

'Charities must stop living in the past' claim as Student Volunteering Week is launched

Charities must stop living in the past and react to the changing needs of volunteers, it was claimed at a debate to launch Student Volunteering Week yesterday.

Rob Jackson, from the Royal National Institute of the Blind, claimed that volunteer managers needed to realise that the majority of volunteers were no longer from an older generation who see helping their community as a 'civic duty'.

"The problem is that these are the people we have always focussed on," said Rob.

"We are not creating the flexible forms of volunteering that people want these days. We're too busy naval gazing instead of looking at what people actually want."

Mr Jackson was speaking at an event entitled The Bling Factor, organised by Student Volunteering England as part of the Year of the Volunteer, which is backed by the Home Office.

He said that the baby boomer generation would soon become hugely important as volunteers - but they would expect a high-level of efficiency from voluntary organisations. He added that in a survey of volunteering, 71% of volunteers said that their work could have been better organised.

"People now are very demanding about what they want volunteering to be, and about what they want to do. It's got to be on their terms, and that's what we have got to get used to."

"Our approval rating as volunteer managers isn't great and that's something we have got to look at. If people have a lousy experience of volunteering there's a very strong possibility that they will never volunteer again, and a very strong possibility that they will tell their friends about that bad experience."

Fellow speaker Anna Wallace, a volunteer co-ordinator at CALM (Community Action @ Leeds Met) agreed with Mr Jackson that more cash backing from the government, and a change of attitude, were required by organisations to ensure that volunteering met the requirements of modern society.

"The structure of volunteering needs to be improved first before there is a recruitment drive, otherwise it will cause disappointment. And we need to ensure there is a balance

between the needs of the community and the needs of volunteers. Basically volunteering needs to be diverse, and react to the changing needs of society," she said.

"The image of volunteering must reflect the true picture. Some volunteering opportunities may be boring to some, but be very rewarding to others. Volunteering is not really bling, so the image can create false expectations."

Other speakers at the event were Tom Green, editor of the volunteering website do-it.org.uk, and Richard Harries, Head of the Volunteering and Charitable Giving Unit at the Home Office.

Students Soumaya Mauthoor and Max Griffiths discussed their own volunteering projects, a Language Skills Pool of bi-lingual students at University College London; and the Tanzania Book Project, which has collected 25,000 books for African school children.

Student Volunteering Week continues with projects and events across the country. On Friday 25th, the second annual Matt Spencer Award, set up to honour the work of outstanding student volunteers, will be presented at the Norbreck Castle Hotel in Blackpool.

Ends

For further information, please contact Chris Pitt, Year of the Volunteer Press Officer on 0207 812 0036, cpitt@csv.org.uk; or Martin Walford on 0207 812 0033, mwalford@csv.org.uk

Notes for editors

1. 71% of volunteers say their work could be better organised (1997 National Survey of Volunteering)
2. Year of the Volunteer 2005 is owned by volunteers, led by a partnership between CSV (Community Service Volunteers) and the Volunteering England Consortium, and supported by the Home Office.
3. The Volunteering England Consortium consists of Volunteering England, TimeBank, do-it, The Media Trust, Bitc and Youth Action Network.
4. To find out more about events and activities during the Year of the Volunteer 2005, please visit the official website at www.yearofthevolunteer.org and watch The Community Channel 24 hours a day on Sky 585 and Telewest 233. It's also on ntl 14 and from 6-9am on Freeview 46; and Ceefax page 650. Alternatively, contact the CSV Action Desk at your local BBC radio station.