going through the courts system. They are sometimes stressed and worried, so I help with things like meetings with their solicitors, helping them understand official situations, but also then with other things that come from that, like connecting them with ideas about education and training, employment, and so on.

There is a lot of training offered, there's something new every couple of months. The training on domestic violence was really good – interesting and very relevant to some of the issues I have worked with. But that's not the only thing that keeps me coming back. I enjoy doing it. You meet some real characters in this kind of work, plus you get that feeling that comes from helping someone. It might seem small a lot of the time, and what you have done might be small to you, but it really matters to the woman you have worked with. Someone the other weekend said that she hadn't realised I was a volunteer. She appreciated that; it made the organisation look good, and it made it seem to her as if they were even more willing to help. She said it seemed to her less like they were just box-ticking. She said it made what they were offering more believable.

Sometimes the service users can be difficult, especially when there are substance issues. The Centre has a policy of explaining to women who are using substances that it's harder to work with them that way, and that it prefers them to stay away if they are using. Occasionally – it's not common – this creates some friction and some incidents. Or there have been other instances when women who have



come here have had partners or ex-partners waiting outside. But it's not common, and there are always members of staff around, so you don't feel you're on your own dealing with a difficult situation.

Some of my friends have asked me what it's like to work here as a volunteer. Some of them are finishing university and there aren't many jobs around. I say to them that it gives you an idea of what you might want to do, and it gives you a foot in the door as well. But actually that's what gets you in, and then you get the feeling of doing something useful too.

## Clinks links

### Clinks Volunteering page

Clinks' new work on volunteering will be posted on this page.

### Clinks Volunteering Guides

Clinks has published a series of guides designed to support organisations in their day-to-day work with offenders. The guides have been developed with the expertise of Volunteering England, Charities Evaluation Services, and the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation. Targeted at those who involve volunteers, or provide mentoring and befriending services to offenders and ex-offenders, these guides are designed to support any organisation whether they are already established or just setting up. The guides are:

#### Service user involvement

Written by service users, this guide provides a structured and accessible introduction to involving offenders and ex-offenders in your work, including examples of good practice, checklists and signposting to further information and support.

#### Setting up a project

This helps support organisations who are setting up a mentoring or befriending project to work with offenders and ex-offenders. The guide goes through the different elements that need to be considered when planning for a new service and gives interesting case studies of organisations working with offenders and ex-offenders.

#### Managing volunteers

The purpose of this guide is to help ensure that organisations working with offenders and ex-offenders use volunteers well. There is a lot of good practice in the Criminal Justice System of involving volunteers. However, there is also inconsistency in the way that volunteers are recruited, managed and reimbursed.

#### Demonstrating effectiveness

This guide aims to support organisations working with offenders and ex-offenders to demonstrate their effectiveness. The guide goes through the different steps that need to be considered when planning to demonstrate effectiveness with a particular focus on when volunteers are contributing to the delivery of a service.

#### Quality standards

The purpose of this guide is to help support organisations working with offenders and ex-offenders to gain an external quality standard for their work with offenders, ex-offenders, or their families. This guide explains what external quality standards are, why you would consider getting one, and then goes through the quality standards that are currently available and allows the reader to select which one is best for their organisation.

#### Volunteer peer support

The purpose of this guide is to support Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and other agencies and stakeholders in the Criminal Justice System to deliver quality peer-to-peer services for people in custody, those released from prison and people serving community sentences.

#### Trustees & board members

This Clinks guide has been written in response to requests from trustees looking for basic information about the Criminal Justice System and links to good practice around the roles and responsibilities taken on by trustees. The guide sets out to provide an introduction to the Criminal Justice System and provide information which is relevant to the needs of trustees.

## Other volunteering links

### [Volunteering England](#)

Volunteering England is an independent charity and membership organisation committed to supporting, enabling and celebrating volunteering in all its diversity. Their work links policy, research, innovation, good practice and programme management in the involvement of volunteers.

### [Do-It](#)

Do-It is a volunteering website, created by YouthNet, which enables users to search for real-time volunteering opportunities. With their partners at volunteer centres and voluntary organisations across the country they aim to make sure that those who want to volunteer can do so quickly and easily.

### [CSV](#)

CSV enables people of all ages and backgrounds reap the benefits of putting something back through volunteering. Through their learning and training facilities, thousands of young people and adults develop new skills, build their confidence and improve their job prospects.

## Evidence

### [Institute for Volunteering Research](#)

The Evidence Bank is home to all of IVR's publicly available research. It is an easy-to-use searchable database of our research, reports, bulletins, publications and journal articles.

### [Exploring Volunteering](#)

This blog contains in-depth discussion of the development and history of volunteering in the UK.



Clinks  
59 Carter Lane  
London  
EC4V 5AQ  
020 7248 3538  
info@clinks.org  
www.clinks.org

Clinks is a registered charity no. 1074546 and a company limited by guarantee registered in England no. 3562176.

