British Red Cross – written evidence (CCE0243)
6 September 2017

Who we are

*The British Red Cross is a volunteer-led humanitarian organisation that helps people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are, in the UK and around the world. We are part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the world’s leading and oldest humanitarian movement which comprises:*

- The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC);
- The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC); and
- 190 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies worldwide.

*The British Red Cross believes passionately in enabling people to respond to human crisis through human kindness – volunteering your time and talent to support people in need. One of our seven fundamental principles is voluntary service and we currently have 22,000 active volunteers throughout the UK.*

Volunteering is a key element of civic engagement – individuals contribute to their communities while developing skills, connecting with people and communities they may not have a chance to do so with otherwise, and find the experience affirming and rewarding in non-financial ways.

**Questions answered**

1. **What does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st century? Why does it matter, and how does it relate to questions of identity?**

1.1. The UK has a vibrant civil society, respected internationally. It is hoped that civic engagement within the UK will continue to thrive in the future, providing an environment supportive of civil society organisations and activity.

1.2. The definition of “civil society”, and with it civic engagement, varies. Terminology changes and different phrases are used: volunteering, voluntary action, civil engagement, social action. We will use these terms interchangeably through this document.

1.3. British Red Cross’s vision is of a world where everyone gets the help they need in a crisis. Our mission is to mobilise the power of humanity so that individuals and communities can prepare for, deal with, and recover from crises.

1.4. Voluntary service is one of the Red Cross and Red Crescent’s seven fundamental principles. We are a voluntary relief movement which believes volunteering is at the heart of community-building. It not only helps in the immediate crisis, but also empowers and brings people together in the longer term. In this respect, the overall impact of volunteering can persist far beyond the provision of aid in the immediate aftermath of a crisis.

1.5. We think this matters because, based on almost 140 years of operational experience, we have an innate understanding in the importance of civic society in promoting another of our fundamental principles – that of humanity. Central to the humanity principle is the desire to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found as well as to promote mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples. We bring people together so that we can be more effective in our humanitarian work.
Our vision could not be realised without the passionate dedication of more than 21,500 volunteers and 4,100 staff working together for the British Red Cross. They help hundreds of thousands of people cope with all kinds of crises every year – from disasters and conflicts, to individual injuries and other personal challenges. Our people help both individuals and communities prepare for, cope with and recover from a range of crises.

For example, in the past three months we helped over 3,000 people in crisis as a result of the Manchester terror attack, more than 80 people after the London Bridge attack, and over 1,500 in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire. And we continue to offer our support to those affected by these crises as they rebuild their lives, including through continued distribution of the funds that we have raised: £16m for the We Love Manchester emergency fund; £2m for the UK Solidarity Fund; and £5m for the London Fire Relief Fund.

Furthermore, last year alone, British Red Cross UK-based services helped in the region of 112,000 people through our ambulance service, 27,000 refugees, 85,000 people to live independently at home, 100,000 people to access a short-term wheelchair, 250,000 people learn life-saving first aid skills and 16,000 through our emergency response service.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of our volunteers – they remain the lifeblood of these operations, in which we work to create a society which is more resilient to crises when they strike. Indeed, many of our volunteers are former service users themselves. Those who once came to the Red Cross for emergency support now help others in the dire situation in which they once found themselves.

We tailor our volunteering offer to meet our different business needs and to suit different people. Volunteers are recruited for a specific role and a role description developed for each post. There is also a formal selection process. It is essential that all volunteers are appropriately skilled to carry out their chosen or allocated role. To this end, the British Red Cross offers an extensive range of training and development opportunities. This offer is a strategic approach in terms of our recruitment and retention.

We believe what makes our volunteering distinctive is that people get to give their time and talents in a way that is both meaningful for them and beneficial to our mission. Research carried out by the British Red Cross highlighting a number of motivations, triggers and barriers to volunteering showed that existing skills or training frequently influenced volunteers’ motivations. These skills also shaped the role they sought to occupy. For example, volunteers in event first aid had often previously attended some first aid training and consequently were keen to maintain those skills, while those entering the fire and emergency response or support at home unit often had an employment or experience background that complemented their voluntary role.¹

We have impact due to the diverse nature of the work that we undertake, and our span of both rural and urban areas. We help people and communities recover from an emergency, provide practical and emotional support to refugees and asylum seekers, increase independence and well-being after a health crisis and support our partners overseas to prepare for and respond to crises. In more rural areas, our volunteers help hundreds of people each year cope with the effects of severe flooding, supporting them as they start to rebuild their lives. This translated to just under 16,000 people being supported and offered comfort, a warm place to rest and advice in 2015.

1.13. Our dedicated event first aid volunteers treated over 28,000 casualties at over 5000 events in 2015, from football matches to festivals. Almost 250,000 people learnt life-saving first aid skills through one of our courses. Our first aid education builds both individual and community resilience. It equips people with simple first aid skills that they will remember, builds their confidence to use those skills in an emergency and encourages people to step forward and help.

1.14. British Red Cross also provides invaluable support to people to help close the gap between home and hospital. Much of our service is delivered by volunteers. We currently provide over 200 hospital and community services across the UK. Working in partnership with hospital trusts and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) we form part of a multi-agency response to help a person avoid entering hospital, or to leave statutory care more quickly. This year we will help over 200,000 people through our support at home services in addition to offering over 100 A&E discharge services across the country.

1.15. Volunteers also help us deliver other vital services such as in areas where there are gaps in statutory provision. For example, our vital short term wheelchair loan service helped 103,810 people in 2015. As such, changes to the provision of statutory services have a direct effect on our service offer.

1.16. Over the last 140 years, our services have changed to coincide with the changing un-met needs of the population, and will continue to do so, so that we can ensure the needs of the most vulnerable in our society are met. For example, 2014 to 2015 saw a massive increase in the number of people using our refugee services across the country; an increase of 39% on the previous year, to support 27,645 people. The most common service delivered was destitution support, for those that could not meet their basic needs for food and shelter.

1.17. We believe that civic engagement is vital to society: it not only confers rights and responsibilities, fosters a sense of belonging, but can also promote inclusion, combating feelings of isolation and loneliness.

1.18. Community connectivity increases inclusion and builds resilience and results in the most appropriate responses to crisis situations. It is vital that individuals know how to bring about positive change in their communities.

1.19. This is especially relevant to youth volunteer groups. Under 25’s are now the biggest growing segment of British Red Cross volunteers. The proportion of young people saying they volunteer has increased by more than half in recent years.

1.20. In 2010/11, 23% of 16-24 year olds said they volunteered formally (i.e. through a group or organisation of some kind) at least once a month. By 2014/15 that figure was 35%; a 52% increase, and in real terms it would mean around one million more young volunteers.

6. Do voluntary citizenship programmes such as the National Citizen Service do a good job of creating active citizens? Are they the right length? Should they be compulsory, and if so, when? Should they include a greater political element? Should they lead to a more public citizenship ceremony? Are they good value for money? What other routes exist for creating active citizens?

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2 NCVO UK Civil Society Almanac 2017: https://data.ncvo.org.uk/
6.1 The British Red Cross welcomes the work that successive governments have undertaken to encourage active citizenship.

6.2 The National Citizen Service has a well-established alumni programme, but this is weighted towards encouraging participants to return to the National Citizen Service (e.g. as recruitment ambassadors) rather than take up opportunities to extend/prolong civic engagement in the wider community.

6.3 There are 100s of voluntary organisations and charities, including the British Red Cross, who engage every day with thousands of volunteers at all levels. Young People aged 15-26 make up 18% of the BRC, 22,000 volunteers throughout the UK. These young people volunteer across all British Red Cross services and activities alongside volunteers of all ages. They could be providing first aid at a public gathering; ensuring a vulnerable person can return home after a stay in hospital; supporting a newly arrived refugee to integrate into their new community; ensuring someone temporarily unable to walk receives a wheelchair or walking aid; selling donated goods in our shops; raising money through fundraising challenges amongst a range of other ways of volunteering their time and talent to support our work to help vulnerable people.

6.4 Our youth volunteers are a significantly active group who are integrated across our organisation appreciating that due to their particular ‘age and stage’ they may need additional support in some areas, as they might be doing things for the first time and are exponentially developing skills, experiences and networks as they give us their time.

6.5 The BRC has introduced RED (Recognise, Empower and Develop), a skills development and accreditation programme for young people. Our young volunteers have told us how important it is for them to have their skills acknowledged in a format that they can share with a prospective employer or for college/university applications.

6.6 It is critical that any programmes involving volunteering are optional and individuals participate of their own free will and not to gain access to state benefits. Forcing people to volunteer risks negative consequences, and in our opinion would be counter-productive.

7. How can society support civic engagement? What responsibility should central government, devolved and local governments, third sector organisations and the individual have for encouraging civic engagement? What can the Government and Parliament do to support civil society initiatives to increase civic engagement?

7.1 Increasingly we are seeing communities arrange take part in civic engagement independently of formal organisations. This started with the London Riots clean up in 2011, and the rise in use of social media has enabled this independent engagement. We need to be aware that people increasingly want to engage on their own terms and may look to charities as enablers of civic engagement rather than agencies that signs up and direct people.

7.2 This also links to the need for the sector to strike a realistic balance between the highly regulated nature of what some charities are engaged in (and all the checks and balances that come with that) and people’s reluctance to commit a huge amount of time and information in order to help their communities.
Young people

7.3 Currently, a young person wishing to volunteer for a year in the UK would fall under the NEET category – not in employment, education or training. However, if they are volunteering full time they are unable to actively job hunt, so cannot claim benefits or receive National Insurance credits.

7.4 This is a barrier to promoting diversity in volunteering, in the same way as unpaid internships are, as it limits volunteering opportunities to those young people fortunate enough to have financial support from other sources, such as parents or other family members. It also diminishes the contribution that volunteers make to our community and fails to recognise the vital work that they do.

7.5 We would welcome the opportunity to explore ways of overcoming these barriers in the future.

Fundraising

7.6 Society can support civic engagement in a myriad of ways. British Red Cross fundraising activities are a vital part of our civic engagement. Fundraising amongst the public is vital in allowing the British Red Cross and our supporters to make an extraordinary impact on the lives of people in crisis. Over half a million members of the public regularly donate to us every year, and this continued and generous support allows us to plan and to rapidly respond to disasters across the world as soon as they take place.

7.7 Alongside delivery of services, our fundraising activities are one of the primary ways that we come into direct contact with the general public and spread awareness of how they can help people in crises.

7.8 We have a range of fundraising activities that are tailored to engage with the community in the most appropriate and relevant way possible:

- Our passionate fundraisers provide inspirational and informed experiences to individual members of the public to provide an opportunity to support charitable causes, both local to the community and internationally;

- Our specialist fundraisers engage with corporate partners, trusts and philanthropists to fund individual projects, support our charitable objectives and express their socially responsible aims;

- Our community fundraisers and Presidents network and community fundraisers around the country work with communities to mobilise local networks and organise events tailored to each area; and

- Our charity shops provide a mechanism for the public to donate goods and support charitable causes in alternative ways, provide volunteer opportunities and a local face for the organisation. We have witnessed how important this is to local communities of late, with the incredible outpour of community spirit following the attack at Manchester Arena and the Grenfell Tower fire.

7.9 By providing a positive experience and showing evidence of the impact of donations and support, we hope to spread our values that encourage the public to continue support these causes – and indeed other civil society initiatives.

Loneliness and social isolation

7.10 In July 2015 British Red Cross and Co-op announced a new partnership to highlight and tackle loneliness and social isolation in communities across the UK.
Through our research we found that loneliness is a serious and widespread issue – almost 80 per cent of people have experienced loneliness, and almost one in five (the equivalent of over 9 million adults across the UK) said they were often or always lonely.

In response to these findings, we have developed a new and broad ‘Connecting Communities’ programme. This includes 49 services in 39 communities across the UK, bringing together more than 50 dedicated staff and around 500 volunteers, who will support thousands of adults of all ages who feel they have nowhere to turn. This is just one of many examples of society becoming involved with civic engagement.

The programme goes beyond these new services, however. Partnerships will be key to delivering a long-term, sustainable impact on loneliness and social isolation, both for individual service users and on the issues as a whole. Our role as a partner on the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness has shown the impact that can be achieved when organisations work together to as a broad social movement, amplifying the national conversation on loneliness and the everyday steps people can take in their lives to address it. We aim to build on this by working with partners to ensure services are available to people who need them most no matter how hard-to-reach, and by sharing the learning generated by our new services. At the end of this year, the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness will be publishing its manifesto including policy recommendations on the role for government.

Our research also found that more than 80% of people agreed that ‘there are lots of actions that everyone can take in their daily lives to help those feeling lonely’. A key aim of Connecting Communities is to work with partners, in particular the Co-op and its existing community networks, to support, empower and inspire everyone across the UK to come together and take action in strong, thriving communities where people are supported to connect and stay connected.

Inclusion and diversity

Inclusion and diversity should be high on the agenda for civil society. It is only through considering and understanding the experiences of all groups in society – particularly protected groups under the Equality Act (2010) and those from working class backgrounds – that civil society can remain effective, relevant and able to represent the interests of all citizens.

These groups should be represented in the civil society workforce (in terms of both volunteers and staff). A recent British Red Cross report outlines several recommendations to address this.

We believe that any reduction in civil society funding will mean that organisations may struggle to pay competitive salaries, or even the living wage. This risks leading to an increasingly homogenous workforce. This will impede our ability to harness the diversity of talent in society and most effectively support the diverse citizens civil society exists to support.

This lack of funding, or the insecurity of funding, may lead to a lack of innovation in civil society, leaving the sector stagnant and resistant to change and, potentially, at risk of losing relevance to the citizens we exist to support.

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Volunteer retention

8.1 Recent internal research the British Red Cross conducted into volunteers, and whose findings may have learnings for the wider civil society, found⁶ that it is common to volunteer for a number of different organisations, even within the space of one year. The majority of volunteers carry out volunteer activities at least once a week, and there is overwhelming satisfaction with volunteering roles, with over half of volunteers we sampled being very satisfied. Three quarters intended to continue volunteering next year, and about the same proportion would consider volunteering for a different organisation next year.

8.2 The same research found that the factors that may drive volunteer retention are:

- Greater flexibility in regards to volunteer commitments – allowing a change in hours/location or informing volunteers of alternative roles that might be relevant;
- Ensuring that all volunteers feel valued for their time as well as the skills/expertise that they bring;
- Communicating effectively with volunteers; including on how different teams are working together;
- Ensuring volunteers only attend training that is valuable and explaining why each course is felt to be so;
- Clear channels and procedures to raise issues if problems are encountered;
- Retaining contact with lapsed volunteers outlining current volunteering opportunities; and
- Engaging volunteers when they decide to leave to discuss possible alternative arrangements.

8.3 It is the role of any organisation who works with volunteers to take these factors in to consideration.

⁶ Internal research/management information – unpublished