



Frequently Asked Questions about the Voluntary and Community Sector

The voluntary sector is made up of a wide range of organisations that are set up to provide charitable services to their users. These services could be lunch clubs for older people, activities to train younger people into work or support groups for those with a mental health issue. Normally they are registered with the Charity Commission who will approve their constitution and they will be governed by a management committee which is elected.

Community organisations on the other hand provide services to users, but do not have to be charitable.

Is there an organisation which represents the voluntary sector?

There is no single organisation which "speaks" for the voluntary sector. Barnet Voluntary Service Council is the umbrella organisation for the voluntary sector in Barnet. We provide a range of services to enable the voluntary sector to develop its services and act as a vehicle for ensuring that the voluntary sector's voice is heard. For example, we facilitate eight voluntary sector networks encompassing the variety of work undertaken by the voluntary sector, as well as working directly with the statutory authorities on partnership work. As the key agency for the sector, BVSC acts as a channel of communication between the voluntary and statutory sector and aims to represent their views.

See the Membership page on our website for details of joining BVSC.

Is the voluntary sector part of the Government or local authority?

No, the voluntary sector is independent from Government and Local Authority. However, the major funders of voluntary and community organisations are local and national government. Much of that money comes in the form of contracts and there is concern that this could lead to the voluntary sector doing the work of both government and the local authority. Our independence allows us to provide services to members in a manner not matched by the local authority and to raise issues of concern about how services are delivered by both the Local Authority and the Health Authority.

How can I set up a voluntary organisation?

Setting up a voluntary or community organisation can be a simple process, dependent on what you want to do. In setting up a group you will need to be clear on why you are setting it up. If you wish to raise money in the future you will need to have a constitution and a management committee.

BVSC's Development Worker, Sandra Fullerton, can help you with the complexities of setting up a group: T. 020 8364 8400 E. sandra@barnetvsc.org.uk.

How could I become a volunteer?

You become a volunteer by approaching an organisation you would like to work with. If you do not know of any organisations that you would like to volunteer for, contact Barnet Volunteer Service on 020 8364 8400 or volunteer@barnetvsc.org.uk for help being placed with an organisation. Becoming a volunteer is much like applying for a job as references will have to be taken up. You will normally be consulted on how long and on what days you want to work. Most importantly you need to be sure what skills you will be learning and what you want to get out of the volunteering.

What real contribution does the voluntary sector make to the community in Barnet?

The voluntary and community sector make a real contribution to Barnet. Services provided help individuals end their social isolation, can help keep people out of Hospital saving the hard pressed National Health Service valuable money, and can equip those who use the service with new skills. Additionally, it gives volunteers valuable job experience, as well as being a vehicle for changing social attitudes to those most vulnerable in society.

If this is the voluntary sector why are people paid?

The term "voluntary" service reflects the history of the voluntary sector. Many volunteers were the well to do in society with time on their hands. They could afford to conduct voluntary deeds without being paid. The principle of non - paid work has continued, but the task of recruiting, training and supporting volunteers has become more complex, requiring a paid person to co-ordinate all of the unpaid activities. Volunteer coordinators, directors, admin staff etc are now paid. Unpaid volunteers only claiming expenses that provide a service for a few hours a week still exist though and remain the backbone of many organisations.

Isn't the voluntary sector nothing more than well meaning amateurs trying to do the job of professionals?

Nothing could be more incorrect. Many people working in the voluntary sector have considerable experience in the area they are working in, perhaps gained as volunteers. Many founders of smaller organisations, particularly ethnic minority organisations, are former nurses or other care professionals. Volunteers bring a wealth of skills, experience and expertise acquired both through their professional and personal life. More importantly they often bring a real understanding and awareness of the community and its needs and an enthusiasm and commitment to developing high quality services.