

Voluntary Sector Forum
17^h March 2005

Hands Up Launch

I am very pleased to have seen so many organisations signing up today to the revised Compact for West Sussex, and perhaps therefore it is timely to quote from one of its codes of good practice:

“ Volunteering is an important expression of citizenship and an essential ingredient to active community life throughout West Sussex”

I am sure we would all acknowledge the truth of that statement, which underlines the importance of voluntary activity for the health, cohesion and self-reliance of the towns, villages, and neighbourhoods that make up the West Sussex community.

When West Sussex County Council was drawing up the Public Service Agreement – or PSA to those who are familiar with acronyms - it asked people, “What are the key elements that can

most improve the quality of life of individuals and communities in West Sussex?" One of the answers, loud and clear, was:

" Raise the profile of volunteering and increase the number of people who give their time freely, by choice, and without concern for personal financial gain".

So West Sussex has done a deal with the Government – to increase volunteering in West Sussex by 10% by September 2006. If we succeed, the Government will give us over a million pounds in reward grant. That sort of cash could do a power of good.

But it is an ambitious target. A 10% increase amounts to around 25,000 people.

The County Council asked me to chair a Management Board to try and make that happen. The Board is made up of representatives from the voluntary sector and the public sector. And today, I should like to ask you all to help us.

A survey in 2003 showed that about 37% of people in West Sussex give at least an hour a month of their time in formal volunteering, through groups, clubs or organisations. I am proud to say that this is well ahead of the national average, which is 28%. The same survey showed that 44% take part in informal volunteering, which is about being a good neighbour; again well ahead of the national average of 37%. We also did a survey in secondary schools, which showed that about 37% of young people take part in volunteering.

Of course, volunteering covers all sorts of activities.

- There are activities to help children and young people – in and out of school.
- There are activities to support older people or others who have special needs, like Gemma Quilter who is a volunteer with the Cinnamon Trust, which helps inactive older people care for their very active pets.

- There are those who undertake environmental and conservation work, in our countryside or their own neighbourhoods
- There are those who play particular roles in keeping services going, from special constables to school governors, from JPs to hospital visitors - like Richard Andrews of Lancing who volunteered to be a team leader with Sussex Lowland Search and Rescue, formed after the Sarah Payne tragedy to help the police search for missing vulnerable people.
- There are those who raise funds for charities or who take on Trusteeships
- Some people give a few hours in the evenings or at weekends.
- Some young people may take on virtually a full time assignment in a gap year
- And of course, volunteers are of all ages. We want to get people to start young, continue throughout their working lives, and beyond, into active retirement.

It takes all sorts, and some of the displays you will see at lunch time illustrate that.

But we do desperately need more volunteers. All over West Sussex there are organisations that are crying out for volunteers. Guides and brownies, cubs and scouts have waiting lists of young people who want to join, but they need more volunteer leaders like Sarah Burford, who is not only a guider at Walberton but also volunteers in a play area at Ford prison. And these are only some among many organisations which urgently need volunteers.

The Board which I chair has been giving grants to lots of organisations who want some cash to help and attract more volunteers. But we need a co-ordinated campaign, and that is where you come in.

A Home Office citizenship survey has indicated that lots of people who do not at present volunteer, would be willing to do so if asked directly. So how do we ask them?

Well, it is the **Year of the Volunteer 2005**. That is a great start. There is a national campaign running, and Barbara has told us about that.

But to that, we want to add a West Sussex campaign. As a co-operative initiative, we have produced an advertising campaign to encourage people to volunteer. Some of the advertisements and posters we are running are reproduced in the packs on your tables, and the core message "Hands Up, if you could lend an hand" is displayed on these banners at the front here.

We would like you and your organisation to be a part of this campaign.

So I would ask you to do three things.

First, have a look in the pack and think about how you and your organisation can use this material. You will find an order form.

Please fill it in and hand it in today, or send it to the address on the order form. If you like, we can adapt this material to include the contact details of your organisation.

Secondly, you have about half an hour to discuss with colleagues on your tables ideas for how this material could be used, and to come up with other important messages which we will need to include. Again, there is a feedback form in your packs so that you can give us the benefit of your wisdom.

And thirdly, and above all, when you leave here today, please join this campaign and do all you can to raise the profile of volunteering and encourage more and more West Sussex people to take part.

Finally, I should like to introduce Paul Dollner of Horsham CAB, whom the Board has appointed to manage and co-ordinate the campaign on our behalf. Paul can be contacted at Horsham CAB, Lower Tanbridge Way, Horsham on 01403 261916 or e-mail

p.dollner@horshamcab.org.uk. He will be delighted to hear from you if you can join the campaign.

Thank you very much.