



The Members' Advisory Panel online discussion
Evaluation
David Coles – June 2010

Background

Between July 2008 and June 2009 YouthNet conducted research to explore volunteers' and organisations' experience of using Do-it and vinspired.com. One of the main findings of this work was that members of YouthNet, such as Volunteer Centres and charities, wished to be consulted more on developments that affect them and the National Volunteering Database (NVD). To respond to this feedback the Members' Advisory Panel (MAP), an online discussion forum, was created.

The purpose

The purpose of MAP is to consult with our members on issues that may affect them in relation to the NVD and Do-it. YouthNet can use their expertise and ensure that our products and services meet their needs.

There will be three or four discussions per year looking at a variety of topics.

May 2010 discussion

This discussion explored the how the opportunity content on Do-it can be improved so that volunteers are engaged.

A list to the questions that were put to the panel can be found in [appendix 1](#).

The format

There was one discussion group consisting of Volunteer Centres and national/regional charities.

The discussions started on Monday May 10th and finished on Tuesday 25th May with new discussion points being posted throughout this period.

They were held on the 'Basecamp' network in private discussion rooms.

The Participants

The participants were recruited through re@d-it!, attending regional meetings and by word of mouth.

Oganisation	Name of participant
BACYP	Bianca Gallipoli
Barnet VC	Misha Bhatt
Central Surrey CVS	Julia Gallagher
Rochdale Volunteer Development Agency	Sheila Pilling
The Scout Association	Ben Storrar
VC Camden	Sheila Norris
vinvolved Surrey	Chris Pearsall
Volunteer Centre Bexley	Lynne Regan
Volunteer Centre Colchester	Tania Morton
Watford YMCA	Julia Collar
Watford YMCA	Mary Green
National Trust	Chloe Cooke
Caterham VC	Marion Piggott
Telford and Wrekin VC	Beverly Harris
Chelsea and Kensington VC	Eli Wislocka
Volunteer Centre Greenwich	Shaun Delaney
Volunteer Centre Enfield	Meera Vasudevan

The results

Please see [appendix 2](#) the full transcript of the discussions.

Participants were initially asked

- What they thought of the ‘Writing inspiring opportunities for Do-it’ article in the partners section of Do-it and how, if needed, it could be improved.
- If they had attended ‘Writing Good Copy’ training and what their thoughts were on this.
- If they had used the proofreader service and their thoughts on this.

The consensus of the group was that the article on Do-it was very helpful and several of the organisations have used it for ideas on how to create inspiring opportunity descriptions.

“We have visited the ‘tips’ site on Do-it and found it very useful” (Chris Pearsall, vinvolved Surrey).

Several of the organisations had also attended the ‘Writing Good Copy’ training and had very positive feedback for the session.

“Jenni from YouthNet came to our office and gave a ‘Writing Good Copy’ training session in house to our team – this worked very well and all of our team came away with a better knowledge of what works and what doesn’t. I would highly recommend these training sessions” (Chris Pearsall, involved Surrey).

Tania Morton from Volunteer Centre Colchester summed up how a combination of using the tips on the website, attending training and using the proofreading service YouthNet offers can be used successfully.

“We’ve visited the tips section and attended a ‘Writing Good Copy’ training at YouthNet and have also taken on board a few suggestions from the Do-it proofreaders and we are now armed with enough know-how to offer organisations our assistance in redrafting their current opps or drafting new ones. Offering this service has enabled us to work closer with organisations and improved the service we offer (Tania Morton, Volunteer Centre Colchester).

However, there was a note of caution.

“When working with organisations I feel it is important that copy writing is a part of a much bigger offer – a well worded and punctuated role description is great but not if their organisation practices and procedures not in check” (Shaun Delaney, Volunteer Centre Greenwich).

Julia Gallagher, Central Surrey CVS, said that the proofreading service would be much more helpful if a volunteer could be sent to their CVS and could also automatically change the details on an opportunity rather than just make suggestions.

“(It) seems odd to me that someone spends all that time going through my ops spotting the mistakes but not being able to change them at the same time. I would jump at the chance to use this service if someone could actually do it for me” (Julia Gallagher, Central Surrey CVS).

David Coles, Chair of MAP and Partnerships Account Manager at YouthNet, responded to these points saying that organisations like to keep control of their opportunity descriptions and that is why our proofreaders can only make recommendations. He also advised that any organisation could recruit a proofreader for their opportunities and YouthNet would be happy to help organisations do this.

Julia gave some advice on the materials that YouthNet give members to use with their partner organisations. She said although it contained useful information but it was a bit too focused on youth volunteering and the other work that YouthNet does such as TheSite.org and LifeTracks.com.

Julia also gave her thoughts on how Do-it could be improved when attracting volunteers. These included:

1. Having more information on the homepage about what it is to volunteer.
2. Giving Volunteer Centres a higher profile on Do-it.
3. Ensuring that Do-it stays fresh and up to date like the vinspired website.

David responded to these points by explaining that YouthNet have done extensive research in the past and although they would like to make several changes to Do-it there are restrictions on both time and resources. He assured the panel that these ideas had not been forgotten about. He also explained that YouthNet and the Partnerships Team always tries to support the Volunteer Centre network by directing both new organisations and volunteers to their local VC.

The discussion moved on to how to address the issue of duplication on Do-it and V-Base users posting out of area. Shaun Delaney, Volunteer Centre Greenwich, raised the point that certain areas have many more opportunities than volunteers and others face the opposite problem. In turn this could lead to members posting outside of their area.

“No wonder so many VC’s, in trying to meet their volunteering demand are therefore looking to out of area postings to support their local users” (Shaun Delaney, Volunteer Centre Greenwich).

Julia Gallagher, Central Surrey CVS, said that in Central Surrey the three Volunteer Centres often communicate about the opportunities that may be from out of their area. She also explained how all three Volunteer Centres often network together and also have the same organisational and opportunity forms, which improves how they collaborate. Julia also said that YouthNet should take more of a lead with helping members ensure duplication doesn’t happen.

The panel was also asked to discuss whether they had used additional recruitment means that YouthNet offers such as featuring opportunities in our newsletter or on the Do-it homepage. There was little discussion on this point but Chris Pearsall, involved Surrey, had featured an opportunity on the homepage with good results

“(We) have had one virtual post featured on the Do-it front page ‘how about this’ section. This resulted in a high number of very suitable applications/enquiries.”

The last point put to the participants was around how MAP could be improved for future discussions and any feedback the panel had.

Julia Gallagher, Central Surrey CVS, raised the point that sometimes too many questions are posted at once and it may feel slightly overwhelming for participants. She suggested that smaller questions would get a better response as all of the people in the group are pressed for time.

Conclusions

Those in the group who had attended Writing Good Copy training or read the articles on how to write inspiring opportunities were unanimous in saying how helpful they had been and would recommend it to other members. To improve the quality of opportunity descriptions the training is something that YouthNet should continue to offer to members. However, there was a note of caution which was that a well written opportunity description is not a replacement for a well thought out volunteer role. There

was also praise for the work that proofreaders do and how they helped with making suggestions to improve opportunity descriptions.

Good points were raised to help ensure that YouthNet stays relevant and fresh such as a revamp of the site and clear information about what it is like to volunteer.

There was a consensus that there is a problem with duplication of opportunities and out of area posting but there wasn't an overall answer on how to deal with this. Working with neighboring Volunteer Centres was one good idea. YouthNet should also take more of a lead in dealing with this problem.

Although there was little discussion about other ways in which YouthNet can help market members' opportunities there was agreement that posting an opportunity on the Do-it homepage helped increase applications.

This MAP discussion had some in depth and high quality discussion but it is a worry that not as many members took part as in the February 2010 discussion. However, the panel was quick to think of some good ways to engage people in the next MAP group such as shorter questions and an appreciation that time is at a premium for members.