

A response by NSPCC Northern Ireland to the Department of Social
Development Consultation Paper on a Volunteering Strategy for Northern
Ireland

September 2009

Introduction

1. The NSPCC is the lead voluntary child protection agency in Northern Ireland and is unique among charities in having statutory powers by virtue of Royal Charter and the Children (NI) Order 1995. The NSPCC's authorised status is recognised by the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008 in relation to public protection arrangements. The NSPCC aims to end cruelty to children by seeking to influence legislation, policy, practice, attitudes and behaviours for the benefit of children and young people. This is achieved through a combination of service provision, research and public affairs, campaigning and public education.
2. The NSPCC employs approximately 150 staff in Northern Ireland providing a range of services. These include therapeutic work, family support assessment, support for young people with sexually harmful behaviour, young witness support, counselling services in schools, Independent Visiting Services for young people in the care system, Child Protection in Sport and ChildLine.
3. The NSPCC involves more than 400 volunteers in both Services and Appeals functions in Northern Ireland. ChildLine, the UK's free helpline for children and young people, is the main volunteer involving service of the NSPCC. ChildLine involves approximately 200 volunteers in two bases located in Belfast and Foyle. The majority of these are counselling volunteers who speak to children and young people on the telephone and online. Volunteers have been at the heart of the ChildLine service since its inception in 1986. Childline's volunteers deliver the direct service through the helpline. There are also approximately 32 volunteers in the Young Witness Scheme and 48 volunteers in the Independent Visiting Scheme. In addition, there are numerous volunteers and supporters engaged in the Appeals function, helping to organise and take part in fundraising events. A forthcoming Policy and Practice paper by NSPCC on the Independent Visiting service will show that volunteers greatly value the high quality volunteering opportunities provided by NSPCC.
4. In the development of this response members of the NSPCC's cross-functional Volunteer Development Group have been consulted. This group includes representatives of all those services which involve volunteers within the NSPCC.

Consultation Response

5. As a volunteer-involving organisation, the NSPCC welcomes the opportunity to respond to this Consultation Paper on a Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland.
6. NSPCC considers the definition used in the Strategy which is taken from the 2005 Compact Code of Good Practice on Volunteering is reflective of our understanding of volunteering. It is the view of the NSPCC that the vision in the consultation document includes the components which, if implemented, will lead to an effective Strategy for Volunteering in Northern Ireland.

Objective 1: Volunteering: Recognising the Value and Promoting the Benefits

7. NSPCC would like to see provision made within the strategy for measuring the impact of volunteering in society and for publication of statistics which reflect the true value of volunteering (ie the costs of services currently delivered by volunteer services if delivered instead by paid staff). Impact measurement should take account of the range and types of services which could not be delivered without volunteers. (for example ChildLine, advice services, fundraising, etc)
8. The Strategy should include a recommendation encouraging organisations to continually promote the benefits of volunteering. This can be achieved in a number of ways, for example, through the use of real life case studies as advertorials in newspapers. Individuals who are considering volunteering should be able to see the clear benefits that volunteering could have for them as well as for the organisation.
9. We would recommend the development of a dedicated Northern Ireland website for the promotion of volunteering opportunities. This would be useful for prospective volunteers as it would provide ease of access to a range of local opportunities. This could also host volunteering opportunities and provide links to organisations offering volunteering opportunities such as NSPCC.

Objective 2: Volunteering: Enhancing Accessibility and Diversity

10. The NSPCC welcomes the establishment of the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) and its role in making discretionary barring decisions on those unsuitable for work with children. Public

attitude research carried out by NSPCC¹ and the 4 Area Child Protection Committees in Northern Ireland due for publication this year, confirms that parents are very concerned to ensure that voluntary and community organisations providing activities for their children have safe recruitment practices. The new Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) will be considerably more flexible because of its portability than the current system of enhanced disclosure certificates.

11. The NSPCC would agree with the strategy's aim to ensure the protection of children and vulnerable adults. We recommend the Department consider investing in the development of the volunteering infrastructure through supporting the implementation of the new Vetting and Barring Scheme and consider providing training to organisations on the implementation of the new Scheme for volunteers.
12. The Volunteering Strategy needs to include actions to encourage the involvement of ethnic minority organisations in Northern Ireland. People from ethnic minorities are under-represented in volunteering and are not specifically mentioned in the strategy.

Objective 3: Volunteering: Improving the Experience

13. There should be a recognised set of standards in place for volunteering organisations to work towards such as Investing in Volunteers. Organisations which involve volunteers could be required to have minimum standards in place. Such a system, NSPCC believes, will improve practice and consistency across organisations and improve the overall volunteering experience, leading to better service provision.

Objective 4: Volunteering: Supporting and Strengthening the Infrastructure

14. It is particularly important to develop an infrastructure in Northern Ireland which supports volunteering. Ideally there should be a "one-stop shop" organisation which could promote good practice, offer training in the recruitment and support of volunteers, advertise volunteering opportunities and liaise and network with volunteer-involving organisations. This organisation should operate on a local and regional level. While the Volunteer Development Agency currently provides some support and training services it does not advertise volunteering opportunities and the existing volunteer bureaux only provide a local vacancy advertising service rather than a regional one. We would recommend a more joined-up approach through an appropriate organisation.

¹ Public Attitudes towards Child Protection in Northern Ireland, 2008: Technical Document and Executive Summary Documents. A forthcoming publication by NSPCC and the 4 Area Child Protection Committees

15. There needs to be a commitment made by DSD to deliver and monitor the success of the Strategy and to resource it appropriately.

Objective 5: Volunteering: Delivering the Strategy

16. The Volunteering Strategy should not be stand-alone but should also feed into other regional and Departmental strategies in order to ensure integration between volunteering and other NI Executive policies.

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