

*This article uses a black voluntary organisation, the Black Justice Project, as an example to identify and explain areas of good practice in the recruitment and retention of black volunteers. The research findings are compared and contrasted with those of previous studies. The policy implications of the findings are applicable to both mixed and black voluntary organisations.*

# Recruiting and retaining black volunteers: A study of a black voluntary organisation

Dr Nadia Joanne Britton, Leverhulme Trust Research Fellow  
Department of Sociology, University of Manchester

## Introduction

The continuing growth of the black voluntary sector reflects a well-established history of volunteering among black people in Britain. Black volunteering has often been a response to the difficult circumstances with which black people are confronted, and has ranged from the initiatives of traditional organisations such as church and community service groups to the activities of political pressure groups seeking to challenge racial inequalities.

This tradition of self help and mutual support has been vital, considering that the services of mainstream voluntary organisations are under-utilised by minority ethnic groups. Direct and indirect discrimination, or the fear of it, and a failure to meet the specific needs of black people are thought to reduce the availability of services provided

(Jackson and Field, 1989). There is also a persistent lack of black volunteers in mainstream voluntary organisations, reinforcing the sense that they do not cater for the interests of ethnic minorities (Obaze, 1994a).

In order to address the specific needs and interests of black people, both the further development of the black voluntary sector and the participation of black people in mainstream voluntary organisations should be encouraged. This involves identifying and disseminating evidence of good practice in the recruitment and retention of black volunteers. Despite the commendable efforts of the UK's Resource Unit for Black Volunteering, there is a need for more detailed empirical research on volunteering among black people (Obaze, 1994b).

The findings presented in this paper are based on my qualitative study of a black voluntary organisation, the Black Justice Project, undertaken over a period of two years. Established in 1991 with a Home Office grant, the project has as its main objective to offer practical advice to local black people about any aspect of the criminal justice system. The main part of its work involved operating a Help On Arrest Scheme which ensured that, with the agreement of the police, trained volunteers were available to go to any local police station at the request of an arrested black person to offer practical help and assistance. A telephone rota system ensured that a volunteer could be contacted twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

The scheme employed only one full-time co-ordinator and therefore trained volunteers were essential to its operation. The organisation's success in recruiting and retaining a body of around sixty volunteers showed that it provided an example of good practice for other voluntary organisations seeking black volunteers.

### **Research methods**

The project was studied over a period of two years using a combination of qualitative research methods. First, I observed the project by training as a project volunteer and attending training, meetings and social events in this capacity. I did not participate in the Help On Arrest Scheme, as my sole purpose in becoming a volunteer was to gain a better understanding of how the project operated and was

managed. I also visited the project's offices informally on a regular basis, meeting the co-ordinator, volunteers and management committee members. Everyone was aware that I was carrying out research and that I was producing an evaluation report for the project as part of my agreement with the management committee.

Second, I carried out semi-structured interviews with the co-ordinator and a sample of volunteers and management committee members. Initially, the interviews were arranged by the co-ordinator, but in due course, and with the agreement of the volunteers, I was given their telephone numbers to contact them directly. The interviews took place at the project's offices or at the volunteers' home or place of work, depending on their preference. The interview schedule included sections on the motivation to volunteer, experiences of volunteering and wider views of race and criminal justice.

### **A profile of the project volunteers**

A summary of the minority ethnic origin and gender of a representative sample of the volunteers is shown in Table 1.

The table shows that, although the volunteers were diverse in terms of minority ethnic origin, the majority were of African-Caribbean or Pakistani origin. It also shows that 63 per cent of volunteers in the representative sample were male. This is unusual because, in general, women demonstrate a greater propensity to volunteer than men (Hedley and Davis Smith, 1992).

*Table 1: Minority ethnic origin and gender of the volunteers interviewed*

<i>Ethnic origin</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
African-Caribbean	8	7	15	50
Pakistani	0	8	8	27
Irish	1	1	2	7
White British	1	1	2	7
Indian	1	0	1	3
Chinese	0	1	1	3
Persian	0	1	1	3
Total	11	19	30	100

The project was keen to recruit men because of the safety issues related to female volunteers. During volunteer training it was notable that women recruits were concerned both about potentially violent suspects and about attending call-outs during the night. The project aimed to recruit a substantial number of male volunteers to avoid exposing female volunteers to these risks, and the evidence suggested that it was successful in doing so.

In relation to their overall number in the general population, there was a disproportionate number of graduates and undergraduates among the volunteers. Table 2 demonstrates that 54 per cent of the volunteers were

graduates or undergraduates, highlighting a strong relationship between having or studying for a degree and the propensity to volunteer.

The table also demonstrates that 23 per cent of the volunteers were either graduates or undergraduates in law. The law student volunteers were confident that, owing to the nature of its aims and objectives, the project provided a valuable opportunity for practical experience. This supports the suggestion of the Make a Difference Team (1995) that universities are excellent recruiting grounds for volunteers, particularly if the aims and objectives of the voluntary organisation match the vocational ambitions of students.

*Table 2: The volunteers' level of education*

	<i>Graduates</i>	<i>Undergraduates</i>	<i>Total</i>
Law	4	3	7
Other Subjects	7	2	9
Total	11	5	16

The volunteers also appeared to share some common ground in terms of their social class, as a substantial ninety per cent of the employed volunteers were broadly middle class. Previous empirical research has indicated that this is an important general indicator of who takes part in volunteering, although it has been considered less important for black people than it is for whites (Hedley and Davis-Smith, 1992). The distinction between black and white volunteers is perhaps less clear-cut, given that only ten per cent of the project volunteers were working class. This has policy implications for recruiting and retaining black volunteers because, contrary to popular understanding, it cannot be taken for granted that black people from working-class backgrounds are more likely to volunteer than either working-class white people or their middle-class counterparts. Again, other factors such as the type of voluntary work must be taken into account when predicting who is likely to volunteer.

Among the volunteers classified as middle class, there were significant differences in the types of work that they

did. For example, Table 3 shows that over a third of the volunteers were in professional or managerial positions.

Thus, 53 per cent of the employed volunteers classified as middle class were not managers or professionals, and in fact ranged from a recruitment consultant to a self-employed retailer and wholesaler. As a result, middle-class volunteers occupied a range of locations in the wider class structure, and were therefore less likely to share similar class-based views.

This shows that classifying volunteers according to basic social class indicators can conceal significant differences in their employment background. As a result, determining the propensity to volunteer should involve examining the paid employment of existing volunteers. In the project's case, the propensity to volunteer increased if an individual was employed in an area that reflected its aims and objectives. Table 4 reveals that two-thirds of the volunteers were employed in various types of community, legal and social work.

*Table 3: Volunteers employed in managerial or professional positions*

<i>Employment</i>	<i>No of volunteers</i>
Probation officer/social worker	3
Teacher	1
Trainee solicitor	2
Project co-ordinator	2
Senior administrator	1
Sales office manager	2
Total	11

Table 4. Current employment of volunteers that reflected the project's aims and objectives

Employment	No of volunteers
Advice worker/careers adviser	2
Community project worker/co-ordinator	4
Social/youth worker (includes part-time)	9
Legal profession/law-related work	5
Total	20

Each of these areas of work reflected the stated aims of the project to advise black people of their legal rights and to provide practical help and advice. In addition, the paid work of the majority of these volunteers inevitably involved contact with young people. This was significant because the project disproportionately provided services to this group, its annual report revealing that 60 per cent of suspects assisted were below the age of 25. Similarly, 23 per cent of the volunteers stated that their decision to volunteer was related to their prospective employment in one of the areas listed in Table 4. The propensity to volunteer was therefore influenced by current and prospective employment, and accordingly 37 per cent had some form of vocational association with the criminal justice system, whether as employees in the legal profession and law-related work or as undergraduates and graduates in law. Again, in terms of recruitment policy, this highlights the potential benefits of targeting groups with work-related connections to the voluntary organisation. It also supports the research findings of the National Centre for Volunteering, which recorded the advantages of specifically

targeting recruitment strategies at particular groups (National Centre for Volunteering, 1996).

Overall, then, the propensity to volunteer for the project increased according to three main criteria: being a graduate or undergraduate, having a broadly middle class socio-economic position, and being (or aiming to be) employed in an area of work that reflected the project's aims and objectives.

#### **The relevance of race to the motivation to volunteer**

Thirty per cent of the volunteers were participating in, or had considered participating in, specifically black organisations and interest groups. In describing their other voluntary interests, they revealed a commitment to a diverse range of black issues and community initiatives.

*I do go to a meeting, it's a black women's sexual abuse forum. That's very new and hasn't really settled yet, but I'll be hoping that will give me a lot of work around black women who've been sexually abused, who are isolated really.*

*My consideration is on the Afro-Caribbean section of things because they are very under-represented in several areas. Most of my time is spent in the cleaning industry and I want to branch out more into that side of things, to get a clearer picture.*

However, 43 per cent of the volunteers participated in, or had considered participating in, mixed organisations.

*If I didn't work full time, I would get involved in other things and I guess the Samaritans is an example because I actually enquired about it. And there's lots of other things, you know, like Victim Support for people who have been burgled, and all sorts of things like that.*

Consequently, volunteering for the project did not indicate a more general tendency to participate solely in black voluntary organisations, suggesting that there is no clear relationship between being black and volunteering for black organisations alone.

Although the volunteers were interested in volunteering for mixed voluntary organisations, 25 per cent were categorical that being black significantly contributed to their decision to volunteer for the project.

*Oh yeah, definitely. I mean, you wouldn't be involved in a project like that, basically you've got black communities' interests at heart and that is the bit what played the biggest part in me volunteering, for doing something like that.*

A further 50 per cent referred to their ethnic minority status as an important contributory factor to their motivation to volunteer, considering it the obvious criterion for volunteering. The volunteers described how being black enabled them to appreciate the project's value, arguing that they were able to empathise with users of the project and recognise the potential worth of the project's services to themselves and their families.

*It's specifically designed to help black people or Asian people who are maybe under-represented in these areas. People who can most relate to them, who are similar to them, who understand what they're going through, and therefore being an Asian or black, obviously it's the criteria, that's the obvious criteria.*

*As a black person, it would interest me because I mean my family, obviously through one way or another, have had dealings with the police and the only support they had was their family. There wasn't any legal support, professional support, so that interests me as well.*

The remaining 25 per cent of the volunteers explicitly stated that their ethnic minority status had no relevance to their decision to volunteer.

*No, that wasn't why I volunteered at all. I volunteered because I thought that it was for a good cause and I liked the sound of it, what they were doing. But it wasn't related to me being Asian.*

However, even these volunteers referred to the value of the project's specific role

in addressing the interests of black people. For example, it became clear that the Asian volunteer's reference to a 'good cause' was an acknowledgement that the project attempted to meet the particular needs of black people.

*It is because sometimes other organisations can't cater for their needs and it's the black organisations themselves that sometimes can relate to the needs of people from the ethnic minorities.*

Thus, a broad orientation towards the project's aim of meeting the specific needs and interests of black people either contributed to the decision to volunteer or was recognised as an integral part of volunteering for the project.

The wider reasons given by volunteers for why they decided to participate also reflected a commitment to the project's aim of addressing black needs and interests. In describing their motivation to volunteer, they referred to benefits for themselves and benefits for those that they helped and, in fact, 63 per cent referred to a combination of the two. The most altruistic volunteers (33%) agreed that their sole motive for volunteering was to benefit those whom the project sought to assist. This does not mean that they gained no intrinsic satisfaction from volunteering, rather that personal benefits were never given as a reason for participating. They explained how their knowledge of black people's experiences of criminal justice encouraged them to participate, and mentioned personal knowledge and

skills that could benefit the people they assisted during the course of their voluntary work.

*I initially worked for the police as an interpreter and I could see the problems people faced when they were arrested; and then I started working for the solicitors as their sort of interpreter. I left the police and I could see from the other side and then, when something like this came up, I thought: Well, that'll be handy, it can help people.*

Thirty per cent of the volunteers were semi-altruistic, in that they decided to volunteer because they regarded the project as necessary and worthwhile, but also cited personal benefits as a significant secondary motivation.

*There [were] two reasons. The first reason was, I wasn't working as much at the time, you know. I was only doing a few hours a week, so I had the time. The second thing was that I felt that generally, amongst the Asian or black community, it would be some sort of thing to get involved with, you know. The general thing, you know, the [project], what it stood for. We believed it was something of importance, of moral value.*

A further 33 per cent had a specific personal aim in mind when they volunteered for the project, but were also aware that participating enabled them to help others. By participating, these volunteers were able to appreciate the value of their contribution and, by implication, the value of the project more generally.

*The reasons to begin with were really selfish because I was thinking, I initially wanted to work, to train, as a probation officer, until I started dating a probation officer and she cracked up so. But then I did the training and I got called out, I thought this is quite worthwhile. And I sort of get a sense of fulfilment when you go out and talk to people.*

Lastly, one volunteer's reason for participating was based purely on self-interest, in that he had no alternative but to undertake voluntary work if he wished to pursue his career aspiration of becoming a probation officer. He objected to the principle of volunteering, arguing that he 'didn't believe in volunteering' because he thought it 'just another way of getting things on the cheap'. This inverts the spirit of voluntary work, which by its very nature is based on a desire to help others, and therefore it is not surprising that only one volunteer held these views.

In summary, the common understanding that united all but one of the volunteers was that they volunteered for a necessary and worthwhile project and that, by volunteering, they helped to meet the specific needs of black people.

### **Recruiting project volunteers**

The importance of word of mouth as a recruitment method has been identified in other studies of volunteering (for example, Jackson, 1985; Hedley and Davis Smith, 1992). The project was no exception in this respect, as word of mouth was the single most important method through which it recruited volunteers.

It became evident that Majid, the project co-ordinator, was a crucial source of new volunteers, his previous education and employment experience providing him with access to a network of prospective participants. Forty per cent of the volunteers were friends or former colleagues of Majid and had first heard of the project through him. Further, they acknowledged that they shared with Majid an active commitment to pursuing initiatives in local black communities. This shared commitment encouraged them to volunteer for the project when originally approached by him, and provided reassurance that they volunteered for a project managed on a day-to-day basis by someone who was very committed to it.

*Well, Majid and myself sort of go way back through college, and also we tend to move into work in the community, straight from college, university and then into the community. So, Majid knew that I was interested in things like that anyway, and he left some leaflets about the training and the volunteering aspect of it as well.*

A further 40 per cent initially heard about the project from other volunteers who were family or friends, indicating another network through which prospective volunteers were actively encouraged to participate.

*Through my brother, my brother is a volunteer. He got some information and he decided that he wants to be a volunteer. So he told me about it. So I thought, well, I'd like to do it, and I got in touch with Majid.*

The project's more formal methods of recruitment were less successful, because even though its original recruitment initiatives included participating in newspaper and radio interviews and dispatching posters and leaflets to relevant local organisations and community centres, only 20 per cent of the volunteers were recruited as a result.

Importantly, the project's successful recruitment methods suggested that the volunteers did not actively seek voluntary work: for example, none of them had sought information from a volunteer recruitment agency. Instead, they unintentionally received information that aroused their interest and encouraged them to volunteer.

*I don't actively go out and seek volunteer work. If something comes through my letterbox or somebody told me and I like the sound of it, then I would. But I don't go out and say I want to be a volunteer for this organisation. If something comes up, and I think I'll like it, then I'll do it.*

This indicates good practice for voluntary organisations seeking to recruit black volunteers because it reveals that investing in what are often expensive forms of advertising is less productive than making use of informal networks that already exist among black people. Taking advantage of these networks is likely to be crucial, given that proactive recruitment appears to be essential.

### **Retaining project volunteers**

The project was very successful in retaining volunteers: its records indicated that only five volunteers had formally left the project since its inception. According to Majid, these volunteers had obtained employment away from the city where the project was based. Given that it had a consistent body of around 60 volunteers, the project provided an ideal site to explore how to maintain a high retention rate. However, the isolated nature of volunteering for the project appeared to be at odds with its success in this area. It was striking that, during the course of their routine voluntary duties, volunteers rarely had contact with their counterparts, meeting only at occasional social events and training sessions. As a result, there appeared to be little opportunity for volunteers to share views and experiences and to support each other in practical ways.

The volunteers were therefore asked if they felt they gave each other help and support, and their responses revealed that, although they had to take the initiative in seeking assistance, it was both plentiful and reliable. The volunteers were confident that they could satisfactorily secure the support of other volunteers and gave examples where support had been forthcoming.

*I was covering the phone and a person from the police station had rung up. And I couldn't actually get in touch with anybody to go 'cause the man what was on duty was off sick. So I had to like ring round and try and get somebody ...*

*but ringing through all the volunteers, they were giving me little bits of advice on what to do and so there was quite a bit of support. 'Cause I was panicking a bit.*

Experienced volunteers were in general considered a reliable source of assistance, and provided specific support by allowing new volunteers to accompany them on call-outs.

As well as supporting each other, the volunteers were confident that they could seek the support of Majid, who was understood to be accessible and approachable. The confident expectation of support was crucial for the volunteers, because dealing with telephone calls and call-outs was potentially difficult and hazardous. A lack of available support would therefore have been detrimental to both the volunteers and the project, and would more than likely have resulted in a lower retention rate of volunteers. The distinction between the 'supervisor' and 'personnel manager' approach to co-ordinating volunteers is important here, as it was clear that the former approach was favoured by Majid, who placed priority on getting the job done well (Hedley, 1992; Wardell, 1998). With regard to the Help On Arrest Scheme, the volunteers accepted that this approach was in their best interests as well as the project's.

Previous research has identified the importance of 'charismatic leadership' to the success of small voluntary organisations in particular (Pearce, 1993: 131-6). Charismatic leaders have

vision, strong ideological goals and rhetorical ability, and behave in ways that instil confidence. They embody the values of the organisation and work tirelessly for it. This description certainly fitted the co-ordinator, who was universally seen by volunteers as extremely dedicated to the project. For example, Majid could always be contacted on the project's mobile phone when he was not in the office, and it was not uncommon for volunteers to remark that the project would be lost without him. The volunteers were sure that they could always obtain support whenever they requested it because they had a well-founded confidence that Majid's response would be instant and appropriate.

The project's training programme also contributed to its high retention rate, as it encouraged a sense of commitment to the work and reinforced the perception that the volunteers' role was both valuable and valued. The project operated a relatively comprehensive programme of training, prospective volunteers attending two full-day training sessions before they could begin to participate. Furthermore, volunteers were occasionally asked to attend training if there were changes to the law or if particular aspects of their voluntary work required more clarification. The trainers emphasised that the volunteers were the project's representatives whenever they attended call-outs, and explained how to approach volunteering duties in an appropriate and responsible manner. The volunteers were asked what the training had taught them.

*Knowing what you could and couldn't do, especially in the police station. 'Cause I think there were some of us that had these grandeur ideas about what we were and weren't gonna do down at the police station. And it was important to realise what you can and can't do.*

Increasing their knowledge was thought to be crucial because it gave the volunteers the confidence to carry out their duties effectively. This was understood to be particularly important when dealing with the police, protecting the interests of the project by minimising the likelihood of volunteers behaving in ways detrimental to its progress and reputation. Also, by dedicating considerable resources to its training programme, the project indicated to the volunteers that their efforts were of considerable worth. It hired trainers of a high standard to conduct the training sessions and, without exception, the volunteers considered them a strength.

It was evident that the training also contributed to the personal and professional development of the volunteers, because it taught them new skills and knowledge that would be valuable in their wider social and working lives. For example, it has been shown that two-thirds of the volunteers were in paid employment that was related to the work of the project. This 'higher needs' aspect of the benefits of volunteering has been identified in other research, where it has been argued that gaining new skills is an important by-product of training and working as a volunteer (Black Perspectives in

Volunteering Group, 1988; Social and Community Planning Research, 1990; Wardell, 1998).

In addition, the project's rota system encouraged a high retention rate of volunteers. The system involved two tiers of volunteers: the first undertook telephone duties, which involved answering the project's diverted calls at home and telephoning second-tier volunteers, who would then go out to police stations in response to requests for help from black suspects. Both tiers of volunteers worked unsociable hours – duties were undertaken during the night and at weekends – and both were expected to prepare detailed reports on each case. The rota was compiled each week by the co-ordinator, who telephoned volunteers to ask if they would like to contribute to the following week's duties.

Majid did not contact volunteers if he expected them to be unavailable, so for example those who were studying for exams or having personal problems were immediately exempted. This helped to ensure that volunteers regularly determined the extent of their voluntary activities, were flexibly committed to the project and did not leave owing to unreasonable expectations about their level of commitment.

Other research studies have identified time commitment as a major issue for volunteers, who often feel under pressure to do more while finding it difficult to say no (Social and Community Planning Research, 1990). The

volunteers evidently appreciated the absence of this kind of pressure at the project. In fact, their view that volunteering for the project was worthwhile was reinforced by the efficient organisation of the rota system. Majid was always willing to carry out volunteering duties himself whenever gaps in the rota appeared, and this was greatly appreciated by the volunteers, who acknowledged that the scheme was efficiently and professionally managed.

In summary, the project's high retention rate depended on three factors: an informal, reliable network of support among volunteers and between volunteers and the co-ordinator; a comprehensive, personally useful programme of training which indicated that volunteering was valuable and valued; and an efficient rota system that reflected the nature of volunteering as a limited commitment.

Although the project provided ample evidence of good practice for both black and mixed voluntary organisations in general, it is important to emphasise that its high retention rate was also due to a less positive factor. Essentially, the volunteers complained that their direct involvement with the project was extremely limited. It has already been explained that flexible commitment contributed to the project's high retention rate, but limited involvement is a different matter, as it suggests a distinct lack of volunteering activity and related contact with the project. Volunteers often had no contact with the project for several months at a time, having little cause to visit its offices

regularly. They complained that their skills were under-utilised, particularly because undertaking regular rota duties was not a reliable indicator of being an experienced volunteer. For those carrying out telephone duties, calls to the project were extremely irregular; and for those undertaking call-out duties, requests for assistance were even rarer.

There is no room to discuss the complex reasons for this situation here, except to note that it was more the fault of the police than the project. Instead, it must be emphasised that, owing to the limited involvement of the volunteers in project tasks, their wish to help meet the needs of black people was only partly fulfilled. For example, Majid was often concerned about the lack of time available for the administrative tasks of the project, but the volunteers were not asked to help. Perhaps not surprisingly, the volunteers believed that their skills and expertise were under-utilised by the project.

*NJB: Some of the volunteers have said they don't feel they're being used enough.*

*Volunteer: Well, that's my complaint as well. I think, with the experience I've got, I could be used more, not only to be sat around waiting for a phone call.*

This indicates that, although Majid's 'supervisor' approach to co-ordinating volunteers was appreciated, a 'personnel manager' approach would have been welcome in certain circumstances, as it would have placed more emphasis on meeting the

volunteers' needs and finding them jobs to match their skills.

It also became clear that the volunteers' lack of direct involvement in the project extended to their involvement in its decision-making processes. Despite a general agreement that volunteer representation at management committee meetings was desirable, eighteen months elapsed between the formation of the project and the holding of volunteer elections, and owing to complications with the elected volunteers, another year passed before a volunteer attended a meeting. Throughout this period, the volunteers had no formal opportunity to represent their views directly, nor did they have adequate occasions to discuss issues amongst themselves. Furthermore, volunteers had little if any contact with the management committee; it was not uncommon for volunteers to complain that they had never met any of its members.

This shortage of activities contributed to the project's high retention rate. It was clearly unnecessary to leave the project formally when voluntary activities were so few and far between that volunteers could get away with never undertaking rota duties or contributing to organisational decisions. None of the volunteers interviewed fell into this category. Instead, they remained frustrated at the limited opportunities to contribute.

### **A summary of the project's success**

The reasons for the high retention rate were undoubtedly mixed. Although the project was an example of good practice

in many respects, its retention of volunteers was nominal. Thus, a minority were volunteers in name only, while the volunteering activities of others were extremely sporadic. This does not detract from the contribution of the core volunteers, who undertook difficult and stressful work often at inconvenient times.

It was clear that the co-ordinator was crucial to the project's success in recruiting and retaining volunteers. As the sole paid employee of a small voluntary organisation, he had the main responsibility for the day-to-day running of the project, a task that he undertook professionally and with a great deal of commitment. He was largely responsible for generating and sustaining the commitment of the volunteers and for ensuring that the project operated smoothly, particularly with regard to maintaining a good working relationship with the police. It was also evident that the project's successful recruitment and retention were facilitated by its ability to offer considerable personal and professional benefits to volunteers.

### **General suggestions for good practice**

My study of the Black Justice Project highlighted a number of factors relevant to voluntary organisations seeking to establish good practice in recruiting and retaining black volunteers:

- Although the volunteers demonstrated a particular enthusiasm for volunteering for black organisations, they were by no means averse to volunteering for mixed organisations.

The central motivating factor of their volunteering was that they could meet the specific needs and interests of black people by volunteering for a worthwhile and necessary project.

This means that mainstream voluntary organisations can increase their chances of attracting black volunteers by demonstrating a clear commitment to equality of access to, and provision of, their services. Most importantly, they should not underestimate black people's enthusiasm for volunteering.

- In terms of recruitment, voluntary organisations are likely to benefit from targeting individuals whose paid or prospective employment is related to its work. Undergraduates and graduates seeking experience in their chosen careers are an easily accessible group in this respect. In addition, it appears that the resources of voluntary organisations can be used more effectively by actively seeking and employing the informal networks that already exist among black people. Assumptions about the likely gender and socio-economic status of potential volunteers are unhelpful, as, contrary to popular belief, both men and middle-class black people were well represented at the project.
- In seeking to retain volunteers, organisations must give ample evidence that their commitment is both appreciated and worthwhile. The provision of high-quality and thorough training and of adequate formal and informal support, as well as confirmation that the organisation is efficiently managed, are key steps in the right direction. Volunteers must also be given challenging tasks to

match their particular skills and abilities, whilst at the same time they must be allowed to offer a flexible commitment to their volunteering activities.

The under-representation of minority ethnic groups in voluntary organisations is unacceptable and unnecessary. The examples of good practice highlighted in this paper can help to increase the number of black volunteers recruited by both black and mixed organisations. It is in the interests of mainstream voluntary organisations to do so, as the presence of volunteers from different minority ethnic groups will help to increase their accessibility to black service users. And for as long as statutory and mainstream voluntary organisations continue to fall short of meeting the specific needs of black people, it is undoubtedly in the interests of black voluntary organisations as well.

### References

- Black Perspectives in Volunteering Group (1988), *Black People and Volunteering*, ADVANCE.
- Hedley, R., and Davis-Smith, J. (eds) (1992), *Volunteering and Society: Principles and Practice*, NCVO.
- Hedley, R. (1992), 'Organising and Managing Volunteers' in Hedley, R., and Davis-Smith, J. (eds), *Volunteering and Society: Principles and Practice*, NCVO.
- Jackson, H. (1985), *Recruiting Volunteers*, Home Office Research and Planning Unit Paper 31, HMSO.
- Jackson, H., and Field, S. (1989), *Race, Community Groups and Service Delivery*, Home Office Research Study 113, HMSO.
- Make a Difference Team (1995), *Make a Difference: An Outline of Volunteering Strategy for the UK*, NCVO.
- National Centre for Volunteering (1996),

*A Route to Opportunity: Black People*, National Centre for Volunteering.

Obaze, D. (1994a), 'Equal Opportunities: Putting Ideas into Action', *Black Echo*, Resource Unit for Black Volunteering, August 1994.

Obaze, D (1994b), 'Black People and Helping (Volunteering) – Included or Excluded?', *Black Echo*, Resource Unit for Black Volunteering, November 1994.

Pearce, J. (1993), *Volunteers: The Organizational Behaviour of Unpaid Workers*, Routledge.

Social and Community Planning Research (1990), *On Volunteering: A Qualitative Research Study of Images, Motivations and Experiences*, The Volunteer Centre.

Wardell, F. (1998), *The Role of Volunteer Co-ordinators in the Provision of Care: Edinburgh and Highland Region*, Paper presented at the 4th Researching the Voluntary Sector conference, Loughborough University.

### Notes

The term 'black' was used by the project in its broader sense to include any group that is not usually classified as white, and it is used in this way throughout the paper.

The word 'race' is often enclosed in quotation marks to denote its status as an ideological and social construct. This status is acknowledged.

The two volunteers who classified themselves as white British are excluded from the research findings presented here because they were not asked these questions. With hindsight, this was a mistake, because their racialised identity potentially contributed to their decision to participate.