



NCVO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Good employment practice case study: Diversity

The British Red Cross is part of the global Red Cross Red Crescent organisation, with seven clear principles underpinning its work, such as humanity, independence and voluntary service. Within the UK there are 3,500 paid staff and 40,000 volunteers. It is a large and complex organisation.

The Red Cross works to help vulnerable people in crisis, both overseas and in the UK; helping people to prepare for a crisis, to respond to and to move on from crisis.

It seeks to train people in first aid and life saving skills to enable them to take positive action in the event of a crisis; it trains up to 150,000 people in any one year. It provides first aid support for public events and in response to a crisis. It provides services to refugee communities, for example helping people to access referrals to doctors, providing emergency aid, befriending for young people and specialist services for women. It helps trace people forced apart through conflict and to provide a messaging service to try to reconnect people.

The Red Cross offers a range of services to help people to live more independently, with more confidence and a sense of well being. For example, providing therapeutic massage to people in crisis; helping people through its skin camouflage service and making loans or supplies of medical equipment. It offers a huge range of services, which should have relevance to people across all communities.

If you would like to find out more about the British Red Cross, please visit:
www.redcross.org.uk.

What happened?

The Red Cross values diversity and states that:

"The Red Cross seeks to ensure that our organisation and our services are relevant and accessible to all. We value fresh perspectives and insights gained by involving and welcoming people from the widest possible diversity of backgrounds, cultures and experiences."

The importance of diversity for the Red Cross cannot be understated. The Red Cross must deliver its services to all communities and cultures. It needs to attract people

as volunteers and staff members from a range of backgrounds so it can promote its services in ways, which seem relevant and attractive, and so as an organisation it can be credible within those communities and so its messages of help and prevention are taken seriously.

Who was involved (e.g. paid staff, volunteers, and trustees)?

To ensure that it was living out its diversity mission statement the Red Cross invited in an external consultant to undertake a diversity audit in 2004 with over 200 staff and volunteers. This audit asked a range of questions about the Red Cross and its effectiveness in attracting and supporting minority groups and in being an equal opportunities employer. The consultants developed a ten-point action plan to enable the Red Cross to become more able to promote and practice its commitment to diversity.

These points included addressing the needs of three groups who were under-represented in the Red Cross, having clear leadership on diversity and finding ways to ensure that it was mainstreamed. The action plan also suggested a project dedicated to developing the diversity of the Red Cross and the development of a Diversity Policy.

The Red Cross has worked hard to address and to action the consultants' suggestions. One key suggestion, the development of a dedicated project has led to the Living Diversity Project; in itself this project addresses a number of recommendations. This seeks to widen the representation of staff, volunteers, and service users from diverse backgrounds such as young people, disabled people, people from black and minority ethnic groups.

What planning took place?

The Diversity Project has a Co-ordination Group of Board members and senior managers to encourage the diversity agenda from top down and to ensure that policies, processes and services are not exclusionary.

The Diversity Project has three paid staff members, including one person who is funded by SCOPE to encourage employment opportunities for disabled graduates. It works to a project plan developed with Red Cross senior managers and the Co-ordination group.

The Diversity Project team has a national remit and works nationally to integrate diversity into all planning processes; it has overseen training for numerous staff and volunteers and is supported in its work by fifteen Diversity Champions.

These Diversity Champions are based across the UK regions and working in different areas of Red Cross work and services. They work according to time bound plans which tackle issues and themes which they have identified as needing to be addressed within their area or service, the outcomes of which they will try to promote nationally.

Practical examples would include diversity and First Aid products being produced in picture to circumvent issues with literacy or with language and ensuring that the retail shops have the products which people in the local communities would find

useful and applicable to them, to display them in a way which would appeal and to have an open and appreciative culture in the shops. The shops raise funds for the Red Cross, and provide a service within the community; they are also importantly a way to promote the services of the Red Cross.

The Diversity Champions have a budget for which they are responsible and they have targets within their action plans which will have been generated through an early diversity audit in their areas. There is on-going monitoring of the work of the Diversity Project, the Diversity Champions having a number of targets in their action plans and being asked to report on the various ways in which the diversity agenda has been met, for example, what has been done to promote and to publicise diversity, what positive action tools have been used, how many partnerships have been established with under-represented community groups and what increase there is in numbers of staff and volunteers from under-represented groups.

Diversity is a hard area to measure. It is possible to find new communities which are being worked with and to see more creative thinking, but it also requires exploring how people's attitudes have changed and how many staff and volunteers have accepted the importance of diversity, this may be hard where people do not feel directly touched by the issue or may feel that there have been so many initiatives and changes in recent years that this is but another or may be one to which they accord less importance.

The Red Cross Diversity Project is working in systematic way appreciating that change is incremental and that action should be targeted. For example, over the three years of the Diversity Project different groups will be targeted, for example, 2005 focused on disability; 2006 focuses on Black, Minority and Ethnic groups and 2007 will focus on young people. These were three groups, which the Diversity Audit found to be under-represented in 2004.

The Diversity Project Team draws together the experiences and the lessons learnt for their own work and from that of the Diversity Champions. It produces an electronic bulletin and a bi-monthly newsletter Re-Diverse. In disseminating developments in practice and issues as work in progress the Diversity Team is stimulating and reinforcing the changes process. It will have a similar role at the close of the project to ensure that all Red Cross areas and central services can benefit and so that practices can be mainstreamed and the whole organisation move forward in a coherent and diversity positive way.

It is important that there are close links with Human Resources and working groups on racial equalities.

Are you planning any future developments to maximise the impact of this process?

The Diversity Project will be reviewed in early 2007, by external consultants. They will look at the successes and progress towards the recommendations that were made in 2004, and make further recommendations for the British Red Cross to take forward. The Diversity Project itself is scheduled to close in December 2007.

The Red Cross comments that it feels the best way to work is by finding ways to engage people so that staff and volunteers within all roles within the organisation

feel that they have an understanding of the importance of diversity and of its significance to them, in such a way there will be a sense of collective ownership and a desire to see changes.

Further comments...

What has been clear has been the overwhelming commitment to promoting diversity from senior managers within the Red Cross, resources have been made available to support the change process and the Diversity Project has been developed to ensure that there is impetus for organisational change at many points within the organisation, so that local areas and services take ownership over project developments to promote diversity.

About HR and your workforce

How many paid employees do you have?

101+ full time; 101+ part time

How many trustees sit on your board?

11+

How many volunteers do you have (non-paid staff, excluding trustees)?

101+ full time; 101+ part time

Does your organisation have an HR Strategy?

Yes

Does your organisation have a recruitment policy?

Yes