



# **Work Focused Volunteering Annual Report 2009 – 2010**

**Prepared by Alex Rusch, Project Manager**

- 1. Overview, including project history and objectives**
- 2. Staffing**
- 3. Steering group**
- 4. Objectives**
- 5. Achievements of period, September 2009 – April 2010**
- 6. Benefits**
  - 6.1 Work and processes
  - 6.2 Statistics and performance
  - 6.3 Case studies
- 7. Project development**
- 8. Objectives and targets for the coming year**
- 9. Conclusion**

## 1. Overview

This report has been prepared by Alex Rusch, SOVA Project Manager and covers the reporting period 2009 –2010.

In partnership with Job Centre Plus, in April 2009 the Department for Work and Pensions launched Work Focused Volunteering, to be managed throughout England by BTCV, V, Volunteering England and CSV.

The programme was introduced as part of a package for people who have been unemployed for a minimum of 6 months or more and are likely to be a victim of the current economic climate. The aim of the programme is to organise volunteering placements to help people improve their employability by reconnecting them with the labour market through skills maintenance or development. Over the course of 2 years, the scheme looks to provide 34,000 Jobcentre Plus customers Nationwide with a volunteering placement.

In September of last year SOVA were offered the chance to become part of the project and rose to the challenge to set up the scheme in just **14** short days, successfully delivering Work Focused Volunteering across 14 Job Centres throughout Birmingham.

**14 Job Centres  
throughout  
Birmingham**

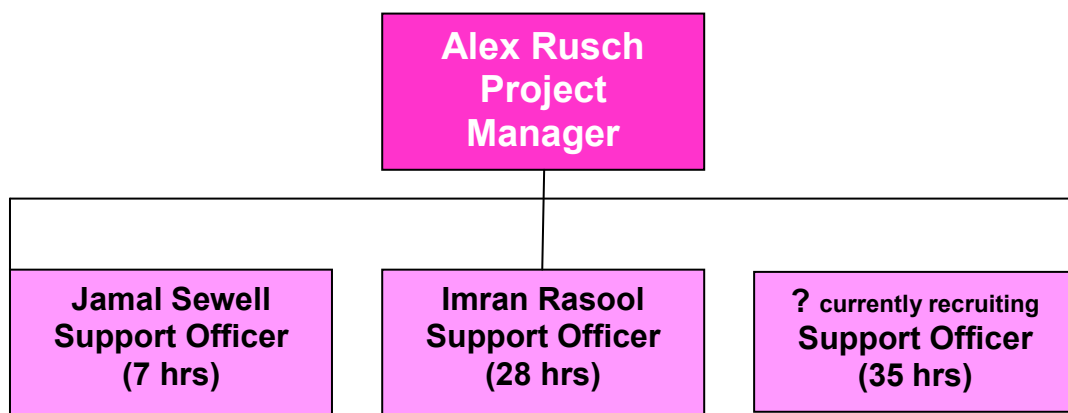
Not ones to shy away from a challenge, between September 2009 and the end of April 2010, we have taken over 1,266 referrals, forged relationships with 100 placement providers including Community Transport, The British Heart Foundation, The Scouts Association, Childline, Bootcamp Extreme and Barnardos, and made 479 successful volunteer placements doing everything from admin, to retail to warehouse to care work.

**1,266 referrals**  
**704 placements  
arranged\***  
**(\*479 of whom turned up!)**

## 2. Staffing

Due to the time restraints SOVA faced in setting up the scheme, we promptly looked to SOVA's pool of volunteers to recruit Jamal Sewell and Eugene Smyth into sessional Support Worker posts, who were later taken on as permanent staff members. Once the project began to take shape and we had a clearer understanding of the resources required to deliver the project, we later advertised for and recruited a full-time Administrator, Tabasem Fardose, who joined us in October 2009.

Since this point, the staffing for Work Focused Volunteering has changed considerably, with Eugene leaving SOVA and Tabasem moving on to our NOMS project. It was agreed that moving forward the project would benefit from another Support Officer in place of a full-time Administrator and at the end of April 2010, the team structure stands as follows:



## 3. Steering Group

On a quarterly basis, SOVA attend a 'learning forum'. This is chaired by Lisa Cowley, National Programmes Manager for BTCV, and is attended by each organization responsible for delivering Work Focused Volunteering across the West Midlands, as well as representatives from Jobcentre Plus.

Attendees discuss their procedures and share in best practice – these meetings have proved beneficial not only in allowing us to network with other organizations, but to understand what we're doing well and changes we can implement to make things even better.

Every 6 weeks we meet with Patricia Tierney, District Office Third Party Provision Team, of Jobcentre Plus to discuss any feedback, analyze referral/placement numbers and resolve any issues.

Contract meetings are held between SOVA and BTCV on a quarterly basis.

#### 4. Objectives



Work Focused Volunteering, unlike most other SOVA projects in the Midlands, has purely an employment focus. Our objective is to act as a stepping stone back in to the workplace.

We offer our customers the chance to build on their skills and develop their experience, as well as the chance to try new things and to get involved - to add a new string to their bow. The placements aim to ease unemployed people back into a working pattern and help them build their self-belief and confidence, as well as becoming motivated about volunteering and the benefits it has for them and the organisations they are placed with.

Work Focused Volunteering helps provide something new for their CV, the chance to obtain work references and really importantly, a good reason to get out of bed in the mornings.

#### The contract with BTCV sets out the following targets:

- *The Provider will appoint Brokers to place Participants into volunteering placements referred to those Brokers by relevant Jobcentre Plus offices as per Table 1 below.*

Solihull	Birmingham Broad Street
Birmingham City	Birmingham South West
Chelmsley	Erdington
Handsworth	Kings Heath
Perry Barr	Selly Oak
Sparkhill	Sutton
Washwood Heath	Yardley

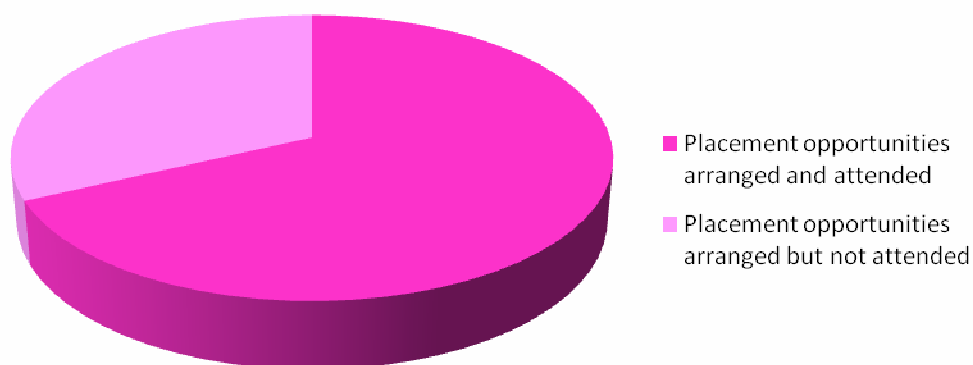
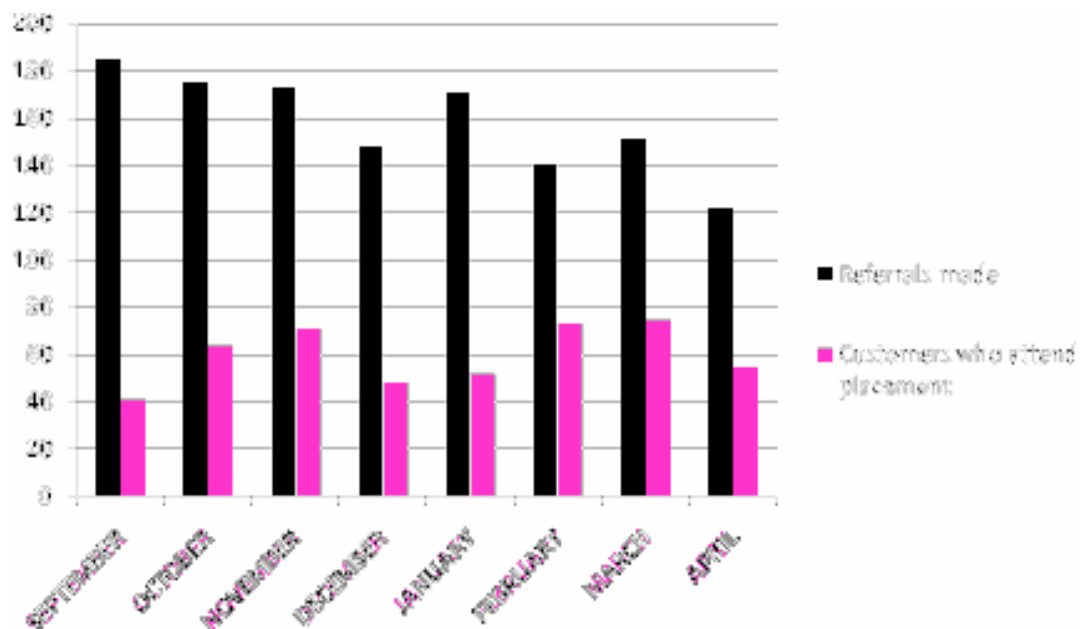
Table 1

- *The Provider will ensure that the appointed Brokers place Participants into suitable volunteering placement positions.*

## 5. Achievement of period September 2009 – April 2010

Each month we work on a fallout rate of c.30% - this is the approximate percentage of customers we match and arrange voluntary placements for, however do not show up on the day – this may be due to limited 'buy-in' to the WFV scheme, lack of funds to get to the placements, sickness or other reasons.

The graph below illustrates the number of referrals made each month, against those who were matched to and attended their placement. SOVA only get paid for those people who attend their placement. This is a constant battle for the WFV team who are constantly monitoring and improving the way they sell the scheme to customers as well as looking for practical improvements they can make – for example, supplying bus ticket scratch cards, including 'about volunteering' leaflets in with customers letters, refining placement letter and including maps to ensure clarity of understanding and that customers know how to get to their placement.



## 6. Beneficiaries

### 6.1 Work and processes

The Work Focused Volunteering client base is made up of Joe Public.

Now, Joe Public is a completely mixed and unpredictable bag.

He may want to try new things.

He may only want to do what he's always done.

He may be happy to hop on a bus and travel across town.

He may only want to work within 15 paces of his own front door.

He may speak 8 languages.

He may not speak English.

He may only want to work with animals.

He may be allergic to animals.

He may have volunteered before.

He may not have volunteered before.

Infact, chances are he has absolutely no concept of volunteering and what it's all about.

Work Focused Volunteering acts in an almost 'broker' type capacity, operating not unlike a call centre.

Sheer volume of referrals, plus the high-levels of administration required for each referral, dictates the necessity to implement strict processes in order to hit volunteer placement targets.

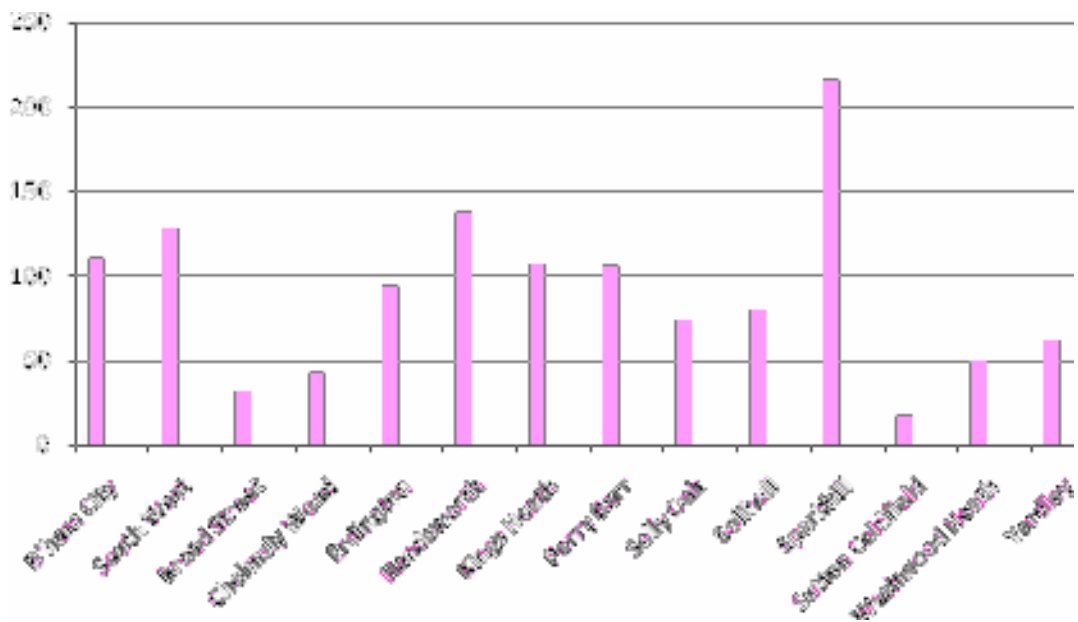
Unlike most SOVA/Volunteer relationships, our 'touchy feely' time with prospective volunteers is limited to approximately 5 to 10 minutes. During that time, we need to interview our customer and find out their basic details such as telephone number, date of birth and NI number. We need to sell in the project, driving home what they can hope to gain and understanding what they want to gain. We need to discover what they've done, where they've been and where they want to go, and we need to understand what makes them tick. We need to dispel any misconceptions, such as loss of benefits. And all the time we're talking and holding their hand, we're scanning the opportunities board, searching for an appropriate placement in their local area, and looking to make an immediate match.

From 'hello' to 'your placed' in 10 short minutes, is no mean feat.

Despite Work Focused Volunteering remaining a relatively young project for SOVA, we are confident we've now got a good idea what works and what doesn't. This doesn't however open us up to complacency and through constant reevaluation of our working processes, organising 'group 'taster sessions', changing both what we ask and what we tell and how we pitch the project, and importantly, the introduction of a 'quality filter' giving us the freedom to decline unsuitable customers as appropriate, means we're meeting targets month on month and getting really great feedback from participants, placements and funders alike.

### 6.2 Statistics and performance

SOVA work with 14 Job Centres across Birmingham and have received 1266 referrals between September 2009 and April 2010. The graph below shows the number of referrals received from each centre since SOVA took over the Work Focused Volunteering contract back in September 2009.



The number of referrals we receive from the different Job Centres differs greatly. To build relations and ensure a steady stream of referrals, we have visited the different JCP offices to sit in on their 'Personal Advisors - Stage 3' meetings and ran through the project in greater detail with them. As Work Focused Volunteering has developed, we have been able to feedback 'feel-good' stories and address any questions / issues they may have.

The main reasons we have identified for non or low referrals from particular PA's are as follows:

- Too many different projects to keep on top of – the most recently launched scheme tends to stay front-of-mind
- Customers are afraid that volunteering will affect their benefits
- They can't get through on the phones
- They were unaware the scheme existed
- Jobcentre Plus employee strikes.

Following some of our slower referral periods, through attending team meetings and building a close relationship with Patricia Tierney who has helped sell in Work Focused Volunteering from within the job centres, we have seen an upsurge in referral numbers. However, as an increasing number of different schemes, such as Future Jobs Fund are introduced, this is an area we have to constantly monitor and respond quickly to.

On a practical level, we now have 3 dedicated Work Focused Volunteering telephone lines, always advise customers that Volunteering will not affect their benefits and regularly circulate new case studies to Job Centre Plus Advisors.

## 6.3 Case Studies

**“I have been looking for work for a year and thank you for providing me with this placement – I’ve truly benefited from the opportunity and have learnt a great deal about how to interact with people more...”**

Philip had no work experience before this point. He had an interest in music and was placed with the Sound It Out music project, working with teenagers and teaching them music.

Philip continues to volunteer whilst searching for full-time work.

**“this experience has given my confidence a real boost.”**

Daniel has experience working for the Royal Mail but and has been looking for work since 2008. He was placed at the Headway charity shop in November 2009 and quickly got involved with the day-to-day running of the store – from sorting and steaming clothes, to dealing with money and interacting with customers. He has gained valuable retail experience (a sector alien to him before this project) and feels this will put him in good stead for finding paid work.

Daniel continues to volunteer with Headway.

**“ ..thanks for your help and a good fast response. I've learnt so much about working as part of a team, as well as working with young people and the different teaching methods used to get the best out of people.”**

Thomas has experience working in security but had been searching for work for the last 8 months. He'd heard about Work Focused Volunteering through a friend and was immediately placed at the Sound it Out music project. Daniel worked with young people teaching them how to use different instruments. He really enjoyed being able to use his interest in music within a 'work' environment.

Thomas has been at his placement for 2 months and continues to volunteer.

**“ ..I enjoy keeping busy, doing something worthwhile... making money for a good cause by selling otherwise unwanted items.”**

Richard has been placed at the Headway charity shop for over a month now. Richard has confidence issues which he feels have held him back from getting a job. Since working with the team at Headway he has seen his confidence grow and progressed from working at the back of the store to dealing on a one-to-one basis with customers.

Richard feels a lot more job ready.

## **7. Project Development**

Since SOVA began delivering Work Focused Volunteering back in September 2009, we have forged relationships with 100 placement providers.

In order to meet our customers needs, we are continually looking to identify new placement providers so that we can offer a broader range of voluntary opportunities across all locations. Again, as new job-focused initiatives are introduced, many of which ask for a longer term commitment from the volunteer and offer a monetary incentive for the placement provider, this will continue to present an up-hill battle.

That said, we currently have some excellent companies onboard, including Childline, The Scouts Association and Barnardos. For the benefit of both our customers and our placement providers, we have recently introduced 'taster sessions' which invite groups of potential volunteers to visit the placement providers and learn a little more about them before making any level of commitment.

### **Benefits of taster sessions:**

- They allow our customers to get a greater feel for volunteering and what's involved
- They can learn about the companies objectives and ways of working
- They can see what opportunities are on offer and hear from the people already working in those roles
- Act as a quality filter; allowing people to opt-out if they feel volunteering isn't for them
- Placement providers don't waste time processing application forms and CRBs for those who are not committed / have no real interest in volunteering with them.

The feedback we have had from our providers is the quality of volunteers coming through SOVA is of an excellent standard.

**“ ■■ I have found the volunteers provided by SOVA to be of a very high standard.”**

Jackie runs the Perry Tree care centre, helping older people become involved in activities in the community. Her centre relies on the help of volunteers, who must hold an enhanced CRB before commencing work. To overcome this stumbling block, Eugene suggested they use ‘taster sessions’ which allow large groups of potential volunteers to visit the center and learn more about the work they do and the roles available. This helps both parties establish if it’s the ‘right fit’ for them and in turn acts as a quality filter to ensure Jackie only takes onboard those with the same passion for care as her.

Jackie hosts ‘taster sessions’ every 6 week at the Perry Tree and is looking to use SOVA to source volunteers for her 3 new care centres.

**“we are extremely pleased with the results SOVA has enabled us to achieve, working hard to support us and placing quite a few volunteers with us – both to the benefit of ourselves and the volunteers.”**

Dorothy, Headway charity shop – Harbourne.

**“...she was a tremendous asset from day 1. She stayed with us for 3 months and I happily supplied her with a reference for a job which she subsequently got – she even popped back last week to tell us all about it...”**

Anna - Manageress, Barnardos.

Fahmiea is just one of the volunteers placed at Barnardos. Following an initial meeting with a member of our team, we quickly matched Anna's requirements with our volunteers skills and experiences and have never looked back since...

**“..following a visit from Eugene, the volunteers were found immediately which was really pleasing for us and a far better response than from our previous volunteer provider...”**

Anna - Manageress, Barnardos.

“...we have had some excellent volunteers provided by SOVA, several of whom have been with us since September. These include Abdul – having been unemployed for a long-time, he made a hesitant start, but is now absolutely fantastic and one of our most valued volunteers. He works 3 days a week for us and is always willing and helpful to customers and extremely polite.

Another SOVA volunteer, Jennifer, is a lovely lady who helps us with our window displays and stock rotation and is now learning to use the till. She works with us once a week and is very pleasant with a charming way about her.

I have no problems with SOVA or their volunteers and have happily recommended the service to another of our stores!”

## **8. Objectives and targets for the coming year**

Due to the recent staff changes, the team has been under great pressure to stay on top of things and continue to meet their targets. However, we are shortly due to have a full team once again and are looking to build on our current success and implement the following targets and quality initiatives:

- To consistently reach a minimum monthly placement attendance target of 70 people
- Increase the number and scope of our voluntary placement opportunities, by location, sector and type of work
- To get know our placement providers better – our team will spend more time with new providers, working with them to get a feel for the role which in-turn will help us sell in the opportunity to our customers
- For those customers who may lack confidence, our team will offer to meet them and escort them to the placement to make the initial introductions, and where necessary, stay with them for a short period to overcome any initial first-day nerves
- Through referrals from the Job Centres, we shall identify Lone Parents and Neets aged 18-24 years, based in the Ladywood, Perry Barr and Hall Green areas. Following successful completion of their Work Focused Volunteering placement, we shall approach them to become part of our Working Neighbourhood Fund 'Working it Out' project which helps people with the practicalities of finding employment, such as job searches, motivation levels, CV writing etc
- To continually update marketing materials for Job Centre staff
- To visit Jobcentre Plus receptions and talk to customers direct about the merits of Work Focused Volunteering – with customers referring themselves on to the scheme, we shall increase project buy-in and in-turn, increase the ratio of placements made against placement completed.

## 9. Conclusion



**“best  
performing  
team in the  
Midlands!”**

We're not ones to boast, however, as the best performing Work Focused Volunteering team in the West Midlands, we think we've started something that's worth shouting about.

The WFV project is by no means an easy one. For any number of reasons it can be a very frustrating project to work on, but the team we now have in place are dedicated to getting results and I have absolute confidence that they'll succeed during this coming year.

The clients we work with are often unmotivated, unskilled and inexperienced. They may have a history of unemployment in their family, they may lack confidence or be scared of losing their benefits. Chances are that Volunteering is an alien concept to them. To ask people to move away from their comfort zone is a big ask, however the learnings we've made in what is a relatively short space of time, will allow us to find new and innovative ways to tackle and overcome those hurdles.

Going forward, we shall be focusing not only on meeting our number targets, but also adding that all important 'quality' – be it through teaming up with the 'Working It Out' project, by holding our customers hand a little more tightly and accompanying them to their placement, or by finding new ways of communicating the merits of Volunteering. If we can get them through the door with an understanding of what they can gain, a week or a month long placement could make all the difference.

I believe we have established a strong foundation on which to build and believe we can ensure Work Focused Volunteering has real impact for SOVA, our participants, funders and partners alike.