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Ethical citizenship? Volunteers and the ethics of providing services for homeless people

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Abstract

This paper draws on wider research into the uneven spatialities of emergency services for homeless people in England, and focuses on the role of volunteers in staffing these spaces of care. In the first part of the paper, we explore the contemporary context of voluntarism, locating opportunities for volunteers in the shifting nature and character of organisations providing these services. We also trace conceptualisations of motivational underpinning of volunteering, arguing for the inseparability of giving and receiving in this context. These discussions frame the second part of the paper where we use interview and participant observation research to discuss what motivates volunteers to identify with and serve homeless people. The paper interprets the discourses, practices and performances of volunteering in services for homeless people in order to understand how volunteers are implicated in the co-construction of spaces of care.

Keywords: Homelessness; Volunteers; Voluntarism; Spaces of care; Ethics; Citizenship

1. Organisations, volunteers and ethics

This paper draws on a wider-scale research project which has sought to investigate and explain the uneven spatialities of emergency services for homeless people in England.[1] As part of this research we have focused especially on the provision of shelters/hostels, drop-in centres and soup-runs, seeking to understand the co-constitutive relations by which services are initiated and sustained in particular places (see Johnsen et al., in press, Johnsen et al., 2005; May et al., in press). Whilst it is important to emphasise that these relations are complex and multifaceted, we have been particularly interested to explore the reasons why organisations and individuals engage with the task of caring for homeless people. Accordingly our research has included extensive surveys of service providers, and intensive research in seven English cities and towns involving both interviews with professionals and volunteers engaged in serving homeless people and periods of participant observation in spaces of emergency service provision in those places.

In a previous paper (Cloke et al., 2005), we have examined the ways in which overarching organisational ethos represents a significant waymarker in the moral landscapes of caring for homeless people. Deploying Romand Coles' (1997) ideal types of ethos in charitable organisations – Christian "caritas", secular humanism and post-secular charity – we suggested that many organisations serving homeless people were not only undergirded by strong and deliberate discourses of 'mission' or 'values' but that these discourses presented significant ethical

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bases for involvement and action. However, our accounts of organisational ethos in this context called into question any neat ethical distinction between faith-based and secular ethics of generosity and service. Service provision for homeless people in England involves Christian organisations functioning in a secular humanist world often engaging in partnership projects involving Christian and non-Christian organisations and individuals. Equally, secular organisations seemed often to be drawing implicitly on ethical principles which were equivalent to those which provided the foundation for faith-based service organisations. This seeming muddle of ethos was compounded by the variations within different categories of organisations in terms of professionalism, rule-regimes and the expectations of social responsibility on behalf of clients. The principle fault-line of organisational ethos reflected divisive moralities in terms of the expectations imposed on service users. Some organisations unashamedly desired some kind of conversion of the homeless other, elevating spiritual needs alongside the more commonly recognised physical and emotional needs. Other organisations expected homeless people to raise their own levels of self-responsibility, reflecting an ethos of care in return for deliverable changes in lifestyle and attitude. Yet other organisations espoused something closer to post-secular charity, eschewing both evangelism and any expectation of the changing self of homeless people.

Our research on organisational ethos in the context of serving homeless people recognised at least two limitations of understanding ethos in terms of organisations. First, any organisational discourse of ethos is likely to attract widely varying levels of allegiance from the staff and volunteers who represent the organisation to homeless people, and will therefore not necessarily be carried through into the spaces of care concerned. Secondly, Coles' idea of post-secular charity implies a receptive generosity – an ability to accept the other on their own terms and to be generous to them on those terms rather than in ways dictated by self-fulfilment. Recognition of such receptive generosity is most likely at the level of day-to-day performances and interrelations between the organisation's staff and volunteers and the homeless people whose otherness is being served and responded to.

In this paper, then, we investigate the ethos claimed and performed by volunteers working in emergency services for homeless people. Accepting that voluntary and community-sector non-statutory organisations are of crucial importance in the landscape of services for homeless people in England, we question how the ethics of these service spaces are influenced by the varying forms of ethos introduced by the volunteers on which so many services depend. In what ways are the spaces of care which are established to respond to the emergency needs of homeless people co-constituted by the ethical frames, attitudes and performances introduced by people who volunteer their time and embodied presence into these spaces? We draw on interviews with volunteers who work in a range of different emergency services for homeless people in different places to ask questions about their motivation, their identification with homeless people and the ways in which organisational and individual ethics interconnect to produce discourses and practices of ethical volunteering. We also draw on our participant observation in some of these services to question how these interconnections are acted out in particular circumstances.

Again, it is important to recognise the limitations of this approach. Although, as Jenkins (1996, p. 128) puts it, "institutions are emergent products of what people do as much as they are constitutive of what people do", the role of individual agency within organisations has been hotly disputed. Early accounts in the field of non-profit organisations allocated a core role for the agency of individuals (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991; Tolbert and Zuker, 1996; Zucker, 1977), but subsequent development of organisational theory has inserted a degree of determinism into neo-institutional accounts (Scott and Meyer, 1994; McDonald and Warburton, 2003). Only recently has the importance of individual agency been reasserted in these contexts (Barley and Tolbert, 1977; Hirsch and Loundsbury, 1997). While recognising the potential strength of institutional discourse, and the potential institutionalising of habitual practice within organisations, we nevertheless argue, following McDonald and Warburton (2003), that volunteers contribute to the discursive construction, and perhaps deconstruction, of the institutional order of the field in which they work.

A second potential limitation of our approach comes with the recognition that not only are organisational ethics stretched and transformed by individual ethics, but also that organisational spaces are performatively brought into being. An emerging body of literature (Conradson, 2003A; Crang, 1994; Knowles, 2000; Parr, 2000; Philo, 1989, 1997) has emphasised the importance of interconnections between organisations, space, discourse, and practice. Conradson's (2003) account of the organisational space of a drop-in centre, for example, discusses how a recognisable faith-based ethic of social care amongst volunteers is somehow 'woven through' with personal and collective forms of Christian belief which imbues the organisational environment with a particular sociability and experiential texture. Far from being able to 'read-off' the impact of volunteers from their ethical standpoint, the ethical in such situations will always at least in part be implicated in and emergent from the diverse sensibilities of embodied co-presences (McCormack, 2003), suggesting performative moves rather than codified rules or representable ethical positioning. We believe that understanding of spaces of care should pay heed to ways in which these "emotionally heightened spaces" (Anderson and Smith, 2001) are processually enacted, and we deployed participant observation methods in our research to investigate aspects of these performativities.

In the first part of the paper we explore the contemporary context of voluntarism, suggesting significant shifts in

the motive and character of volunteering organisations and of the voluntary sector more generally. We also trace attempts to conceptualise the motivation of volunteers in terms of altruism, egoism and the potential inseparability of giving and receiving in this context. These discussions frame the second part of the paper where we draw on interview and participant observation research to discuss what motivates volunteers to identify with and to help serve homeless people. Here we interpret the discourses, practices and performances of volunteering in services for homeless people in order to understand how volunteers are implicated in the co-construction of spaces of care.

2. Volunteering in context

Contemporary accounts of the voluntary sector emphasise its growing size, scale and impact (Dollery and Wallis, 2003; Evers and Laville, 2004; Kendall, 2003; Salamon, 2003), yet characterise its complex and under-researched nature – Kendall and Knapp (1995) call it "a loose and baggy monster" and Salamon et al. (2000) regard it as the "lost continent" in the cartography of the social fabric of modern society. For some, the global explosion of volunteering represents a positive means of fostering citizenship, participation and community (Anheier and Salamon, 1999). However, the rise of voluntarism also reflects changing state ideologies about the apparatus of welfare and the positioning of responsibility for providing social services (May et al., 2005). Over the last 20 years or so a 'shadow state' of voluntarism (Wolch, 1989, 1990) has emerged as western nations have embraced neo-liberal strategies which have denuded the welfare state, privatised social services and resulted in an increased reliance on voluntarism and the non-profit sector (Brodie, 2002; Larner, 2005; O'Connor et al., 1999; Peck, 2001). In the UK, responsibilities for social services have been devolved to voluntary organisations under successive governments (Deakin, 1995; Powell, 2003) as part of programmes of neo-liberal welfare reform (Clarke et al., 2000). Along with these political reforms have come associated moral envisionings of the voluntary landscape. As we have suggested elsewhere (May et al., in press) the Thatcher regime reduced welfare to voluntarism, but characterised volunteering as very much a matter of individual choice, while under Blair's 'Third Way' discourses, volunteering and providing for others is seen as a duty of public citizenship, and voluntary organisations are saluted as ideal vehicles through which to express the values, responsibilities and duties of the 'Giving Age', (see also Fairclough, 2002; Morison, 2000).

In a recent series of timely interventions to these debates, Fyfe and Milligan (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003a,b; Milligan and Fyfe, 2004) have emphasised two significant aspects of the contemporary geographies of voluntarism. First, the distribution of urban voluntary welfare resources is geographically uneven. The poorest communities often lack voluntary resources, community income and institutional cultures of voluntarism. As a result, "voluntarism may reinforce rather than alleviate social and spatial welfare inequalities" (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003b, p. 400). Secondly, the local impact of voluntarism, for both volunteers and service clients, is highly dependent on the kind of service organisation which emerges in a particular locality. The difference between grass-roots voluntarism and the new breed of highly professionalised service-delivery organisations has destabilised the kinds of local citizenship expressed through volunteering in particular places. On the one hand, voluntary associations can be viewed as spaces of democratic politics, active citizenship and well-focused welfare service (Brown et al., 2000). On the other hand, such services now lie outside the sphere of traditional democratic politics yet remain tied to the state through funding and contractual obligation (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003a) Here, then, is one major shift occurring in contemporary landscapes of voluntarism – the shift from traditional to corporatist organisational structure. As organisations grow, and become increasingly enmeshed in shadow state regulation, they become professionalized (Parsons and Broadbridge, 2004) and bureaucratised (Morison, 2000), leading to the production and consumption of standardised welfare programmes and spaces. According to Berger et al. (2002), corporatist organisational structures are also likely to be linked with a secularisation of the organisation concerned. And this shift has clearly been evident in the provision of emergency services for homeless people (see May et al., 2005). Spurred on by government programmes such as the Rough Sleepers Initiative and the Supporting People programme, the homelessness sector is being increasingly populated by large corporatist organisations which represent a voluntary sector which is significantly tied into government approaches and agendas, largely through reliance on government funding. Alongside this growing corporatism there remains a significant number of traditional organisations providing services such as night shelters, drop-in centres and soup runs which increasingly find themselves outside of the government's favoured approach to dealing with homelessness, and outside of the funding regime which frames that approach.

On the surface, this shift appears to limit the choices available to volunteers, who might be viewed either as increasingly squeezed into corporatist agendas and hierarchies or as marooned in remnant traditional organisations, struggling with the amateurism of under-funding and 'outsider' status in the new corporatised world. However, there seems to be another major shift occurring in contemporary landscapes of voluntarism – the shift from collective to individualised and reflexive volunteering (Beck, 2002; Eckstein, 2001; Meijs and Hoogstad, 2001). Collective voluntarism suggests a way of volunteering which is initiated, stipulated and supervised by groups (often faith-based or centred on some ideological alignment). Here, the intentions or preferences of individual group members are subjugated to the 'we' of group membership. As Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003) suggest, reflexive voluntarism recognises the volunteer as an individual actor, deciding where and how to volunteer on the basis of highly individualised

situations and experiences, which are self-induced and self-monitored. Whereas collective volunteering relies on the ethics of religious traditions of benevolence and altruism or on the co-ordinating ideologies of humanist care, individualised volunteering mixes compassion and duty with more personalised objectives such as dealing with personal experiences of biographical discontinuity and opening out possibilities for self-realisation. The volunteer can thus become a consumer of volunteering opportunities, choosing their field of activity. Although it is arguable whether the past was quite as "collective" as is painted here, any such shift tempers the previous characterisation of volunteers as squeezed into corporate agendas, suggesting rather the consumer volunteer with less affiliation to a particular organisation and a heightened sense of how the volunteering opportunity suits their sense of belonging and need. Equally, it seems likely that in the mixed environment of voluntarist organisations there will be some degree of niched provision of opportunities for different kinds of volunteers (McDonald and Warburton, 2003).

3. Ethics and volunteer motivation

These shifts in the landscape of voluntarism signal potentially significant changes in the likely motivations for volunteering, and in the complexity of ethos that accompanies volunteers as they enter spaces of care such as emergency services for homeless people. Much of the discussion of the ethical values and objectives carried by volunteers has typically turned to polarities of altruism and egoism (Clary, 1996; Nyland, 2001; Van Til, 1988). The pure selflessness of altruism, often thought to be framed by faith-based, political or associational discourses, is set against the pragmatic self-interest of the needy volunteer seeking fulfilment through helping others. The shift from collective to individualised reflexive voluntarism would suggest a swing from selflessness to self-interest according to this register. A sophisticated reading of the egoism argument is presented by Allahyari (2000), who recognised in her study of volunteers in Sacramento, California a process of "moral selving" – the work of creating oneself into a more virtuous, and often more spiritual person.

We want to argue, with others (see, for example, Bloom and Kilgore, 2003; Yeung, 2004), that the processes of giving and receiving are inseparable for volunteers. Indeed, Levinas (1986, 1989) identifies the incalculable alterity of the other as the source of an ethical sentiment:

> "Responsibility for the Other, for the naked face of the first individual to come along. A responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself…… A responsibility for my neighbour, for the other man, for the stranger or sojourner, to which nothing in the rigorously autological order binds me" (1989; 83–84).

Here, we can begin to suggest a sense of an "ordinary" ethics which presents a foundation on which more specific impulses to volunteer are developed. Ordinary responsibilities for others - neighbours, strangers or sojourners – are the platform for more specific acts of ethical practice. Ethics does not supplant a preceding existential base, but rather the very core of the subject is bathed in an ethics understood as responsibility (Campbell, 1999). Therefore, ordinary ethical responsibilities are already there to be shaped and enrolled. Instead of the human subject being some kind of blank canvass onto which appropriate ethics need to be painted, we can suggest that this sense of "ordinary" ethics prefigures the precise impulse of voluntarism. Naturally, we also have to account for the rise of negative ethical responses to others, seen for example in racism. As Zylinska (2005) insists, otherness can evoke different reactions in the self, including ignoring and scorning as well as giving. So we need to understand how the call of the other evokes an active response for the other in volunteers – a response which cannot be dismissed in terms or mere guilt, noblesse oblige or even generalised reciprocity.

A useful reflection on this evocation of active response for the other is suggested by Schervish and Havens' (2002) formulation of how volunteers recognise a process of *identification* with the needs of others which generates a philanthropic sense of responsibility. In their empirical studies of wealth and philanthropy, they found that respondents did not frame motivation in terms of mere altruism or mere self-interest, but rather they could recall a moment or time when identification with an other was a significant, sometime life-changing, event, motivating a caring response. In this way, a caring response to others can be understood as an engagement of the self rather than as self-sacrifice (Toner, 1968). We would propose two additional emphases here. First, the sense of 'ordinary' ethics arising from nascent responsibility for the other seems likely to be more often expressed in the less visible (Herd and Harrington Meyer, 2002) routine activities of care (in the home, for the family, in the neighbourhood) than in the more visible irregular forays of care in more formal voluntary spaces. Secondly, the development of these 'ordinary' ethics into extraordinary spaces of care seems likely to be prompted by an accessible or appealing 'device' (see Barnett et al., 2005) which presents a bridge between the governing of the ethical self and the broader governing of welfare. The opportunity to volunteer represents a significant device of this nature, and constitutes a potential bridge between ordinary ethics and a more deliberate performance of 'ethical citizenship'[2] through volunteering. Equally, where no such device exists, ethical citizenship through volunteering can sometimes bubble up to fill the gap. Many small-scale day centre or soup run services have begun with just such a sense of a gap in the meeting of local needs. In these ways ethical citi-

[2] Schervish and Havens refer to a similar concept as 'moral citizenship' in which the moral comprises value-motivated associations which help forge social bonds.

zenship differs radically from politicised citizenship, being wrapped around self-recognition in and self-identification with the needs of the other. We therefore argue that volunteers will be people who use some kind of identification with the other to bridge over from their lifescape of ordinary ethics into some form of extraordinary ethical citizenship.

In undertaking research on the ethos reflexively narrated and performed by volunteers working in organisations providing emergency services for homeless people, we have thus become interested in a series of claims about the dynamic nature of the voluntary sector and about volunteering. The expectation is that the organisational and institutional settings within which volunteering takes place will reflect the twin shifts from traditionalism to corporatism in organisations and from collective to reflexive individualism in volunteering. Binary explanations attributing motive to volunteering in terms of altruism or egoism seem likely to require a deconstructed understanding of how giving and receiving are inseparable in the self-other relations performed by volunteers. The specific prompts to individual volunteering may involve some kind of personal identification with particular others, whether this be a dramatic experience of conversion to the other, or a more gradual transformation. Either way, these prompts to the discursive construction of ethical citizenship seem likely to be accompanied by ethical freight associated with alignment or non-alignment with institutional ethics and order and with presuppositions about service clients – in this case about homeless people and homelessness. Such discursive constructions all in turn co-constitute the ways in which spaces of care are brought into being.

In what follows, we draw on qualitative research with ten different organisations in a range of cities and towns in Avon, Cornwall, Oxfordshire and North Yorkshire designed to gain insight into the practice of volunteering with organisations providing emergency services for homeless people. The names of places, organisations and volunteers are anonymised so that particular information cannot be traced to specific individuals or situations. This specific part of our research involved interviews and focus groups with a total of 24 volunteers whose ages and volunteering roles are given where quoted, alongside extensive periods of participant observation in many of the service outlets. The shift from traditional to corporatist organisational structure is immediately evident in this research design in that professionalised and well funded services such as hostels offer far fewer opportunities for volunteering compared with other types of service – day centres, night shelters and soup runs – which operate outside of the professionalised core. It is these more marginal services, then, which represent the nexus for volunteers in the places concerned, and as a result the volunteering experience is less likely to represent being squeezed into corporatist agendas than a struggle with the under-funding and 'outsider' status of marginalised traditionalist services.

4. Motivation and identification in volunteering

Although by no means a representative sample, the volunteers we interviewed suggest two specific vectors of motivation which prompted their participation in providing services for homeless people. First, the majority of volunteers highlighted a faith commitment (in this case almost exclusively Christian) to involvement with needy others. We do not suggest here that more secular motivation is unimportant. Several of our interviewees expressed their motivation to participate in terms of 'putting something back into society' (Rob, night shelter volunteer) and of a 'community responsibility to all work together' (Kath, night shelter volunteer); terms which were unmarked by faith involvement. Predominantly, however, volunteering was viewed in the context of a Christian response to the needs of others.

> 'I have been a Christian now for two years, my main perception of life has changed … I just want to be involved with helping people'. (Don 28, Detox outreach volunteer)

> 'I can only say it was God sent me, personally, being a Christian'. (Dick, 61, night shelter volunteer)

> 'I think being a Christian now, it's so different, you know there's a purpose for living'. (Kate, 63, host for night stop – a scheme where homeless people are given temporary accommodation in the houses of volunteers)

This significant presence of Christian-motivated volunteers immediately prompts a questioning of the seemingly hegemonic shifts in the nature of the voluntary sector discussed above. For example any overall suggestion of a shift from collective to individualised and/or reflexive volunteering needs to be tempered by a recognition that collective networks of volunteers remain a key feature in the voluntary landscape. Our research suggests clear evidence not only that churches remain a fertile recruiting ground for volunteers, but also that such networks continue to initiate, encourage, valorise and even organise individual and group involvement in the provision of services for homeless people. Indeed, a symbiotic flow continues to exist between the volunteer pools represented by churches, and the role of homelessness services as devices for the fulfilment of active Christian service.

This recognition and continuing collective volunteering needs to be further questioned, however, by a clear indication from our research that Christian motivation can in reality represent rather different ethical approaches and practices of volunteering. Although none of our interviewees (unsurprisingly) admitted to being a 'holier-than-thou Christian do-gooder' they did recognise some of these qualities in other volunteers, although this was by no means the norm. There were, however, distinct differences in the degree to which voluntary practices involved overt 'witnessing' and evangelism rather than quiet service which

made little or no demands of the homeless other. Kate's voluntary work as a night shelter host, for example, is part of her self-perceived role as 'a warrior for God' with 'evangelistic tendencies', and Lianne's work as a day centre volunteer can involve pulling people off the street and into the centre so that she can fulfil what is seemingly an evangelistic compulsion to witness to them, although she is clear in her refusal to 'force religion down their throat'. By contrast Rose (54, support service volunteer), Harry (80, night shelter volunteer), and Anna (70, night shelter volunteer) only refer to their Christian faith in terms of how they began volunteering rather than as immediately integral to their day-to-day practices as volunteers. So although Christian church networks suggest continuing collective forms of volunteering, the expression of Christian faith in volunteering practices is likely to vary significantly.

The second vector of motivation for participation as volunteers in this arena is the previous experience of being a service user. Several of our respondents linked their volunteering with motivation drawn from such experiences:

> 'I got involved cos of Meg, she's the founder … I know what it's like to sleep rough … Meg was good to me … If she met you on the streets … she'd get you a cup of tea or sandwich. That means a lot when you're down. I know what it's like to be there, and it's nice to show that we have respect for them (homeless people). They're humans like the rest of us'. (Edward, night shelter volunteer).

> 'Up until two years ago I was a heroin addict … and I went into a drug rehabilitation centre and cleaned up … I could see the real problem there was with homeless people on the streets and my heart felt for them … I just felt that I wanted to put something back'. (Don, 28, Detox outreach volunteer)

These connections with previous roles as service users offer complex motivational inducements for contemporary volunteering. Alongside the wish to 'give something back' there is a sense from these interviews that the transition from service user to volunteer can be part of a continuing 'getting back in' – a rehabilitation or meeting of needs for engagement in familiar, safe and even socially 'comfortable' places. There is also an expectation that such experience will be valuable in empathising with current service users, and for the individual volunteers themselves there may be an evangelistic fervour (Christian or otherwise) to pass on their life-changing experiences to others. Such experience and fervour can also, however be less valuable when it takes the form of seeking to 'control' situations that were previously 'out of control' for the individual concerned. Each of these possibilities can be significant in terms of the ethical freight carried by the volunteer into their practices and performances.

Whatever the strength of these particular vectors of self-other experience and ethics, volunteering is evidently cross-cut by myriad personal circumstances and consequent motivational traits. Thus Barbara (70, drop-in volunteer) began volunteering when her husband died, Ryan when his marriage broke up, Lianne when she received full-time sickness benefit and Rose when she retired. In cases such as these it seems reasonable to interpret volunteering as both a self-oriented 'filling of the gap' and an 'other oriented' making good use of unanticipated available time. This pointer towards a didactic relationship between selflessness and self-fulfilment is supported by seemingly oppositional discourses of camaraderie and difficulty which punctuate accounts of volunteering in practice. Many respondents confirm that their volunteering brings them positive benefits. Granville and Ryan, for example had been volunteering on a soup-run for 7 and 15 years, respectively. Their work was clearly sustained by a desire to support each other (and other close colleagues on the team) as well as a broad desire to "give something back" to society. Although they found it difficult to admit that they enjoy their volunteering, perhaps because they did not want to be seen as do-gooders, their enjoyment comes from an obvious camaraderie with other volunteers which compensates for the stress of working with such vulnerable people in often distressing circumstances.

These varied and complex motivations for volunteering are thought to be underpinned by a process of identification (Schervish and Havens, 2002) with particular others which prompt their desire to engage in a caring response. Notwithstanding the fact that many of our interviewees were 'serial volunteers' – engaging in a number of different voluntary projects through their lives, often contemporaneously – there was a strong sense of identification with homeless people in particular. For example, Alice (50, hostel volunteer) had given a beggar a can of food for his dog, and was then unable to direct another homeless man to the nearest homelessness service, so she asked a Big Issue seller for directions to the nearest hostel and promptly phoned them and offered to volunteer. Dick heard a TV bulletin that Caring for Christmas was desperate for volunteers, and his initial experience of homeless people motivated him to volunteer in a night shelter over the longer term. Richard began volunteering as a nightstop host after a young homeless man came into the church where he was preaching, and sat at the back, thus transforming an abstract issue into a concrete person. Responding to the man's request for help led to the more formal commitment. In many cases then, there does seem to have been a specific incident or circumstance which led volunteers to identify with homeless people and seek out a device through which they could participate in service provision. On other occasions the availability of the device itself, when valorised in particular social/ethical networks such as churches, is sufficient to attract those wishing to practice what they preach (or what is preached to them). Volunteering can therefore be seen both as a device which channels initial identification into action and as a means by which deeper and more complex forms of identification are opened out 'on the job'. Indeed initial identification can undergo complex changes – both

towards a greater compassion for the other, and towards a greater ambivalence or mistrust of the other – as participation in volunteering continues. As time passes, the power of identification may even gradually be replaced by less reflexive routine in which the focus of volunteering becomes a more complex and didactic negotiation between the self-fulfilling camaraderie and supportiveness provided by a loyalty to the organisation, and a self-giving practices of stressful engagement with vulnerable people in often distressing circumstances.

5. Discursive constructions of ethical citizenship

The volunteers interviewed in this research conveyed little of the New Labour idea that providing for needy others is a *duty* of the contemporary citizen. Julie's (30, night shelter volunteer) declaration that 'I don't like being told by Tony Blair that I should go and volunteer' signals a wider rejection of the rhetoric of volunteering as civic duty and good citizenship. Indeed, interviewees regularly distinguished between volunteering because they *wanted to* rather than because they felt *obliged to*. The latter sense of obligation tended to be linked with discourses about 'do-gooders' – a term which interviewees used to convey a segment of volunteers whose sense of duty left them ill-equipped for any lasting or useful work with homeless people. These distinctions complicate Allahyari's idea of moral selving, in that there seems to be clear evidence that they themselves tend to differentiate between levels of dutifulness and heartfelt motivation in the way in which volunteers use their volunteering to create a more virtuous identity.

Rather than dutiful citizenship, volunteering seems to be constructed discursively as a bringing of ordinary ethics into extraordinary situations. Volunteers choose to express ethical traits of giving (time, money, emotional energy) and connecting (to the otherness of others as well as of the limitations of themselves) through the opportunity to serve homeless people in different ways. Given the faith-based motivation of many volunteers, this sometimes also involves more specific Christian ethical freight being transported in serving the homeless. Thus Don carried with him a desire to show society's outcasts that they are loved and accepted:

> 'They really don't think that they are part of society … because people separate them out, and now that I have learned that I am loved, by God especially, and that there is nothing wrong with me, I want them to know that as well'.

Lianne felt "led directly into wanting to help others, and show them God's love". For Sally, her faith helped her 'not to judge people because you really don't know where they've come from and what their circumstances are' and for Richard and Molly volunteering as night stop hosts resulted in them 'confronting our value systems' which previously had been based on a strong moral framework, including the 'undeserving' nature seemingly represented by many homeless people. So while volunteers carry with them their ordinary ethical frames, these frames are in turn questioned and confronted in the didactic practice of serving homeless people.

Within this bringing of ordinary ethics into extraordinary situations there are a range of differences which mark out different volunteers as having different characteristics. One very significant distinction lies in the choice between 'front' and 'back' tasks within the services concerned. (Goffman, 1968) Take, for example, the night shelter which was a key site of participant observation in our research. It attracts a 'morning shift' of volunteers who work behind the scenes cleaning and setting up reading for the evening intake. We spoke to Carol (64), Daisy (60) Emma (70) and Bill (80) who were volunteers in the morning shift, undertaking work which does not involve encounters with homeless people, and is invisible to members of the public.

> Carol: Well we're not looking for glory! If we were, we'd become a JP or such like.
>
> Daisy: It's just that there was a shortage of cleaners.
>
> Emma: Before I retired, it had to be evening work … after I retired I slid into this.
>
> Bill: When folks come in, it's nice to see places clean and show that we have respect for them.
>
> Carol: Yes, that's right, and they're not clients they're guests.
>
> Interviewer: I guess if you're not necessarily involved in evening shifts, you might not get to see their appreciation of that … and yet you still do it.
>
> Daisy: Yes but we've all done evenings, haven't we and been spat at.
>
> Emma: If you're looking for appreciation, you're in the wrong place!

This morning shift, then, is able to express care and respect in a context where no direct encounter (appreciative or otherwise) with homeless people is possible or necessary. Interestingly, each had previously done evening shifts where encounter was integral, but had gravitated to the morning shift in search of continued service but in a less stressful setting where companionship and fun were inherent parts of the experience.

The evening shift at the night shelter also offers 'back room tasks' as well as more 'out front' work. The shelter's space is architecturally divided between the kitchen and serving area (out back) and the dining and sleeping areas (out front). The roles of volunteers tend to be shaped by these back and front areas, with some hardly venturing beyond the grilled serving hatch that connects the kitchen to the rest of the shelter, while others are unphased and even eager at the prospect of working 'out front' where homeless guests are to be found. As Kath told us:

> 'Some people don't like going out front because they find it intimidating. Other people just perhaps aren't confident enough to go out front, whereas I find out the front is … well it used to be a lot more interesting than it is now. They used to talk to you a lot more, whereas now they're much more doing their own thing. We used to have a lot more trouble as well'.

The discourses and practices of volunteering at the night shelter, then, are framed to some extent by these front/back distinctions. For some a form of service remote from contact with homeless people is desired, while others seek the interest of conversation and maybe even the challenge of dealing with 'trouble'. Both "out front" and "out back", regular volunteering in these circumstances of being nervous and scared, as well as often stressfully busy preparing meals with limited resources on a tight schedule, suggests motivation beyond simply the creation of a virtuous self. Although connections and relations with homeless people differ in terms of front and back roles, the overarching desire to be involved in a response to these people's need is a key factor. So while the ethical citizenship involved in bringing ordinary ethics into extraordinary service spaces will reflect different performative roles, emotions and expectations, the availability of different serving niches brings together potentially disparate volunteers around a common cause.

Just as volunteers gravitate between back and front roles, so other credentials are also flexible and dynamic. For example, we were told many tales of 'rookie' volunteers, fresh-faced, gullible and uninitiated in the practical interactions involved in serving homeless people. In particular, rookies being unfamiliar with rule regimes will leave themselves open to exploitation by worldly-wise service users, a situation which is informally policed by more experienced volunteers – Kath told us ' I tell them that they're new and that's not how they're to be spoken to and not to try it on' – and by other service users. Some of the protectiveness of rookie volunteers represents a self-interested preservation of the overall volunteer workforce – as Rob told us 'they may not ever volunteer again, and if that happens and we're short of volunteers then unfortunately we have to close'. Experienced volunteers, then, nurture rookies, who in time can quickly become experienced. Although turnover of volunteers is considerable, the persistence of individuals through the rookie stage and beyond is testimony both to them wanting to be there (as opposed to some of kind of conscience-salving duty) and to the ordinary ethics of care being practiced between volunteers as well as directed at homeless service users.

These different ways in which volunteers bring their ordinary ethics into service provision are reflected in the various and often ambiguous senses of the homeless other which co-constructed therein. Some volunteers, often ex-service users but also those who are long-serving and experienced, develop very detailed and deep knowledges of homeless lives, mixing a sharp realism with a refusal to blame the victim:

> 'A lot of them have given up on life and a lot of them are just out there waiting to die really. And it is pretty sad when they are really special people. When you chat to them some of the history of some of these guys – they really have lived amazing lives and just one tragic incident in their life and they are out on the streets and it can happen to anyone'. (Don)

Others recognise how volunteering has induced a sharp change in their perceptions as they have encountered and then 'got to know' homeless people. Dick told us how a broad identification with the problem of homelessness became amore personalised appreciation of particular homeless people:

> 'I've never had any sympathy for them (homeless people) before … But the more you get to know these people, and particularly the drug addicts you see they have to mix with the criminal classes to support their very unfortunate habit'.

More generally, however, volunteers often carry somewhat ambiguous attitudes towards homeless people. Granville and Ryan – the soup run volunteers – for example are used to meeting homeless people as groups as well as individuals, and their grasp of homeless peoples lives is a somewhat vague notion of how they are 'victims', alongside a sharper perception of the change from the old groups to 'gentlemen on the road' to more recent larger, younger more threatening groups of homeless people dealing with addiction and dependency. Indeed, there is evidence that they felt uncomfortable about the waning nature of their sympathy, which was only occasionally jogged by meetings with particular homeless individuals in particular 'deserving' cases such as vulnerable young women. By contrast, Richard and Molly – the night stop hosts – are used to meeting with individuals, and struggle with ambiguities between moral undeservedness and victimisation in the personal circumstances of such individuals:

> 'this Simon lad represented one end of the problem, which is the long term homeless … it's clear that he's had difficulty holding a job down … but there's the question that he came from a home where father remarried …'

> 'the young lady, I suppose she was 16 … she was pregnant. Obviously for me there's conflict … whether she's left home or she's been thrown out because she's pregnant. It's not our job to find out …'

Once again it can be argued that the ordinary ethics of volunteers frame and are framed by their encounters with homeless people, which will differ according to the type of service and the role played within that service.

It is clear from the above, that volunteering in the homelessness service sector is less of an expression of some kind of duty to political citizenship and more of a basic desire for an ethical citizenship by which the volunteers' ordinary concerns and ethical codes are brought into identification

with the needs of homeless people and are transported into the extraordinary situation of emergency service. Motivations vary, as does the seeking out of particular front or back niches in service spaces. Perceptions and knowledges of the lives and issues of homeless people also vary, although ambiguity between constructs of victim and culpability are often present. These various trajectories of difference suggest that any institutional ethics of the service organisations concerned are unlikely to be applied or practiced without significant filtering through the individual volunteers who often embody the sharp end of service provision outside the funded and professionalised sector. How, then, do institutional ethics interconnect with the ethical frames and practices of volunteers? Our research suggests three points of interconnection.

First, organisations can seek alignment of their overall goals and ethical proclivities through selective recruitment of volunteers. For example, some Christian-based services for homeless people will, by design or by routine practice, only recruit from church-based networks, the assumption being that key shared values will form the core of the enterprise. Certainly such recruitment may enable greater awareness of the organisation's ethos amongst volunteers, particularly in close-knit service forms such as a soup-run operated by a single church. Nevertheless, many Christian organisations recruit from a number of churches and our interviews clearly show significant diversity amongst faith-based volunteers particularly over the issue of whether service should include overt forms of evangelism. Secondly, organisations can align volunteers to their ethical positioning through training. Our research suggests that the training of volunteers to work in emergency services for homeless people is highly context-specific. The night-stop scheme, for example, involves introductory sessions, a training day, a manual with significant rules about what should and should not be done and a 24 h helpline to provide urgent advice. Understandably, given that volunteers serve homeless people in their own homes rather than in a centralised service, the organisation has found it necessary to provide a framework for practice. Even so, the night stop hosts we interviewed routinely reported incidences where they had broken these rules, exclusively to the benefit of their guests rather than to benefit themselves. More generally, however, volunteers in services such as night shelters, drop-in centres and soup runs received little formal training and so any institutional ethics had to be discerned through the day-to-day regulation and culture of the operation. Volunteers appeared to enjoy the potential flexibility which the lack of formal training enabled, although there are serious concerns in the wider context about the quality of care provided by untrained volunteers (May et al., in press). Overwhelmingly, however, volunteers feared that training would be associated with over-regimentation, professionalisation and the loss of an ability to make a unique personal contribution through the exercise of ethics and personality. The strength of these feelings poses significant questions about the power of institutional discourse in these cases.

Thirdly, volunteers can be aligned to organisational ethos through the rules imposed on how services are provided. Rules for the giving out of food and allocation of beds may appear to be relatively straightforward, but we heard consistent stories of how rules were interpreted differently by different volunteers, sometimes causing uncertainty and conflict over the continuity of service funding. Kath gives an example of this from the night shelter:

> 'The last thing we had was about extra beds and putting mattresses down … that they had done it on other nights, which is where sometimes if falls down if it's not consistent. And I will say to them, 'Health and Safety will only allow 15 beds' when actually we are allowed more. But that's the Health and Safety for the number of volunteers we had that night'.

Exercise of compassion or sympathy by bending such rules creates precedents from which other volunteers suffer. In the aggro which can ensure, institutional ethics of fairness and justice become complicated by individual acts of kindness. As with recruitment and training, then, there is scope for considerable slippage of organisation ethos as volunteers seek the flexibility to pursue their particular brand of ethical and personal connection with homeless people.

6. Performing care

The organisational spaces of emergency care for homeless people can be expected to be partially constructed from the ways in which organisational ethics are variously represented in, or transformed, by the ways in which volunteers bring their particular ordinary ethics to bear in their work. Yet although offering an understanding of how such ordinary ethics influence why volunteers present themselves in such spaces and what they are aiming to achieve through that presence, there can be no automatic assumption that the resultant space of care will be imbued by particular ethical characteristics. Indeed, it is clear that organisational spaces of care are performatively brought into being, not simply in terms of performing to impress, or performing routines but also in acting out care unreflexively and through improvisation during eruptions of non-routine events and practices (Conradson, 2003; McCormack, 2003). Our account thus far has been punctuated by performativities of various kinds, but here we draw on two examples to draw out more specific aspects of how volunteers perform their role.

Despite the fact that interviews are in many ways an inappropriate medium through which to record and understand these performativities, the accounts given by some of the volunteers about their interactions with homeless people do point to the significance of performing spaces of care. An interesting example can be seen in the way in which Kate – a night stop host – tries to make a new guest feel 'at home'.

> 'They always come with a (organisation) member, and they're introduced, and I try and break the ice

> straightaway by saying 'I'll put the kettle on, what do you want?' and 'while that's on shall we go round the house' … so when we go round the house I sort of make jokes and laugh with them – try and make them feel at home, and by the time you've got down again (because it's a three-storey house) the person who brought them has usually got on with making the tea and … they go off and then I find they relax. Cos I just say 'Do you wanna bath? Do you wanna have something to eat first? Tell me your plans – and then they open up and they're very shy in the beginning but it doesn't take them long. And I say 'If you wanna put your feet up, put your feet up' and I tell them the rules about smoking. I'm a non-smoker … but I say 'the veranda's free and if you really must smoke in the bedrooms, fine but can you sit near the window …?' Once they know that you're not going to be hard on them, they relax. And we laugh about the shower, the fact that they have to press the button down and put the knob on, and unless you do that it's too hot or cold, and we laugh about that'.

Kate's routines and improvisations performatively bring her home into being as a space of care. The tour of the house not only affords one-to-one conversation with the homeless guest (the organisation 'official' is immediately sidelined) but also acts out the house as a place of opportunity. Rules are conveyed, but the conversational emphasis is on what can be done, what does the young person want. Kate intersperses the performance with humour and fun. She is self-deprecating and seeks out ways for her guest to relax. Later she describes her act as treating the guest just like she would treat pals of her son. There is the caring mother here, but without the fussiness that can sometimes arise between mother and children. Kate weaves an acceptance and an ethic of (in her case Christian) care through the experience. As a result she offers her guest 'home-space' if only for the brief stopover, and she empowers her guest to treat the experience as something more than just a bed for the night. It is unsurprising that Kate keeps in contact with many of her previous 'guests' as a result of this kind of relational performance. Although some of her actions may reflect the organisational training given to night stop hosts, Kate brings particular performative capacities and affects to her caring.

The performance of care is perhaps more easily witnessed using participant observation. Our work as volunteers in a night shelter, for example, allowed us to record many instances of how spaces of care are performatively brought into being. For example, Sarah noted the stand-out performative qualities which accompanied Jilly's work as volunteer co-ordinator in the shelter:

> 'Jilly worked out back until opening and then oversaw proceedings out front. When watching her 'in action' one would almost think that she found the drunken blithers of some service users endearing – laughing with and teasing them patting them on the arm etc … Jilly seems to have a way of getting service users to do anything – even leave the premises – without upsetting/aggravating them. 'She had one guy hugging her a lot tonight. Rather her than me' (this a comment from another volunteer). One of the other volunteers laughed and said that she thought Jilly was a bit of a 'mother figure' to some of the service users'. (Sarah, participant observation, 13/02/02).

Although these kinds of performative relations are by no means dependent on the maternal role, and the gender relations attendant to that role, this example again illustrates the performance of a mother figure bringing the space of care into being. Jilly's passion for homeless people shines through in terms of her interactions with individuals which involve strong elements of embodiment along with laughter and teasing. Jilly performs endearment and as a result can carry that performed relationship into more difficult disciplinary areas involving the behaviour of service users. Jill's personal ethos is expressed in terms of Christian faith, but her ability to be charismatically endearing comes through her performance of endearment, perhaps embodying organisational and personal ethos, but by no means circumscribed by them. Our research thus suggests that spaces of care can usefully be understood as performatively brought into being, and that performativity represents yet further stretching of the scope provided by organisational and personal ethos. Performance of coping is, however, an essential element in the performance of caring in the environment of emergency service provision for homeless people.

7. Conclusion

Voluntary sector organisations are integrally implicated in the provision of emergency services for homeless people in the UK, yet mainstream service provision increasingly involves highly professionalised corporatist organisations in which there are less and less opportunities for volunteers to participate in meeting homeless people's needs (Clarke et al., 2000). However, alongside these corporatist organisations there remain myriad smaller and more traditional organisations whose vision relies on continuing images of on-street homelessness, and whose provision of services for these homeless people continues to rely on the resources of volunteers for their operation. These more traditional organisations tend to be poorly resourced, and outside of the formal joined-up governance of homelessness enabled by state organisation and funding (McDonald and Warburton, 2003; May et al., 2005). Indeed, the services provided by traditional organisations – usually involving the meeting of basic needs for food and a place to sleep – are those which have increasingly been stigmatised for keeping homeless people 'on the street'. It is interesting, then, that it is these marginalised and 'outsider' organisations which are the principal sources of opportunity for volunteers wishing to do something to help meet the needs of home-

less people. That part of the voluntary sector which has been embraced by the state as part of its third way discourse, is becoming closed off to individuals whose propensity to volunteer seems to match the state's valorisation of volunteering as civic duty and good citizenship. Instead volunteers are most able to contribute to that part of the voluntary sector which is out of state favour. Interestingly, whereas staff and management of marginalised services have a clear understanding of their disadvantageous place in the homeless service sector (May et al., 2005), there is little evidence that volunteers have knowledge of, or reflect on, the marginalised status of the organisations through which their volunteering occurs. This suggests that their self-evaluation of volunteering does not reflect or appreciate that the volunteer experience could potentially be easier and more professionalised in less marginalised service settings.

Volunteers can be branded socially as self-righteous do-gooders (Clary, 1996; Van Til, 1988), and in the academic context their activities have often been interpreted in terms of moral selving – the creation of a more virtuous and even spiritual self (Allahyari, 2000). Our research suggests that the motivation of volunteers is far more complex than these stereotypes convey, and that volunteering usually involves elements of giving and receiving (Bloom and Kilgore, 2003). There is certainly evidence from our interviews with volunteers that they derive benefit from their volunteering, which provides companionship, camaraderie, sociability, a boost for self-esteem and for some forms part of a process of personal rehabilitation. It is also clear that volunteering can become unreflexively habitual and that its focus can shift away from homeless people per se becoming instead a matter of loyalty to fellow volunteers and/or to the organisation concerned. Certainly volunteers will often hold ambivalent views about homeless people, acknowledging both their status as victim and as culpable individual. However, our research suggests that these self-serving motivations are almost always intertwined with some form of identification (Schervish and Havens, 2002) with the plight of homeless people, and that the participation of volunteers reflects that identification, not in terms of guilt, but in terms of giving something of themselves to others. Motivation, then, is didactically worked out as volunteers bring themselves into contact with homeless others.

We argue, therefore that volunteering can be interpreted as a way of bringing ordinary ethics into extraordinary circumstances. By ordinary ethics we refer to the complex everyday caring and relations with others which are widespread through society. Accordingly volunteering is not reducible to faith or political belief (although such factors can be important) but may be seen rather as a connection between ordinary ethics and an organised space of care, whereby individuals variously identify with the needs of particular others respond to particular devices which enable volunteer involvement. Despite the current political culture which seeks to promote volunteering as an integral part of what citizenship should entail, people volunteer because they want to, not because of any sense of obligation or civic duty, reflecting a form of ethical citizenship rather than political citizenship. We also suggest that volunteers will be reflexive in choosing particular suitable devices for volunteering (Hustinx and Lammertyn, 2003) – they will niche themselves in particular organisations and particular back/front roles (Goffman, 1968). This is not to say, however, that collective volunteering is unimportant. These reflexive choices will often be influenced by social networks such as churches.

A further finding from this research is that volunteers seek out flexibility. Far from being squeezed in marginalised organisations and roles, volunteers suggested that these organisations offered them opportunities to express their ethical citizenship without the perceived fettering of professionalisation, over-training and standardisation in service provision. There are potential disparities here between quality control for services, and favoured conditions for volunteers. Equally, the flexibility enjoyed by volunteers suggests that any enactment of overriding organisational ethos will be stretched significantly because volunteers often embody the organisation and represent it to users. While the organisation provides a device for volunteering, there is little evidence to suggest that this device is loaded ethically. Indeed, volunteer discourses are relatively silent on the matter of organisation ethics. In addition, from the point of view of the organisations concerned, the very pragmatics of operating a marginal voluntary organisation – unselective recruitment, little opportunity for training and potential inconsistency in the interpretation of rules – create inherent problems for implementing organisational, rather that personal ethics. Our research adds weight to the idea that spaces of care are performatively brought into being and that individuals, in this case volunteers, play a formative role in routinely or spontaneously performing care which characterises the service as a whole with far greater intensity than any organisation set of ethos ever could.

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