



Volunteers Without Borders- Building a resilient community organisation

Background information about the RCO

Volunteers Without Borders (VWB) has been established for four years. Our client group is refugees, asylum seekers, young people, children and families.

Summary of activities:

- Culture and diversity awareness through drumming.

In Volunteers Without Borders we have set up and developed a drumming group. One of the members of VWB is an experienced drummer and has now trained the rest of the group. We have 10 drummers who regularly organise shows in Huddersfield, Leeds and Wakefield area. These shows are our main source of funding. We also organise drumming workshops for organisations working with young people and schools. After the workshops we talk to young people about refugee issues and we give them an opportunity to ask us questions. We find these workshops a good way of raising awareness about cultural diversity issues.

- Volunteering

In Volunteers Without Borders, we value and promote volunteering. We encourage our members to volunteer with different organisations in order to gain work experience, avoid isolation and integrate in the British society. Volunteering is also a good way of improving our members' English skills. One of the members of Volunteers Without Borders represents the refugee community in the West Yorkshire Police hate crimes scrutiny panel and the Crown Prosecution Service hate crimes scrutiny Panel in Yorkshire and Humberside.

- Education

In Volunteers Without Borders, we value education – we encourage our members to go into education and do the best they can. At the moment we have four members who are at university: one studying psychology, two studying civil engineering and one studying youth work.

- Community cohesion and conflict resolution

In Volunteers Without Borders, we promote and encourage community cohesion. We raise awareness about conflicts. In August 2009 we have organised a Forum in

Coventry and we invited the Burundian community. We chose Coventry because that is where you find most of the Burundian refugees in the UK. We wanted the Burundians to get together and discuss conflicting issues to do with the divide between Hutus and Tutsis. We were supported by experts in psychology and Conflict resolution. This forum was a success and we have been asked to organise it again.

Briefly describe the experience you wish to focus on in this paper

In this paper, I would like to focus on our main activity in Volunteers Without Borders and this the drumming group.

Describe what your RCO did, and what came out of this

My colleagues got together and discussed the idea of creating an RCO, we called it Volunteers Without Borders and we know that our activities might expand and go beyond the UK borders as well. We started by writing the constitution of the association and we also opened a bank account.

When we started in 2006, we didn't have drums but we got together and decided to start an African dance group by singing and dancing. We didn't have any money but the members decided to make contributions so that we could buy basic equipment. We started approaching different funding bodies and we were very fortunate to raise £3,000 to buy drums. We now have drums.

What problems and barriers did your RCO face in doing this, and how did you overcome or try to overcome these?

Setting up Volunteers Without Borders hasn't been easy. We had a few problems to do with lack of skills, time constraints and lack of finances.

- **Lack of skills:** When we started Volunteers Without Borders, we did not really know where to start from and we decided to seek advice. We approached Voluntary Action Kirklees and they helped us to write our constitution. We then opened a bank account.
- **Time constraints:** Most of the members of Volunteers Without Borders were in employment and education. Others were asylum seekers waiting for their home office decisions. It was not easy for us to have a time which was convenient to all of us. We then decided to meet on weekends. Most of our drumming sessions still happens on weekends and evenings.
- **Lack of finances:** We started off with no money at all. We got together and decided to start contributions in order to buy basic equipment that we need for our dance group.

If your RCO accessed any support to help you with this area of work, describe this support and whether it was helpful to your organisation.

We approached Voluntary Action Kirklees and they helped us to write our constitution, they also explained us the procedures of setting up a management committee and opening a bank account. Voluntary Action Kirkees deliver training to community groups and other organisations as well. As we did not have any money to pay for training we negotiated with them and our members were allowed to attend the training sessions free of charge. That was very helpful for us.

Do you have any tips for other RCOs considering doing something similar?

Networking: There is a lot of help out there but unless you get out and start marketing your ideas you will never find out. In order to build strong foundations for the organisation, you need to reach out to people and get together a diverse community. The more diverse you are, the more attractive you will be to potential funders and you will definitely gain more understanding of the issues affecting the people you are working with. Diversifying participation and membership can happen by recruiting and involving different client groups. There are different reasons why people can be excluded or not encouraged to participate, these are mainly due to gender, age, disability, language, sexuality, etc. In the recruitment process, it would be beneficial to keep this in mind and encourage the minorities to come forward. In Our RCO, we have developed strong ties with other community organisations for our own publicity but also to learn as much we can from them.

Identifying common interest: setting up an RCO will be a lot easier when you are working with a team of people who share common interests. But when you don't share common interests, there is always a possibility of discussing with people and get to identify what can be done together. I would definitely say that in Volunteers Without Borders, drumming brought us together and other ideas and activities have been inspired by the drumming.

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