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*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of an Inspection

The Millennium Volunteer Programme

Inspected: November 2006

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1. BACKGROUND

“Volunteering is defined as the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment or individuals outside one’s immediate family. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain.” -
(Department of Health and Social Services Board, 1998)

1.1 The Millennium Volunteer (MV) programme was launched in Northern Ireland in 1999 as part of a United Kingdom wide initiative by the Government to develop a national Citizens’ Service to promote and recognise sustained volunteering among 16-24 year olds. In Northern Ireland, the Volunteer Development Agency (VDA) is responsible for the management and administration of the MV programme.

1.2 The Millennium Volunteers programme aims to:

- offer challenge and opportunity for young people to participate, learn and develop;
- set a standard for voluntary opportunities for young people;
- increase recognition for volunteering as an expression of citizenship; and
- make a positive impact within local communities.

1.3 The Director of the VDA has overall responsibility for the MV programme. The Assistant Director has line management responsibility for a full-time development officer. A Millennium Volunteer Advisory Committee, comprising people with an expertise in youth volunteering, meets four times a year. The MV Advisory Committee provides advice to the VDA on a number of issues relating to the MV programme and makes decisions on applications from delivery partners.

The MV programme provides grants to funded and non-funded delivery partner organisations.

1.4 The Department of Education (DE) provided funding of £324,000 to the MV programme for 2006-2007. At the time of inspection there were 15 funded and ten non-funded delivery partners supporting over 150 community placement organisations. Applications for this year’s programme were restricted to existing delivery partner organisations only.

1.5 There is clear evidence of strategic planning in the organisation and the objectives for the MV programme are detailed in the VDA operational plan for 2006-2007. The MV staff are in the process of drawing up a new strategic plan for 2007-2010.

1.6 The volunteers make a commitment, through a volunteer plan at the beginning of their placement that involves 200 hours of voluntary service; each volunteer receives an Award of Excellence on completion of the required hours. Volunteers must demonstrate how they will adhere to the following nine key principles: sustained commitment; community benefit;

voluntary participation; inclusiveness; youth-led projects; variety; partnership; quality and recognition. The key principles are clearly explained to delivery partners and community placement organisations.

1.7 The volunteers are placed with a delivery partner or with a community placement organisation in a wide variety of youth and community settings. The focus of community placements includes disadvantaged groups, creative arts and youth participation including work with three youth forums.

1.8 During Phase 1 of the programme, 1,139 Millennium Volunteers participated with 548 receiving their Award of Excellence for 200 hours of voluntary work. Phase 2 was launched in April 2002 and 1,321 volunteers enrolled in the programme with 489 receiving their Award of Excellence. In the spring of 2004, Phase 3 was launched and since then 1,100 volunteers have registered on the programme and over 400 have received their Award of Excellence.

1.9 Each delivery partner ensures the safety of volunteers through a series of quality assurance undertakings put in place by the MV programme and directed by the VDA. All funded partners have a part-time paid co-ordinator and non-funded partners have a nominated person in charge.

1.10 As part of the inspection process, the Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) examined the procedures for pastoral care and child protection and almost all volunteers interviewed stated they felt safe and were treated fairly by staff. In a significant minority of cases, some volunteers were unaware of the procedures in relation to reporting an incident. Not all parents of those volunteers who were under 18 were informed about child protection procedures.

2. EVIDENCE BASE

2.1 The Inspectorate visited eight delivery partners, eleven community placements and held discussions with 34 volunteers. Members of the Inspectorate held pre-inspection meetings with the Director of VDA, the Assistant Director of MV and the MV Development Officer. Discussions were also held with members of the Advisory Committee and the Inspectorate examined a wide range of documentation provided by the organisation. The Inspectorate also examined relevant documentation, including information packs, guidelines for groups and monitoring and review materials.

3. STRENGTHS OF THE PROVISION

The strengths of the provision include:

- the high levels of motivation and engagement and the sense of enjoyment experienced by almost all of the volunteers;

“MV is a simple idea, it gives young people a good start in life and gives volunteers deserved recognition” – MV volunteer aged 20

- the good opportunities for the volunteers to progress towards leadership roles within their communities;

“I was volunteering anyway but MV gave me a focus and the confidence to go on to further youth leadership training” - Volunteer aged 22

- the variety of challenging approaches and learning experiences that take into account the creative ideas of the young volunteers;
- the external links that the MV programme has developed with schools, local community groups, youth service and other agencies;
- the consistently good leadership and management of the Millennium Volunteers through the VDA;
- the systems in place for the support of delivery partners and community placement organisations;
- the monitoring and review procedures;

“Staff from the MV programme in VDA have been very supportive providing clear guidelines and I just have to lift the phone if there are any problems” – MV co-ordinator

- the commitment and dedication of the co-ordinators of the delivery partners many of whom are working with limited resources and some in areas of recognised deprivation;
- the caring environment which permeates throughout the whole organisation; and
- the active involvement of the Advisory Committee and their commitment to excellence and continuous improvement.

4. **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to ensure that the targets included in a significant minority of the volunteer plans are more specific;
- to recognise achievement at 50 hours of voluntary work and provide clearer progression routes for those exceeding 200 hours;
- to involve volunteers more in the management of the programme;
- to ensure that all volunteers are aware of the procedures for dealing with child protection in the community placement organisations; and
- to review the memorandum of understanding with DE.

5. **CONCLUSION**

In the areas inspected, the organisation has major strengths in its educational provision. The educational and pastoral needs of the learners are being well met. The local community can have confidence in the organisation's capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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