# Recruitment in the Voluntary Sector:
# Challenges and Opportunities

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**with**

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## Introduction

UK voluntary sector organisations are facing intense resourcing challenges in the wake of significant changes taking place in their recruitment context. In this paper, Doug Young reflects on particular challenges being faced by social care organisations in this sector, and potential organisational responses to these. Corinne Morrison-Gillies then presents a case study example of their *'Get Into Care with CrossReach'* programme, designed to facilitate the employment of young people with challenging backgrounds in her organisation.

## Why do people work in the voluntary sector?

While many definitions exist, the voluntary sector is most broadly defined by the objective of creating public benefit, and simultaneously, not seeking to distribute a profit (NCVO, 2020). The terminology can often be confusing to those out with the sector, as the term 'voluntary' refers to the status of the organisation, rather than the individuals who work there. It is also known as the third sector, the charity sector, and the non-profit sector. Research has established that those who undertake this employment tend to be motivated by a perceived ethical and ideological fit (Almond and Kendall, 2000). They have been observed to regard their work as "part of their identity" (Musick et al., 2000, p.1542), and being "based on a principle not reducible to self-interest," (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003, p.578). They have been observed to exhibit self-sacrificing behaviour (Baines and Cunningham, 2011) in relation to lower wages (Philpott, 2014), less stability (Lee, 2016) and even the possibility of experiencing physical violence while at work (Baines, 2006). This is said to comprise an overarching 'voluntary

sector ethos' (Cunningham, 2001; 2005), which is observable in the workforce. In consequence, recruiting workers in the voluntary sector can be significantly different than in other areas of work.

**How does recruitment differ in voluntary sector social care?**

Recruitment in the voluntary sector has been a longstanding challenge, with Wilding et al. (2003) noting fifteen years ago that nearly half of organisations in the sector experience recruitment difficulties. More recent studies confirm that the issue not only persists, but has become more severe. In the 2018-2019 report from a five year longitudinal study focussing on HR benchmarking in the Scottish voluntary sector, 58% of participating organisations reported that recruitment needs were higher than the previous year, and that their expenditure on recruitment had increased in the last year (Cunningham, James, Baluch and Young., 2019). Vacancies for front-line support staff were identified as the most difficult to fill, with 89% of highlighting this particular role as problematic (Cunningham et al., 2019). Too few applicants in general, and too few qualified applications in particular, were cited as the key causes of this difficulty.

**What current challenges face voluntary sector social care organisations?**

The contemporary context for employment in voluntary sector social care is one that has weathered the storm of austerity and associated budget cuts for close to ten years. In 2013 – just three years in to austerity – the Centre for Welfare Reform (CWR) asserted that disabled people were impacted 9 times harder by the cuts than the average citizen, and those with severe disabilities up to 19 times more severely impacted (Duffy, 2013). The impact on these individuals lives has significantly intensified work within the sector.

During this period, the Self-Directed Support (SDS) (Scotland) Act came into force. While reassessment under SDS was primarily designed to facilitate personalisation of care by increasing service user choice and discretion (Pearson et al., 2014), this was almost exclusively accompanied by reductions in funding at an individual level, suggesting that the context of austerity into which it was introduced in Scotland had a negative impact on its delivery (Young, 2018). As a result, levels of uptake and participation remain lower than in the rest of the UK

(Glasby and Littlechild, 2014). Additionally, the delivery of personalisation in the context of austerity has been seen to further intensify work (Young, 2020).

Demographic change also has a part to play. The UK population has grown exponentially, with birth rates rising, and people living longer (ONS, 2019). The social care sector will inevitably have to grow in order to cater for this, but where the workers required to do so will come from remains to be seen.

As with all sections of the UK economy, the voluntary sector looks set to experience a number of significant transformations in the immediate future. Upcoming changes to immigration policies resulting from Brexit will mean that an estimated 6-8% of social care workers (Scottish Care, 2018, p.3) will be forced to leave the country, which in consequence will diminish the workforce and available recruitment market considerably. Without European Union (EU) membership, future funding from streams such as the European Social Fund (ESF) are uncertain, which will jeopardise the national and local projects they enable. In other words, it can be expected that organisations will lose a significant proportion of their workforce, the recruitment market through which they seek to hire new staff will shrink considerably, and the sources of funding through which the process relies will diminish. In consequence of these multiple pre-existing and new challenges to the recruitment & selection process, new and innovative solutions are necessary.

**What opportunities and solutions are available?**

Despite the scale of these contextual challenges and changes, there are two fields of recruitment practice that offer opportunities to ameliorate these problems. The first pertain to recruitment methods.

Firstly, it has been argued that traditional methods of recruitment may be ill-equipped to assess the skills necessary to successfully undertake care work, which often are not observable behaviours (Bunning, 2004), and instead rely on more implicit knowledge, skills and experiences (Coakes, 2006). For example, Cook's (1993) 'classic trio' of recruitment and selection, premised upon an application form, a face-to-face interview, and a references checking stage, involves no interaction with the service user group, or demonstration of

physical skills and competencies. Identifying new methods of recruitment could help address this.

The second field of practice that may be developed to address recruitment challenges includes reviewing target labour markets for potential applicants. For example, males are a "relatively untapped" group (Nickson et al., 2008, p.28) in relation to social care, and the same could be said of older workers (Manthorpe and Moriarty, 2009).  The sector offers a particular set of benefits – such as flexible working patterns and intrinsic reward – which may be attractive to candidates who have no knowledge of or access to social care employment. Advertising and publicising the work which the voluntary sector does may help bridge this gap. There are also other individuals who do have experience of care, but no employment history in the sector – for example, those who have cared for family members, or who have experienced care as service users (Parry et al., 2005). Identifying and facilitating these groups could offer a solution to the recruitment issues faced by the sector.

The method which has been developed by CrossReach – is to utilise the untapped potential of young people from challenging backgrounds, in an initiative called *'Get Into Care with CrossReach'*. Corinne Morrison-Gillies, Head of HR Operations and People Development at CrossReach, explains further in the case study below.

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### Case study: 'Get Into Care with CrossReach' Programme

**Background:**

CrossReach are a voluntary sector care providing organisation who offer care to people of all ages who are in need of a helping hand, supporting them to live life to the full. Having been at the forefront of high quality social care for almost 150 years, CrossReach have worked hard to understand the needs of our service users, and strive to create pioneering services (Crossreach, 2020), which improves the quality of life for thousands of people. Today, we are one of the largest care providers in Scotland, with expertise across a broad range of services.

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**The 'Get into Care with CrossReach' Programme:**

Like many employers in the voluntary sector, CrossReach recognised that difficulties existed in recruitment, especially the sourcing of candidates with the skills and attitudes necessary to undertake social care work. Driven by a shared desire to remove barriers from recruitment, such as lack of previous employment experience or qualifications, CrossReach built up a relationship with the Princes Trust, in order to facilitate the sourcing and development of a new type of candidate towards work in social care – individuals whose experience of social care came not from previous employment or caring responsibilities, but from experiencing social care first-hand as people who use services[1], which gives them knowledge and experience that could help prepare them for work in the sector. These individuals were identified because they have a great deal to offer, are a relatively untapped area of the recruitment market.

This was, in effect, the beginning of the '*Get into Care with CrossReach*' programme, which had the espoused purpose of supporting less advantaged young people into a successful career in the care sector. It was comprised of a 5 week programme to be undertaken by a group of 10 carefully selected young people.

The programme was developed by CrossReach's small in-house HR & People Development team, in consultation with managers, front-line workers, and people who use services. This involved discussion and feedback with stakeholders at a variety of different services and areas of the organisation. The ultimate goal of this process was to garner different perspectives, set expectations and build enthusiasm for the project. The selection day included presentations from people who use the organisation's services, explaining what was important to them, and what qualities and characteristics they looked for in staff who supported them. This provided an opportunity for the young people to engage with the people who use services, and meet our staff and engage in informal conversations, including question and answer sessions.

The initial two weeks of the programme comprised of individual learning, e-learning and on-the-job training, building towards a two-week work placement at a service, and one final week focussing on employability and interview preparation. The vast majority of learning resources were already being utilised in CrossReach, such as general training and induction programs, and adjusted to enhance accessibility and remove barriers to learning and employability, as explained

below. All components were delivered face-to-face, in order to provide enhanced support to candidates, gauge progress, and build self-esteem. E-learning were completed in a classroom setting, to the same end, as candidates did not necessarily have access to computers, internet or a quiet place to work. The resources required were in places significantly different than the organisation's traditional recruitment and selection programme – participants needed much more reassurance, and consideration of their personal circumstances. For example, the demographic of young people involved often have little experience in the classroom setting, and one individual had to be assisted in finding alternative accommodation after being made homeless.

Training and learning covered a wide array of subjects pertinent to a career in the sector, including adult protection, health & safety, emotional resilience skills, confidentiality, equality and diversity, professional boundaries, outcomes-based care, and of course personalisation. Also crucial was an introduction to vocational qualifications relevant to the sector, such as SVQ3 in social care. This prepared candidates for the final two-week work placement, during which they put these newly developed skills into practice, and supported real individuals, with additional and ongoing assistance from existing CrossReach staff. Candidates were supervised throughout via three points of contact: the people development person who delivered training, an individual mentor within CrossReach, and one individual from the Princes Trust.

Upon completion of this work placement, each individual progressed to a guaranteed interview for a real recruitment vacancy. They were provided guidance on employability to prepare for this, including interview skills training and one-to-one coaching in employability skills. Following the conclusion of the programme, 6 individuals successfully passed their interviews, and progressed to full employment with the organisation.

**Key Learning and Outcomes:**

Ultimately, the programme has resulted in three key learning points. Firstly, as hoped for, rather than trying to find committed employees via existing recruitment pools, CrossReach were able to create commitment by investing in young people who already had many of the skills required of social care, but who needed additional help to realise their potential. Secondly, the process of

facilitating this was much more resource-intensive with regards to training than had been initially anticipated. Due to the potential for unpredictability and chaotic lives of the participants, significantly more support was required to ensure they were able to cope with the material and the process. So, while the benefits were greater than imagined, so too was the investment of time and effort on the part of the organisation. Thirdly, the level of group bonding which took place among participants was unexpected. Participants supported each other extensively throughout the programme, creating for themselves an informal community for peer-support.

For the 6 individuals who went on to full employment, the programme concluded with a celebration involving friends and family, which were expressed by participants as emotional and inspiring, reflected in the following comment:

> *"I had no idea of how great and life changing it would be, as before I was just a woman with kids and not a lot of confidence. When I first started this course, I realised that I was so much more than that. I am so proud and happy to be part of this programme and have a job at the end of it.  It has opened up a better version of myself."*

The *'Get Into Care with CrossReach'* programme resulted in a number of beneficial opportunities for the organisation. Primarily, it provided the organisation with a new recruitment pool of uniquely experienced and committed prospective employees. It also provided the organisation the opportunity to demonstrate its values by facilitating the development of young people towards employment and employability more generally, and to social care work specifically.

As a result, the programme has become part of a long-term commitment by CrossReach to improve the lives of people who use their services, and promote social care as a career amongst young people. It is regarded by the senior team as a sustainable approach, as the apparatus to train more individuals in a similar manner is now in place, and new candidates are readily identifiable. It is geared specifically to bring about positive change of the candidates and our service users, and provides access to a partial solution to the ongoing recruitment crisis in social care.

**Conclusions**

The *'Get Into Care with CrossReach'* programme is one method of many through which current recruitment challenges can be partially addressed. The initiative has already attracted considerable attention for the organisation, resulting in their being recognised as a top strategic partner by the Princes Trust, who in turn won the "Making Change Happen Award" in the 2019 Scottish Social Services Awards as a direct result. It identifies a new and uniquely committed recruitment market which can address the gaps created by new and developing challenges noted earlier, such as a growing and aging population, the impact of the Conservative government's austerity programme, more bespoke requirements of service users heralded by personalisation, and changes to the workforce resulting from Brexit.

Equally importantly, the programme creates new channels for positive outcomes for young people from challenging backgrounds, helping them on a path towards independence. Initiatives such as this one help make organisations attractive to funders, who in an ever-intensifying marketplace, need organisations to demonstrate new and innovative solutions. The idea could be utilised by other care organisations, and given that the participants in this case study thrived in the social care context, which is widely regarded to be one of the toughest entry-level forms of employment (Coulthard, 2014), it could surely be a viable option for employers out with the sector. Further research and wider dissemination will help solidify and magnify the benefits which could result.

**Notes:**

1. 'People who use services' is CrossReach's preferred term for the individuals for whom they provide care or support. No one standard term exists for this, but many organisations have an equivalent, such as 'service users'; 'clients', 'supported people'; 'people we support.'

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**<u>Reflective Learning Activity</u>**

1. Identify three key opportunities from reading this reflective piece.

2. Identify three key challenges from reading this reflective piece.

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**Dr Doug Young**

Dr Doug Young is a lecturer in Human Resource Management at Edinburgh Napier University. His teaching interests include employment relations, the organisational context of HRM, people management, and organisational strategy, from undergraduate to PhD level. His research focuses on employment relations in voluntary sector social care. His PhD thesis focused on the delivery of personalisation and self-directed support in the context of austerity in Scotland, and he has several existing and upcoming journal publications and book chapters on subjects such as the impact of customer norms on employment in social care, teamworking and service provision, and trade union membership and mobilisation in the sector. He has worked on a number of large-scale research projects within the voluntary sector, most notably the Coalition of Care and Support Providers (CCPS) annual HR Benchmarking Report.


**Corinne Morrison-Gillies**

Corinne Morrison-Gillies is an experienced, senior HR professional. Her HR experience has been gained across both private & not for profit sectors in an HR career spanning 20 years. Currently Head of HR Operations and People Development and Central Services HR Business Partner for CrossReach, who she has worked for now for 9 years. Corinne combines commerciality with a genuine compassion for people and ensures that her personal values are at the heart of all she does. Corinne was educated at George Heriot's School in Edinburgh and at Napier and Strathclyde Universities.

**Postscript – COVID-19**

The above paper was written before the COVID-19 pandemic had taken hold in the UK, which has had a momentous effect on the social care sector. Corinne Morrison-Gillies and CrossReach have worked tirelessly to safeguard the standards of care for the people they support. CrossReach are still providing residential care and adapting other services to comply with social distancing wherever possible. The unprecedented pressure this is exerting on the sector has intensified many issues, and recruitment is one of them – like many care organisations, CrossReach had significant vacancies before the lockdown, and staff sickness and absence has considerably exacerbated its impact on areas such as workforce planning. The key learning points from this paper are still highly relevant, but more context specific research

is necessary in order to address these developing issues. Doug Young is currently developing research designed to better understand the practical issues which face organisations and employees in the sector as a result of the pandemic. For more information, please contact d.young@napier.ac.uk .

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