



South Wales West Regional Committee

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Date: Friday 02 March 2007

Venue: North Cornelly Community Centre, North Cornelly, Bridgend

Title: Maintaining the Health, Well being and Independence of Older

People: CSV-RSVP Wales Briefing Paper

1 Background

1.1 Community Service Volunteers (CSV) launched the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP) in Wales in 1988. CSV-RSVP celebrates the fact that there are growing numbers of retired people of 50+ who have valuable skills and experience that can be utilised for the benefit of their community.

In modern society, older people can become excluded from community life through loss of their working and social support networks. We find that many older people do not recognise the value of their own lifetime's store of experiences and skills and even if they do, they may not know that their help is needed in their community or how to go about offering their support.

1.2 Through RSVP older people can gain a sense of self-worth and make a valuable contribution to their community. Some 2,700 people are donating their time in a wide range of community initiatives run by local voluntary agencies and also in RSVP's own schools, primary care and social network projects.

RSVP is a fully inclusive organisation and is open to everyone aged over 50. We believe that everybody has something to offer and no one who offers their time and experience is turned away.

1.3 RSVP is unique in that it is primarily led and managed by volunteers – with a handful of professional and experienced paid staff acting in a supportive and developmental role. The key managers of RSVP are the local volunteers who co-ordinate an area or project. The common thread running through all RSVP projects is the combination of self-help and professionally supported action.

2 Volunteer Numbers and Presence

2.1 The Retired & Senior Volunteer Programme has 2,700 older volunteers across Wales, including around 800 volunteers who support children's learning and development in Primary Schools as part of the All Wales Schools Project.

There are 55 Volunteer Organisers in Wales, who manage local community projects, support fellow volunteers as Area Organisers or serve as part of the All Wales Volunteers' Support Team in Cardiff.

2.2 50% of the 22 Local Authorities in Wales now have over 100 active RSVP volunteers and we have recently opened a new project and begun actively recruiting for the first time in Ceredigion. The highest concentration of RSVP volunteers is, as might be expected, in the capital city of Cardiff with 501 volunteers but the second highest concentration is on the Island of Anglesey with 257 volunteers. We are delighted to be one of the voluntary organisations in Wales with a truly 'All Wales' presence.

2.3 RSVP Wales currently employs 4 full time and 7 part-time staff which equates to a full-time equivalent of 8.2 in terms of working hours. Maintaining a 'lean' and project-based staff structure ensures that we remain true to our adage of 'Volunteer led, Volunteer managed'.

3 Projects and Activity in the South Wales West Region

3.1 RSVP currently has 186 members in the County Borough of Bridgend.

Of these, 54 are schools support volunteers, 3 volunteer in Parc Prison and 2 at Ty Penybont Day Centre. 11 RSVP volunteers support at the North Cornelly Luncheon Club and the rest are either knitters or reminiscence volunteers.

3.2 In addition, there are 20 schools volunteers in Neath Port Talbot and 18 in Rhondda Cynon Taff. In the Vale of Glamorgan we have a thriving group of 132 volunteers involved in a variety of projects and supported by 2 Volunteer Organisers. In Swansea there are 148 volunteers servicing schools, reminiscence, knitting and social contact projects, led by a group of 4 Volunteer Organisers.

3.3 RSVP schools volunteers regularly commit a minimum of a morning or an afternoon per week to a school, listening to children read, providing support for IT activities, passing on traditional crafts such as knitting, crochet and embroidery and contributing to oral history, reminiscence and gardening projects.

3.4 Some schools volunteers take on additional responsibilities such as kerb craft, and help with school trips, concerts, plays and assemblies. A number of volunteers have become School Governors and each year in Bridgend, many volunteers receive gold, silver or bronze awards from the Mayor in recognition of the length of time they have been volunteering.

3.5 RSVP volunteers at Parc Prison are based in the Juvenile Remand Unit, where they assist with literacy, numeracy and life skills such as cookery, gardening, painting and decorating. We are

working with Parc Prison on plans to recruit volunteers to assist with enrichment activities for those in the 18-19 years old age group who do not receive any formal education whilst serving their sentence.

3.6 In addition to our work with young offenders at Parc Prison, RSVP works with the Bridge Mentoring Project which supports young people who are thought to be at risk of offending. These young people are referred by a number of agencies including Social Services, the LEA and Pupil Referral Units. Two RSVP volunteers are currently assisting at the Bridge Project and, if the Bridge's proposal to the Big Lottery for a Healthy Eating and Gardening project is successful, we hope to recruit more RSVP volunteers to work alongside the youngsters as they grow vegetables and learn how to cook them!

3.7 At Ty Penybont, a Day Centre for older people with learning difficulties, there are 2 RSVP volunteers. One is assisting the staff and residents to establish a sensory garden and the other is providing social support for attendees and helping them to enjoy arts and crafts.

In 2005 a bulb planting activity undertaken jointly by Ty Penybont staff, attendees and volunteers was runner up in the 'Best CSV Project' category at the UK 'Make a Difference Day' Awards.

3.8 In Bridgend, initiatives have been established to encourage more socially isolated people to volunteer, such as those living in the Bridgend valleys and rural areas where transport can often be problematic. Positive awareness raising and recruitment drives have attracted a number of first-time volunteers. The same is true in Rhondda Cynon Taff, where a number of our recently recruited volunteers are volunteering for the first time in their 80's!

3.9 Giving real volunteering opportunities to people with a range of disabilities has been a priority. At Ty Penybont, there is a group of 10 knitting volunteers from amongst the attendees, and similarly in the Day Centre in Maesteg there are a number of ladies who knit or crochet for RSVP, providing quality knitted goods for local and international appeals. All of these ladies are thrilled that they can do something positive to make a difference to the lives of other people, rather than - as one put it - "always being on the receiving end of other people's charity".

3.10 Local volunteers have spoken of the many rewards of volunteering, and in particular they identify enhanced health and a sense of well-being. RSVP surveys have been conducted which confirm these benefits. A number of volunteers have described volunteering for RSVP as being "life changing" or "a lifeline", having previously experienced disability, loneliness, isolation and social exclusion.

4 Partnerships and other initiatives

4.1 RSVP in Bridgend has informal partnership arrangements with a number of other voluntary and statutory organisations. These include Contact the Elderly, Mentro'r Allan (Venture Out), Eco Dysgu. RSVP has recently supplied 6 volunteers for police training days for the South Wales Police and one of our members is a volunteer on the Youth Referral Panel.

4.2 In Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taff there is excellent partnership working with the Local Authorities, who actively raise awareness and promote RSVP. In Rhondda Cynon Taff, we have received joint partnership funding from Bro Dysg, Education and the Older Person's Strategy Co-ordinator to develop local projects. In Bridgend, the LEA hosts training sessions for volunteers and sponsors an LEA/RSVP guidance booklet on Reading in Schools for volunteers. Neath-Port Talbot commissioned RSVP to develop a Schools Volunteering Toolkit, which will be used to promote volunteering across Wales. In all 3 areas the Local Authorities have utilised their PR Departments to promote RSVP in the Press and on local radio and television.

4.3 The Senior Volunteer Network for Wales, developed and managed by RSVP Wales is to receive National Assembly funding through Age Alliance Wales for a further year from April 2007 to secure and 'mainstream' this network as the voice of older volunteers in Wales. The funding will allow the appointment of a part-time development worker to increase participation in this network throughout Wales.

RSVP Wales' Senior Volunteer Network is identified in the National Assembly's Action Plan for Promoting Mental Health as one of the policies and practices that contributes positively to the mental health of older people.

For further details about any of the projects in this report, please contact Barbara Locke, RSVP's National Development Manager for Wales on 02920 390477 (mobile with messaging on 078877 752859) or by Email barbara@rsvpwales.fsnet.co.uk

**To volunteer in Bridgend, Neath–Port Talbot, or Rhondda Cynon Taff, please contact Pam Bush (Schools) or Judith McMullin on 01656 729299
To volunteer in any other area of Wales, please contact Joanna Browning on 02920 390477 for details of your local RSVP Organiser.**