

Advancing diversity

BTCV Diversity Report 2006



“BTCV’s Environments for All is the single most important development in the environmental sector in relation to social inclusion. It has merged the principle of ‘people for nature’ with ‘nature for people’, recognising that practical environmental action has a unique contribution to make through integrating the delivery of social, economic, cultural and environmental benefits.”

Judy Ling Wong, FRSA, OBE, Director Black Environment Network UK

Introduction

Diversity is a major theme of BTCV's Strategic Plan for 2004-2008, which expresses our commitment in terms of inclusiveness, accessibility and choice.

In January 2006, we conducted a UK-wide survey of our work with people from communities under-represented in environmental volunteering.

The 10 categories selected for this survey were:

- Black and minority ethnic (BME)
- People with health problems
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Those at risk of offending, offenders and ex-offenders
- Older people
- People with a disability
- Young people at risk
- People living in poverty
- Unemployed people
- Other socially/economically disadvantaged people

The last category includes groups such as travellers, people disadvantaged by rural isolation and homeless people.

When we compare the relevant figures with the findings of an England-only survey that we conducted in October 2003, the contrast is encouraging and suggests a substantial increase in our already impressive engagement with people from these communities.



A measure of progress

The number of BTCV's 'diversity projects' (that is, projects involving people from under-represented communities) in England has more than doubled since October 2003 – up 109%, from 152 to 317.

In particular, there has been a tremendous increase in the number of projects that engage with young people at risk (up 417%), people with health problems (up 207%) and 'other socially disadvantaged' people (up 164%).

The only category to have seen a reduction is older people – and that is by just one project overall across the whole of England.

The difference in scope of the two surveys (England-only in 2003 and UK-wide in 2006) means that we can compare only the number of projects, not the number of people involved. However, it seems reasonable to deduce from these increases that the number of individuals from under-represented communities that BTCV England is working with has increased substantially in the last few years.

“Our project makes us feel like we have done something – something with our hands – and seeing the results of everything we’ve planted is really nice”

Teenage refugee staying in Glasgow and involved with a community allotment



The findings of the 2006 survey

In six of our regions, more than half the people we work with now come from under-represented communities. Across England as a whole, the average is 40%, representing nearly 32,000 people. In the UK the figure is close to 40,000.

Of the under-represented people we engage with specifically because it is a condition of a project's funding, the largest percentage – 26%, or nearly 3,000 individuals – are people with health problems. This reflects especially the steady growth of our Green Gyms.

In projects that involve under-represented people without it being a funding requirement, a large proportion of the people we work with – 38% – are from BME communities. This represents nearly 10,500 individuals.

In terms of all the under-represented communities that we work with, the biggest single group is BME communities. Second is other socially disadvantaged. Third is people formally registered as unemployed and fourth is people with health problems.

“Our work challenges anti-social behaviour and helps build a sense of ownership and confidence in the community”

Community organiser improving a local park in Wolverhampton



Conclusions

The findings of this new survey clearly demonstrate that BTCV is working extensively with under-represented communities across the UK. Not that this is anything new – the great success of our Environments for All programme in 1999-2003 (see www.btcv.org/efa) established BTCV as the leading environmental charity to champion social diversity.

When the funding ended for that UK-wide programme focused on diversity, it might have been understandable if BTCV had lost its momentum in this direction and found it more difficult to engage with these communities. However, the evidence of this new survey suggests the opposite. Its findings will be valuable both to BTCV, in helping us to set ourselves even more demanding targets, and to other organisations as they assess how far we have travelled on this journey towards inclusion.

Has BTCV been able to ‘mainstream’ the ethos of diversity?

We believe the answer is yes.



What next?

We believe BTCV should aim for three key outcomes:

- to continue to work with Government and other external partners at policy level to change perceptions and build the profile and credibility of environmental volunteering. We will draw attention to the value of the work BTCV does and the methods we use in building the capacity of individuals to develop social capital, and in empowering them to take ownership of, and improve, their own neighbourhoods.
- to further embed diversity and equality principles in BTCV, moving the organisation towards a culturally diverse network of staff and volunteers, reflecting the communities we serve.
- to set targets and monitor progress aiming for a measurable increase in BTCV's diversity work, particularly where there is under-representation currently. Through the business planning process, we will set out milestones annually until March 2009 and ensure a rigorous annual review.



“I think we have made a hell of a difference because people ‘round here can see the children getting involved”

Community leader in Blaen y Maes, South Wales



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