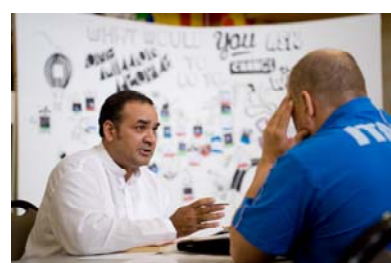


Introducing the National Talent Bank:

a briefing from the Council on Social Action
Prepared by Professor Alex Linley,



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL ACTION



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Alex holds the position of Visiting Professor in Psychology at the University of Leicester, and has delivered keynote presentations throughout Europe and in the Caribbean, the Middle East, the United States, and India. He has written, co-written, or edited more than 100 research papers and book chapters, and six books, including *Average to A+: Realising Strengths in Yourself and Others* (2008).

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Introduction

The Council on Social Action was set up by the Prime Minister. It brings together innovators from every sector to celebrate ideas and initiatives through which government and other key stakeholders can catalyse, develop and celebrate social action. We consider “social action” to be the wide range of ways in which individuals, communities, organisations and businesses can seek through their choices, actions and commitments to address the social issues they care about.

This paper is about our proposal for a National Talent Bank – a time limited partnership promoting and supporting employee volunteering amongst those with more time to share as a consequence of recession.

Early work on this proposal has been developed in partnership with TimeBank and Business in The Community and has been sponsored by the DCSF Talent and Enterprise Task Force. Many other friends and partners have contributed to this work. We greatly appreciate their assistance.

The first part of this paper is the work of the Council. It is a short summary of our proposal and the thinking behind it.

The second part was researched and written for the Council by Prof Alex Linley from CAPP and The Strengths Project. It is an independent view on the case for the Bank. We are very grateful to Professor Linley who, in the spirit of our endeavour, undertook this work as a volunteer.

CoSA is independent of government and this paper is not a statement of government policy.

July 21st 2009

Foreword

David Robinson Vice Chair of CoSA

Our Purpose

At the start of its second year the Council on Social Action agreed to focus on social action in recession and what might be done now to ensure that we emerge from this period with not only a stronger economy but also happier, healthier, stronger communities.

Strong communities benefit from the engagement of the many, not the few. They nurture a commitment to one another sharing the opportunities, the experience and the knowledge we need to shape the decisions that affect our lives, to fulfil potential individually and to live and work effectively together.

These are timeless values but particularly significant today: Recession could drive division and exclusion or it could unite us, extracting greater value from all that we have, embracing new ideas and working together on common goals.

Social and economic renewal are interdependent. The Labour Force Survey shows that more than a quarter of successful job seekers find work through word of mouth and more than half through non statutory or informal channels. Successful personal networks increase knowledge about new possibilities, build confidence and open doors and, as the New Opportunities White Paper noted, (www.hmg.gov.uk/newopportunities) social mobility is dependant on the effective distribution of this kind of social capital.

Volunteering projects build cohesion, offering the platform for people from different backgrounds to work together. Just as economically depressed areas get sucked into a spiral of decline, increasingly effective communities follow a virtuous circle. Willing citizens learn new skills, encounter new ideas and meet new people. They become more confident and more capable of contributing to the economy and to associational life, so creating more openings and more connections for others.

Focusing particularly on the war years Professor Robert Putnam has written about the “resurgence of civic involvement” in time of national crisis. The UK in 2009 isn’t 1940s America but it is, as Putnam wrote of 9/11 *“a new period of crisis that can make real to us and our children the value of deeper community connections”* (www.wcfia.harvard.edu/node/2985)

Recent work on happiness and wellbeing exposes the fallacy of excessive earning and owning as proxies for the good life. By strengthening our communities whilst working also for the return to full employment we can forge a long-term shift in how we live and work together and emerge from recession more thoughtful and more engaged, more generous, more curious, more creative, more committed and more confident. This is a once in a generation opportunity to redefine success.

Putnam further noted that *“60 years ago civic involvement took hold and flourished only with government support. It was not all spontaneous. This is both instructive and reassuring;*

instructive because it shows that the most selfless civic duties cannot be performed without government help reassuring because it shows us a path toward a more civil society today.”

In March 2009 we published “Stronger Communities, Stronger Economy” a set of recommendations to government and other partners on social action and recession. One proposal stood out as particularly timely.

- **Third sector agencies should develop a new National Talent Bank to lead a wholesale brokerage campaign matching employers and employees with opportunities to serve the community.**

This paper marks a milestone in the development of that proposal. It is published on July 21st to coincide with the introduction of the Bank. Just as CoSA’s “Side by Side” programme last year combined policy development and practical action we are not waiting to complete the thinking before we begin the work. As recession continues, more people become available and social problems increase. We need a practical response. The Bank will seek to retain, deploy and develop the skills of the under-employed workforce and provide essential support to communities during the economic downturn. We are developing a shortlist of opportunities, a framework for expansion and a call for partners to build the National Talent Bank together.

Our Plan

The Bank will not be a big new bureaucracy. It will be the sum of the programmes, each run by an independent set of partners, plus a central communications and development function. It will offer light touch brokerage to employers, not individual employees and only to NTB programmes. Clients wanting a more bespoke service will be referred to the national and local partners who do this work already. The Bank will be managed by an existing agency or consortium of existing agencies and each individual programme will be owned and managed by its own team.

NTB will have a fixed life, probably two years, and will unleash the potential from an exceptional and temporary set of circumstances. It will target those employers who are releasing employees for a fixed period or reducing the working week.

We know that 17% of UK employers have implemented short time working programmes, with a further 13% intending to or considering the option. (CBI Employment Trends Survey: June 2009) The “under employed” includes employees working shorter hours, required to take sabbaticals, retained in the workforce but under occupied or “deferred” - new recruits with a deferred start date.

We also know that large numbers of children would benefit from extra one-to-one literacy and numeracy support, that debt enquiries at Citizens Advice Bureaux have risen by 21% and that Child Line have experienced a comparable increase in demand.

On the one hand there is need. On the other there is the capacity to help.

Currently there are insufficient vacancies in the voluntary sector to absorb the potential pool of new volunteers. Even if the opportunities were created the existing brokerage arrangements couldn't cope with the demand. Thus we need new or substantially expanded programmes that can absorb volume and we need a nimble mechanism for attracting and directing the talent.

There isn't the time or money for the swift expansion of personalized brokerage so we are proposing a "wholesale" mechanism linking with the employer, rather than the individual employee and promoting and brokering a focused set of programmes that are both ambitious and concrete. All the programmes must be capable of absorbing volume and benefiting the community and must provide a genuine development opportunity for the individual so enhancing the skills they take back into work.

The Action

The NTB will:-

- Identify and expand existing opportunities and refer companies to these trusted delivery partners
- Work with community partners to develop new opportunities that help build the capacity of the sector and substantially increase the range of employee volunteering opportunities that employers can promote and engage in.
- Support and empower employers to use National Talent Bank opportunities and to so build their own community partnerships.

We intend to build three Programmes: **Action for Young People**, **Action on Climate Change** and **Action on Money Management**. Beneath each Programme we are developing a set of volunteering Opportunities which will:

- Be capable of absorbing numbers.
- Engage the strengths, talents and passions of the volunteers
- Build skills and confidence in the work force
- Work with an existing network who have the will and capacity to expand
- Require minimal central brokerage.
- Measurably address an issue or transform a community.
- Meet our 10 year challenge i.e. leave enduring impact on the individual, the employer and the community.
- Collectively meet the requirements of a range of flexible working strategies.

Employees are making choices about how they use their unexpected time *when it becomes available* - i.e. at the start of their period of underemployment. As the economy picks up they will once again have less time available.

The need and the opportunity exist now. So should our response. We want to work with delivery partners and with employers who share our determination to seize the moment.

Please contact info@nationaltalentbank.org.uk for further information.

David Robinson

July 21st 2009

National Talent Bank – The Business Case

A paper for the Council on Social Action
prepared by Professor Alex Linley, CAPP and The Strengths Project

Summary

The Need: The economic recession has led to a substantial increase in the availability of talented people who have been put out of work or placed on short-time working. This talent can be deployed to support community organisations and social action initiatives. This will deliver benefits for the individuals themselves, their future employability prospects, and the frontline public service organisations and communities in which they serve.

The Opportunity: There is an opportunity to gear social action initiatives toward making a sustainable long-term difference in Britain's communities, through harnessing the newly-available talent of people who have lost their jobs or had their working hours reduced. The formation of the National Talent Bank can ensure that this opportunity is realised.

Proposal for the National Talent Bank: The National Talent Bank will deliver wholesale brokerage of newly-available talent from downsizing organisations. It will act as an intermediary between the organisations and frontline public services, such as schools, and social action organisations who are best placed to deploy this talent for lasting social benefit. The National Talent Bank will focus on organisations that support and encourage social action that can best answer the question, *“What are the actions that, when aggregated together, will make the biggest lasting difference?”*

Employability Benefits of Volunteering: Individuals who volunteer are able to expand their social networks, which opens up new connections for their future employment opportunities. Volunteering is perceived positively by employers, who recognise that volunteers often develop increased interpersonal, communication and organisational skills, which help them at work. Volunteering can also help to maintain existing skills and to demonstrate proactivity and commitment to potential future employers.

Community Benefits of Volunteering: Volunteering enables the strengthening of social bonds through communities. It increases the depth and breadth of social networks and fosters community cohesion. Social networks have been identified as important in the transmission of health and happiness, such that increasing health and happiness in a community can have downstream effects across that community. Frontline public service volunteering, such as supporting children's reading, enables a significant advancement in children's reading ability, with attendant impact on educational attainment throughout childhood.

Individual Benefits of Volunteering: Volunteering leads to enhanced life satisfaction, improved well-being and better physical health. Volunteering provides people with the opportunity to use their strengths, with strengths use associated with greater well-being,

higher self-esteem and greater self-efficacy, together with more effective goal attainment. Volunteering increases positive emotions, which have been shown to contribute to enhanced resilience, greater openness and creativity, and better social relationships. These individual benefits all contribute to the greater employability of any given individual.

Contra-indicators of Volunteering: Contra-indicators of volunteering include time pressure, the need to participate in meetings, out-of-pocket expenses, and frustration at lack of progress. Cost-benefit analyses of volunteering show consistently that the benefits significantly outweigh the costs, and these costs are in themselves both marginal and manageable. There is nothing that may therefore be considered a substantive contra-indicator for volunteering.

Broader Policy Benefits: The National Talent Bank will also play a role in delivering across the broader policy agenda. Through its activities, it will support educational attainment through child reading programmes, provide e-mentoring to social businesses, and role modelling for underprivileged youth.

Conclusion: The National Talent Bank will serve as a unique wholesale brokerage of newly-available talent, acting as an intermediary between the organisation releasing talent and the frontline public service organisations and social action organisations who can best harness it. The business case for the National Talent Bank demonstrates the transformative triple bottom-line benefits to individuals, their employability prospects, and the frontline public service organisations and communities in which they serve. It highlights the need created by our current economic circumstances and the opportunity this brings for engaging in a transformative approach to harnessing newly-released talent in the service of social action that will create a sustainable long-term difference in Britain's communities.

National Talent Bank – The Business Case

1. The Need

As Britain experiences recession, companies and organisations across the country are reducing their staff headcount through short-time working, extended unpaid leave and redundancies. This reduction across the hours that people are working leads to an attendant increase in availability of talented people and the number of hours they may be able to offer in supporting community organisations and social action initiatives.

A striking feature of this recession is how organisations and employees have opted to work together in order to protect jobs wherever possible – often through the introduction of short-time working or other cost-saving measures. Emerging data from the CBI (2009) show that 30% of UK organisations either have made, intend to make, or are considering a shift to short-time working. This trend has significant implications. It means that a large proportion of employed people are may retain their jobs rather than losing them, but doing so working a reduced number of hours. The result is the creation of potentially hundreds of thousands of person-hours becoming available from employees in whom organisations still retain a vested interest. This situation provides both *time* and *talent* that can be deployed in support of social action initiatives, providing the fundamental underlying need for the formation of the National Talent Bank.

As the Institute for Volunteering Research (2009) states: “With 87% of Volunteer Centres experiencing a rise in demand for volunteer opportunities over the past six months it is critical that they are properly resourced so that they can *support volunteers trying to get back into employment and strengthen the country’s resilience to the recession*” (italics added).

Further, enabling effective volunteering and social change projects brings a triple bottom-line benefit for both the individuals themselves, their future employability prospects, and for the communities which they serve through their actions. As reviewed below, the evidence shows that people who engage in volunteering and social action community projects experience benefits across the three major areas of increased employability, enhanced job opportunities, and improved well-being.

These individual benefits combine with the opportunity for social action initiatives that are geared towards making a sustainable long-term difference in Britain’s communities, so that as a country we are able to move out of the recession having made the best of the talent freed-up by organisational down-sourcing, and harnessing that talent toward the enhancement of our communities and social connections. When we look back in 5-10 years time, our aim is to demonstrate that from the jaws of the downturn we were able to create a victory for sustainable, positive social action, and in so doing, to create a model for harnessing our country’s talent for positive ends, social as well as economic, irrespective of our economic situation.

2. The Opportunity

We now have an unrivalled opportunity to access the talent of the many thousands of individuals who have more time available as a result of reduced working hours. Harnessing this talent in the service of social action projects that will make a sustainable difference to Britain over the years to come is our priority.

The need, simply, is for the vehicle that will enable this to happen. At present, there are no means of local or national social action or volunteering organisations accessing or co-ordinating the large number of people hours now available in any meaningful way; hence, the proposal for the National Talent Bank, which is described below.

3. Proposal for the National Talent Bank

The National Talent Bank will provide wholesale brokerage of newly-available talent from organisations who are downsizing and reducing the working hours of their staff, linking those staff to the demand side from social action and voluntary organisations who are able to deploy the available talent into a select number of initiatives that are focused on making a sustainable difference.

The National Talent Bank will act as an intermediary between organisations who are making staff redundant or reducing their working hours, and frontline public services, such as schools, and social action organisations who are best placed to deploy this newly-available talent into effective use in the community.

In so doing, we expect to achieve individual well-being benefits and enhanced employability benefits for those who take up the opportunity, and lasting social benefits for the communities in which they serve.

Our initial soundings from organisations suggest a high level of interest and support for the proposals, since organisations recognise the value of supporting their exiting employees in this way as well as those on sabbaticals and short-time working. Additionally organisations are seeking the corporate responsibility and brand benefits that accrue from supporting social and community initiatives of this nature, especially in these recessionary times.

Recent research in cognitive and social psychology, popularised in the book *Nudge* (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008), demonstrate the powerful effects of guiding people to make particular decisions when those decisions are made easy for them (based on the presentation of information, ease of access, and ease of action required). The establishment of the National Talent Bank provides a powerful “nudge” to engage people in social action projects and volunteer work at times when they have the opportunity to do so, and which otherwise they may not have done.

In selecting the projects on which to focus, we have adopted the principle of “maximum sustainable leverage” by seeking to answer the question of “*What are the actions that, when aggregated together, will make the biggest lasting difference?*” We are not interested in short-term “sticking plaster” approaches, but rather in systemic and sustainable positive changes that will make a difference over the long term. To achieve this, we have sought to

apply the 10-year test, asking ourselves what actions we can take now that will both lead to, and enable, sustainable positive differences as a result of these interventions. The 10-year test will be the metric by which we design the structure and objectives of the National Talent Bank, and select the programmes to be supported through it, as well as designing the evaluation programmes and research that will be used to assess the impact of these interventions going forward.

In the sections that follow, we highlight the employability benefits of volunteering, the individual benefits of volunteering, and the community benefits of volunteering, to make the business case for why the National Talent Bank is needed now and for the difference that its establishment and activities can make.

4. Employability Benefits of Volunteering

4.1 Expansion of Social Networks

Volunteering enables people to expand their social networks, with these social networks often being critical in the success of finding a new job. Research demonstrates consistently that job search is most effective through looser acquaintances rather than close friends, since close friends are likely to share much of the same social networks as an individual, whereas looser acquaintances will be part of social networks to which the individual otherwise would not have access (Krauth, 2003; Marmaros and Sacerdote, 2002).

Importantly, this has been shown to be especially true in cases where industries were in decline: individuals who were restricted to social networks that were intrinsically part of the declining industry were far less likely to find new employment through their social networks, whereas individuals who reached out to weaker ties with acquaintances located further beyond the declining industry were more successful (Brown and Konrad, 2001).

It is notable that there was a tendency for individuals from declining industries to rely more on strong ties within those declining industries, even though this was the least effective method for job finding (Brown and Konrad, 2001). This further highlights the importance of enabling individuals to broaden their social networks and increase their outside acquaintances as a means of creating future job opportunities. Volunteering and engagement in social action projects is a relatively easy and highly effective way in which individuals can be supported to do this.

The National Talent Bank builds on and complements the Government's recent £10m investment in volunteer brokerage for people who have been unemployed for 12 months or more, as part of the Real Help for Communities Programme, by offering individuals the opportunity to develop their social networks and gain new skills while still in employment. Whereas traditional volunteer brokerage is focused at the level of the individual intervention, the National Talent Bank is focused at the level of organisational intervention. The NTB works in partnership with organisations to deploy their underemployed workers to work in projects that have been identified by the NTB as delivering maximum sustainable leverage, making the biggest positive difference over time.

4.2 Positive Employer Perceptions of Volunteering

Employers also regard volunteering positively, thereby providing potential candidates for new jobs with a valuable addition to their CV. For example, TimeBank's Employer Attitude Survey found that:

- 81% of employers view employees positively who engage in voluntary work;
- 43% of employers believe that employees who undertake voluntary work and learn new skills have a better chance of promotion and earning a higher salary;
- 68% of employers feel that volunteering adds skills to their workforce (TimeBank, 2004).

The Canadian National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP, 2000) provides further evidence of this:

- 79% of volunteers said that their volunteer activities helped them with interpersonal skills, including understanding people better, motivating others, and dealing with difficult situations;
- 68% of volunteers said that their volunteer activities helped them to develop better communication skills;
- 49% of volunteers aged 15 to 24 who were in paid work said that their volunteer activities gave them new skills they could apply directly to their job;
- 28% of unemployed volunteers (and 16% of employed volunteers) said that their volunteering had helped them find a job in the past;
- 62% of unemployed volunteers believed that it would help them find a job in the future.

A study of 3,658 employee volunteers provides further evidence of this value of volunteering to employers, either actual or potential. Employees perceived that they had acquired increased skills as a result of their volunteering, were positively recognised by their employer as doing so, and were considered to be succeeding better in their work as a result (Booth, Park, and Glomb, 2009). This evidence supports the view that employers perceive positive benefits from their employees volunteering, which speaks to both (a) employers' support for the National Talent Bank concept, and (b) employers' positive perception of potential employees who have engaged with volunteering activities.

As is summarised by the Institute for Volunteering Research: ***“Volunteering offers a unique opportunity to strengthen employability – through the flexibility of roles on offer, the people-centred support received by volunteers and the practical experience it can give individuals...For those who are recently unemployed, volunteering is seen as a good way of maintaining existing skills and demonstrating to potential employers personal proactivity and commitment”*** (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2009, emphasis added).

Further, extensive and ongoing annual research by bestselling career author, Richard Nelson Bolles (2008), shows that the most effective method for finding a new job is what he refers to as a *“life changing job hunt,”* which has an 86% rate of success. This involves getting to know one’s strengths, becoming clear about one’s values, identifying a fulfilling future career, and then setting out to pursue that career. Volunteering provides a means by which people made redundant are able to try out different roles and explore new experiences that may help them in their *“life changing job hunt.”*

5. Community Benefits of Volunteering

5.1 Strengthening Social Networks

The work of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), calls for a strengthening of social bonds, if the government’s vision of thriving communities is to be realised. This is especially so when the pace of change across the country (perhaps typified by the current economic downturn) means that communities are being reconfigured at an increasing rate through changes in patterns of employment, unemployment, relocation, and immigration. Volunteering is one powerful way through which the social bonds across a community can be strengthened. The National Talent Bank provides the means of doing this both at pace and at scale, as are both demanded by the current economic situation and the organisational downsizing that ensues, with large numbers of people working reduced hours or being put out of work entirely.

Volunteering increases both the breadth and the strength of social networks. Social networks are at the heart of communities, and have been in decline in much of the developed world over the last three decades (Putnam, 2000). As people engage with their local community through volunteering, they build connections and social networks with others.

5.2 Volunteering, Social Networks, Happiness and Health

These social networks have been implicated in the long term spread of happiness, such that the happiness of a given individual has been shown to influence the happiness of individuals up to three degrees removed (i.e. my friend’s, friend’s friend; Fowler and Christakis, 2009). Hence, increasing the level of happiness in any given social network will have a positive influence on the happiness of that social network over time. Further, social networks have consistently been implicated in health: people with better social networks enjoy better health (Lomas, 1998).

It may sound trite to consider community happiness in times of economic recession, but to this we offer three rebuttals:

- First, it seems axiomatic that no democratic government would rather have depressed communities than happy communities.
- Second, a significant and growing body of research shows the benefits of happiness in areas such as increased educational attainment, improved health, better productivity at work, better personal and social relationships, increased pro-social behaviour (see Lyubomirsky, King and Diener, 2005, for review) - indeed, previous

government reports have indicated the importance of life satisfaction and its implications for government (Donovan and Halpern, 2001).

- Third, the Layard report on mental health (Layard, 2006) calls for the training of a new generation of cognitive-behavioural therapists to work with people suffering from depression, yet here we are proposing an integrated social action solution that should serve both a preventative and a generative function in terms of reducing the risk of depression and increasing the possibilities for happiness in social communities. This is especially important when one recognises that a small shift in the population mean of any given disorder can have a disproportionately positive effect in reducing the number of people affected (Huppert, 2004; Rose, 1992).

5.3 Volunteering and Children's Reading: An Example

As one powerful example of a major community benefit through volunteering, in a major study of the effects of reading support volunteers on children's reading, Morrow-Howell and colleagues (2009) found that providing children with a reading volunteer for an average of one session per week significantly increased children's reading ability. Notably, 84% of the children referred to participate in the programme scored as low, or lower than the average reading ability for children their age, yet their reading ability significantly improved over the course of the programme, with the children making over 60% progress during the course of the year.

Another, simpler example is from the Every Child a Reader programme, where the one-to-one support of a volunteer "better reading partner" over ten weeks leads to, on average, an advancement of two years in a child's reading age.

6. Individual Benefits of Volunteering

For example, there is consistent evidence to show that volunteering leads to enhanced life satisfaction and also improved health, with these findings applying especially strongly in older people (Van Willigen, 2000). From positive psychology research, it has been clearly established that increased positive emotions lead to enhanced resilience to negative circumstances (Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004), increased cognitive ability and creativity (Fredrickson and Branigan, 2005) and improved social relationships (Waugh and Fredrickson, 2006). From this, one can make the case that volunteering leads to enhanced well-being and positive emotion, which in turn engender better cognitive functioning and improved resilience, which in turn increase a person's employability and attitude and aspirations toward job search.

6.1 Volunteering, Strengths Use and Job Finding

Volunteering also gives people opportunities to explore and use different strengths. Strengths use is associated with higher levels of positive emotion, well-being, fulfilment, vitality, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Govindji and Linley, 2007), all of which will help people in finding new employment. People who use their strengths have been shown to have increased happiness and decreased depression, relative to control groups and other experimental interventions (Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson, 2005).

Strengths use has also been shown to lead to increased goal attainment, such that people who have a better fit between their strengths and their goals are more likely to achieve those goals (Linley, 2008). Clearly, strengths use is associated with a variety of individual positive outcomes, notably outcomes which improve the psychological well-being of individuals and enable them to be better positioned for finding future employment, both of which are enabled through volunteering opportunities.

6.2 Volunteering and Individual Health and Well-being

In a longitudinal study of volunteer work and well-being, using 2,681 participants of the *Americans' Changing Lives* panel survey, Thoits and Hewitt (2001) demonstrated that engaging in volunteer work led to sustainable increases in all six aspects of personal well-being studied: happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of control over life, physical health and (lower) depression. As a longitudinal survey with a large sample and appropriate controls, Thoits and Hewitt (2001) provide compelling evidence in support of the individual benefits that accrue from engaging in volunteer work.

Piliavin and Siegl (2007) demonstrated the causal positive effects of volunteering on psychological well-being and health over a 12-year period, with a sample of 4,000 people from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Survey. Participants who volunteered more, and more diversely, reported significantly higher levels of psychological well-being (specifically, self-acceptance, personal growth, environmental mastery and purpose in life) and significantly better health, over this 12-year period, providing further evidence of the sustainable benefits of volunteering over time. Importantly, positive outcomes were shown to be a result of both social integration and feeling that one mattered, both of which may be under threat at times of redundancy and unemployment, and which volunteering is hereby shown to counteract.

In a study of 401 older adults working in 13 volunteer programmes, Morrow-Howell, Hong and Tang (2009) reported that over 60% of older adults identified a benefit to their families as a result of their volunteering, and over 30% reported that they were “a great deal better off” because of their volunteering work. In this study, lower income and lower educated volunteers reported more benefit, thereby suggesting a link to the value of volunteering for people who have been made redundant or had their working hours reduced (on the basis of their lower relative incomes).

A review by the Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development (2007) concluded that there were consistent health benefits for volunteers, including lower mortality rates, greater functional ability and lower rates of depression. Importantly, there do not appear to be any contra- indicators of the benefits of volunteering: it is good for the people who volunteer, the communities they serve, and the organisations in which they work, with no evidence for negative consequences of volunteering.

7. Contra-indicators of Volunteering

Potential negative effects of volunteering were reviewed by Chinman and Wandersman (1998). The costs of volunteering on volunteers identified by their review included the time required, the negative feelings when one was not made to feel welcome, out-of-pocket

expenses, the need to participate in meetings, and frustration at the lack of progress being made. These costs appear limited to specific instances, and may result from circumstances of either the individual volunteer themselves, or the nature of the organisation in which they are volunteering. Weighed against the benefits of volunteering, these costs appear both marginal and manageable, when indeed they do occur. This judgement is supported by the fact that Chinman and Wandersman found that volunteers who contributed more time to their volunteering incurred greater costs, but yet they still proceeded to volunteer. As such, there is nothing that may be considered a substantive contra-indicator for the recommendation of extensive volunteer activity through the National Talent Bank.

8. Broader Policy Benefits

The National Talent Bank will also play a role in delivering across the broader policy agenda: For example a national one-to-one reading programme could transform the reading ability of thousands of young children, an online platform which enables under-utilised staff from a professional services firm to use the opportunity to e-mentor someone running a struggling social business, or an engineer to shift the aspirations of a teenager who is unsure whether university is the “right” thing for him or her to be doing.

A couple of potential examples are outlined in more detail here.

A consultant from a professional services firm, who has been asked to work a four-day week, might volunteer on their day off mentoring participants in the Young Enterprise Scheme, helping them manage the finances of their start up business. The students learn budgeting and financial management skills. In the process, the mentor builds a relationship with the young people, and is able to encourage them and advise them on the steps they could take to develop these skills. This might entail more training, entering university or using the mentors knowledge and contacts to find a work experience placement. The employee not only gains personal satisfaction from the opportunity to use practical skills to benefit people in the community, but also learns more patience and empathy, which benefits relationships with both team and clients in the work place.

In another example a worker from a manufacturing firm who has been asked to take a sabbatical might use the time to train as an energy efficiency advisor. The employee helps a group of households in their neighbourhood by visiting and advising them on how they can save energy and money through changes in their home or lifestyle. The reduction in energy usage directly contributes to the government’s climate change targets. Indirectly benefit is derived from increased awareness and responsible attitudes to the environment. The company benefits from increased collaboration with the community, the community benefits from the savings they derive and the feeling of shared action. The employee gains personal satisfaction, increased confidence and communication skills through interacting with a wide variety of people outside of the workplace.

These examples are in line with the following government objectives:

- PSA 2 Improve the skills of the population, on the way to ensuring a world-class skills base by 2020

- PSA 10 Raise the educational achievement of all children and young people
- PSA 11 Narrow the gap in educational achievement between children from a low-income background and their peers
- PSA 21 Build more cohesive, empowered and active communities
- Strategy for social enterprise as set out in the “Real Help for Communities: Volunteers, Charities and Social Enterprises” White Paper, 2009

9. Conclusion

Overall, this business case has demonstrated:

1. The need for a National Talent Bank to provide wholesale brokerage services for newly-available talent to support volunteering and social action projects as people are released from the workforce;
2. The opportunity for the establishment of such a National Talent Bank to play a key transformative role in delivering benefits across individual lives, employment prospects, and community building;
3. The employability benefits of volunteering through enhanced skills, confidence, employer perceptions and social networks;
4. The community benefits of volunteering through strengthened social networks and community building;
5. The individual benefits of volunteering on health, happiness, well-being, self-esteem and social networks.

In sum, the establishment of a National Talent Bank provides a visionary solution to the current challenge of hundreds of thousands of people being released from the workforce in Britain, and the current opportunity that this gives. By doing so, we can harness that newly-available talent by engaging their energies in community building volunteer work that delivers significant benefits to their individual well-being, their employability prospects, and the enhancement of the communities they serve.

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