

“The Door to Knock On”

A Research Report about the Jewish Volunteering Network (JVN) Five Years after its Founding

August 2013

Margaret Harris



The **Jewish Volunteering Network (JVN)** is a national not-for-profit organisation and registered charity. It aims to promote volunteering and the voluntary sector within the UK Jewish community, and to advance the effectiveness and efficiency of charities, with regard to volunteering, for the benefit of the UK Jewish community. These aims are met through a matching service between volunteers and volunteering opportunities, various programmes and award schemes in the community, and independent research into the voluntary sector and the Jewish charity sector more specifically.

Author

Margaret Harris, Ph.D. is Emeritus Professor of Voluntary Sector Organisation at Aston University, Visiting Professor at Birkbeck, University of London and Senior Research Adviser to the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR). She completed her Ph.D. at the London School of Economics. Before entering academia, Margaret worked in local government and with Citizens' Advice. She is the author of numerous publications in the field of voluntary sector organisation and management including 'Organizing God's Work: Challenges for Churches and Synagogues' (Macmillan, 1999). Her current research interests include faith groups; volunteer recruitment and management; community associations; and the Olympic volunteering legacy. Margaret is a member of the JVN's Advisory Panel.

m.e.harris@aston.ac.uk

Foreword

This report was commissioned by the Jewish Volunteering Network as it moves into its fifth year of operation as a registered charity. It was imperative to the Board of Trustees, staff and funders to understand how it has met the needs of the community in relation to volunteering. As a cross-communal, national charity working in close collaboration with several separate charities and engaged with so many others, our enlightened Chairman and Board of Trustees believed that if we were not proving useful to the sector and the community and were duplicating services of others, we should indeed consider changing our operation.

Prof. Margaret Harris was asked as a professional in volunteer research to conduct the investigation and use focus group conversations as the preferred methodology.

All 60 member charities were invited to contribute by attending a focus group session. JVN staff were asked to take notes, whilst each focus group session was recorded.

I suggest this exercise is good practice for any charity or organisation, particularly those financed by charitable funding and those serving the widest needs of the community.

We could not predict the outcomes but certainly intend to build on the comments and recommendations, knowing we are a stronger organisation for having undertaken this exercise.

My thanks go to JVN Chairman David Lazarus for encouraging this process, to staff members Candice Woolfson, Lia Bogod and Mike Silverstone for note taking, to student volunteer Mark Bogod for listening and transcribing the audio recordings, and especially to Professor Harris, who is held internationally recognised as one of the foremost experts on the UK voluntary sector. Her work in conducting and writing up this report that went far beyond the call of duty. An example of wonderful and meaningful volunteering in action. Finally, of course, thanks to all participants who gave up their time to help JVN with this research project – and setting its future strategic direction.

Leonie Lewis

Director, Jewish Volunteering Network

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“The Door to Knock On”: A Research Report about the Jewish Volunteering Network (JVN) Five Years after its Founding

Executive Summary of Findings

- This report has been prepared as a contribution to JVN’s strategic review which is taking place five years after its founding. We report the findings from three focus groups conducted in the period April to June 2013. The purpose of the groups was to gauge the views of JVN’s ‘clients’ (individuals and organisations) about its current work, its possible future directions, and its future funding. (Paragraphs 1.1 to 1.2)
- Focus Group One comprised 14 representatives of medium to large charities which are members of JVN; nine volunteers participated in Group Two; and Group Three included ten people from small charities. (Paragraphs 2.1 to 2.6)
- Invited to share their images and impressions of JVN, participants’ tone was very positive. JVN was universally seen as an established and needed part of the Jewish community. Participants commented positively on specific JVN services eg matching people to volunteering opportunities; training and support for trustees and volunteer managers; and promoting volunteering within the Jewish community. They also valued more intangible JVN contributions including expansion of the range of volunteering opportunities; involvement of diverse and marginalised people; promoting good practice in volunteer management; supporting and advising small charities; and promoting Jewish values about service to the community. (Paragraphs 3.1 to 3.4)
- JVN is seen as independent, trustworthy and genuinely cross-communal. It is valued for its responsiveness but existing users are concerned that there is still too little awareness of JVN within the Jewish community more widely. (Paragraphs 3.5 to 3.7)
- The largest Jewish charities feel that they can, or could, provide for themselves many of the services currently offered by JVN. However, they value highly JVN’s specialist expertise on volunteering and its role in coordinating Jewish volunteer-involving charities. (Paragraphs 4.1 to 4.5)
- Smaller organisations find JVN invaluable for volunteer-matching, for facilitating networking between charities, for providing training and for its broad role as an umbrella or infrastructure organisation. (Paragraphs 4.6 to 4.7)
- Volunteers gave numerous examples of how JVN’s volunteer matching had impacted positively on their lives by, for example, providing work experience; offering new opportunities; and providing personalised support. (Paragraph 4.8)
- In all three groups there was an assumption that JVN is not only well established as part of the Jewish community, but that it will expand the range of its services and

continue as a much needed 'hub' for volunteers and volunteering. (Paragraphs 4.9 to 4.10)

- Group participants offered supportive suggestions about how to make what they saw as the current good services even better. Volunteers were particularly keen that more people should know about, and benefit from, JVN's matching service. In this connection, they made numerous suggestions about improving the user-friendliness of the JVN website. (Paragraphs 5.1 to 5.3)
- Participants from smaller organisations also made suggestions for improving the quality and range of existing services, including website improvements; screening of potential volunteers; promulgating best practice guidelines; more training provision; and more promotion of the volunteering idea. (Paragraphs 5.4 to 5.7)
- Group A participants hoped that JVN will expand its existing provision by collaborating with larger Jewish charities. They also want JVN to develop additional services and activities. Suggestions included a Jewish volunteering research and intelligence function; advice on organisational structure and strategy for Jewish charities; and 'virtual' training and networking facilities. (Paragraphs 5.8 to 5.13)
- Group B participants hoped that JVN will expand its offering to volunteers, for example providing orientation to volunteering and networking opportunities. Smaller organisations hope for help with promoting their organisations' work. (Paragraphs 5.14 to 5.15)
- There was widespread agreement that JVN should now promulgate a clear message about its core business and that the latter should be about the encouragement, support and coordination of volunteering in and for the Jewish community. (Paragraphs 6.1 to 6.4)
- Participants were receptive to the principle of JVN charging for some services but thought that charges should not be applied to its core business i.e. volunteer matching. Training and organisational consultancy were seen as more suitable services to charge for. (Paragraphs 6.5 to 6.10)

Summary of Key Findings and Considerations for JVN

- Key findings which merit further consideration by JVN's leadership include the following.
 1. Those who have used JVN's services in its first five years are appreciative and positive about the organisation.
 2. JVN is now seen as an established part of the Jewish charity scene, occupying a niche position.
 3. There is agreement that JVN's existing work could be built upon and expanded.
 4. Yet there is concern that JVN's current work is still not more widely known.
 5. There is agreement that the volunteer matching service is excellent and should be at the heart of JVN's future offer.
 6. Major improvements are now needed to the JVN website – especially in terms of user-friendliness and data collection capacity.
 7. After volunteer recruitment and training, JVN's networking role for Jewish organisations is most highly valued and now constitutes a key part of Jewish voluntary sector infrastructure.
 8. Smaller charities are relying on JVN to provide a range of support and infrastructure services without which they believe they could not survive.
 9. There is no consensus about what services JVN could charge for.
 10. JVN is respected and valued as an independent, trustworthy and genuinely cross-communal organisation. (Paragraphs 7.1 to 7.8)

- Key questions for JVN's leadership in the light of the findings include the following.
 1. In addition to the volunteer-matching function which is seen as JVN's core business, should JVN continue to perform the Jewish voluntary sector 'umbrella' function which it has taken on and which is highly appreciated, especially by smaller charities?
 2. Should consideration be given to establishing a more sophisticated membership system? If so, can differential rates be charged and what entitlements would membership bring?
 3. What kinds of training (if any) should JVN provide in the future, for whom and at what charge?
 4. What steps can JVN take to improve knowledge of its work within and beyond the Jewish community? (Paragraphs 8.1 to 8.5)

“The Door to Knock On”: A Research Report about the Jewish Volunteering Network (JVN) Five Years after its Founding

1. Main Report Introduction

1.1 The Jewish Volunteering Network (JVN) has been developing rapidly since it started more than five years ago. Its Board and senior staff recently embarked on a review of JVN’s achievements and challenges so far, in order to lay the foundations for decisions about JVN’s strategic direction in the future. The review comprised a number of activities, one of which was a series of three focus groups conducted between April and June 2013 with users of JVN’s services – both organisations and individual volunteers.

1.2 The purpose of the focus groups was to:

- a. Gauge the range of views amongst JVN’s main ‘client’ groups about JVN’s current work and services;
- b. Garner a range of views about possible future directions for JVN from people with experience of JVN’s work to date; and
- c. Explore ways in which JVN might ensure its future organisational sustainability, including by changing the portfolio of services currently provided and/or by charging for some services.

2. Research Approach

2.1 The first focus group (Group One) comprised representatives of medium to large charities. A list was drawn up of member organisations of JVN, of varying sizes and engaged in a range of fields. Personal invitations to attend a focus group to provide feedback to JVN were sent to individuals (within those organisations) who were known to have had some contact with JVN over the preceding five years (see Appendix 2). Fourteen people accepted the invitation and participated in this group which took place on 17 April 2013.

2.2 The second focus group (Group Two) took place on 18 April 2013. Again, personal invitations were sent out to named individuals and nine people attended; people who had registered with JVN since February 2013 and whose link with JVN was as volunteers and potential volunteers. Their ages, professional backgrounds and volunteering experiences were varied.

2.3 The participants in the third focus group (Group Three) were invited using a procedure similar to that used to recruit Group One participants. Ten attended. They were all from charities which varied as to size and field of work but all were from organisations smaller than the charities represented in Group One; mostly charities with very few paid staff.

2.4 All three focus groups took place at JVN's offices and were conducted in an informal atmosphere in which refreshments were provided and time was allowed for social interaction. (A combined list of the organisations represented by the participants in Groups One and Two is provided in Appendix 1).

2.5 As the facilitator of all three groups, the author of this report (see Appendix for biographical details) encouraged participants to address a number of topics – as individuals and also through engaging in discussion with each other. The topics were around perceptions of JVN's current and future work and JVN's role as an organisation within the Jewish community. Topics addressed were similar for each group, with variations to allow for the different backgrounds of individuals and varying circumstances of participants' contact with JVN.

2.6 In Part A of this report the findings from the three focus groups are set out thematically. The views presented should not necessarily be seen as 'representative' of JVN's clients or of the wider Jewish community. Rather, they are a reflection of the range of views currently existing amongst JVN's key client groups. Direct quotes (*in italics*) are used for illustration but speakers are not identified in order to preserve the anonymity of the focus group participants. In Part B of the report, some reflections by the author on the focus group findings and on the implications for JVN's future strategic direction are briefly presented.

Part A – The Findings from the Three Focus Groups

3. General Images of JVN

3.1 At the start of each focus group, and before participants were guided into detailed discussions about specific aspects of JVN's work; they were invited to share the images and impressions of JVN as an organisation which they were bringing to the table.

3.2 Although responses at this initial stage in the discussion must be treated with caution as they could only capture preconceptions and generalities, it can be noted that the overall message from all three groups was positive from the start. This was perhaps to be expected from people who had agreed voluntarily to take time to help JVN with its strategic review process. All the same, it is noteworthy that participants in all groups not only had positive things to say about what JVN has been doing to date, but also spontaneously moved into making suggestions about what JVN might do in the future to expand and strengthen its current portfolio of activities. They saw JVN as an established and needed part of the Jewish community landscape: *"The place to knock on the door is JVN"* and *"It occupies a niche area within the community"*. Thus participants generally were less interested in making negative comments than in suggesting ways that JVN might develop in the future.

3.3 For some participants their general image of JVN was closely linked to specific services which they had used or which they knew about; for example, the website and other facilities for matching volunteers to volunteering opportunities; training and support for volunteer trustees and volunteer managers; and the promotion of volunteering within the Jewish community: *"We wouldn't be able to service the community without an external organisation providing the volunteers"* and *"We get volunteer recruitment, management and support which is crucial for us."*

3.4 In addition to commenting on such specific services provided by JVN, participants pointed to more intangible and less easily measurable contributions which they perceived JVN to be making currently. Prime amongst these was JVN's role in increasing the number and range of volunteering opportunities, including giving people *"something they may not have thought about"*. JVN was also appreciated for raising the profile of volunteering (*"professionalising the concept of volunteering"*); raising the profile of volunteer-involving charities; easing individuals' pathway into volunteering in the community; involving diverse groups and otherwise-marginalised people; promoting good practice for involving and managing volunteers; giving support and advice to smaller and less well-known charities which do not have in-house expertise on volunteering matters; coordination between volunteer-involving charities; and promoting Jewish values about giving service to the community.

3.5 Participants were generally appreciative of the way in which JVN currently works. They saw it as an organisation which is independent (*"cross communal and non-partisan"*) but

also trustworthy, collaborative, flexible and innovative. It is an important source of “*expert advice*” for Jewish charities. It is also good at including people with disabilities and other special groups. Particular appreciation was expressed for the way in which JVN responds to individual requests and tailors responses and projects to demand: “*Each organisation gets a personal service*” and “*It’s the best kind of shidduch-making - based on knowledge of both parties*”.

3.6 For those focus group participants whose links with JVN were mainly as volunteers or potential volunteers, the extent to which they were appreciative of JVN was closely related to the extent of their satisfaction with the opportunities they had found through JVN. They were keen that more people should be made aware of JVN as an organisation and the services it provides. “*It’s not known enough... [a Jewish friend of mine] wanted to volunteer and she didn’t even know about it.*”

3.7 For those associated with, or concerned about, smaller charities, JVN was particularly appreciated for the support, expert advice and networking opportunities it provides: “[Smaller charities] *get more publicity through partnership with JVN*” and JVN’s activities are seen as “*an opportunity for lesser known charities*” to attract needed volunteers.

4. What Participants are Getting from JVN Now

4.1 When asked to describe what they or their organisations were currently getting from JVN, an extensive list was generated by each of the three groups. As individuals, participants each had their own limited list of what JVN provides for them but the combined lists developed in each Group were wide ranging, reflecting varied knowledge and experience of the many aspects of JVN’s work in practice. Participants commented on how the Group discussions enabled them to broaden their own view of what JVN could offer them and their respective organisations.

4.2 The combined list of JVN services developed by Group A (mostly participants from medium and larger Jewish charities) included:

- Help with volunteer recruitment
- Advice on volunteer management and retention “*JVN has helped to train our staff in how to engage and retain volunteers from year to year*”
- Trustee development and training
- Opportunities for networking and coordination between charities on volunteering matters “*We pool our expertise and experiences for the benefit of the community.*”
- Placement opportunities
- Pro-active searches for specific kinds of volunteers and volunteering opportunities “*If it hadn’t been for JVN one or two of my organisation’s positions wouldn’t have been filled.*”

4.3 The largest of the Jewish charities felt that they can provide for themselves (that is, 'in-house') many of the advice and expert services currently offered by JVN. For them the main benefits of JVN were facilitation of coordination and networking between charities, as well as the provision of tailored services in response to specialist requests. *"It's not a matter that JVN is delivering a service that we take but more that we have a mutual benefit [through] collaboration."*

4.4 Some participants pointed out that the benefits provided by JVN do not only accrue to individual charities; they also accrue to the Jewish community as a whole in terms of more cohesion within the community and links between the Jewish community and the wider community. *"JVN shows Jews that they are part of the wider community."*

4.5 All participants in Group A were keen to see JVN move beyond basic provision of services of the kind they had listed (but did not necessarily need themselves, depending on their organisational size). Suggestions made are described in the next section of this report.

4.6 Group C participants, who were generally from smaller charities than those of Group A participants, most frequently thought of JVN as *"the place to go to for volunteers"*. It is seen also as a networking facilitator, and as a training provider; not only training for trustees and volunteer managers but also training in fundraising and in use of social media.

4.7 Group C participants were especially appreciative of functions performed by JVN as an 'umbrella' for smaller charities; for example, publicising the very existence of their charity; opening the doors to places such as schools and volunteer fairs which they would not otherwise have known about or been able to access; and providing a 'one stop shop' when they did not know where to go to for help or support.

4.8 Group B participants (volunteers and potential volunteers) were more closely focused on how JVN has influenced their personal experiences of volunteering. They appreciated the tangible services offered to them by JVN in matching them to volunteering opportunities (especially personalised help and a wide range of ideas) but were most keen to express the personal impact on them of the services offered and available; the difference that JVN had made to their lives by helping them to volunteering opportunities. Such personal impacts included:

- Provision of work-relevant experience (*"building my CV"*)
- Experience of working in teams
- Opportunities to be aware of a range of opportunities and to try new things *"The moment I saw JVN it was a whole new world opening up."*
- A sense of personal achievement
- A sense of being encouraged, supported and responded to as an individual by JVN staff. *"I did feel very supported...I could actually call, make a contact and speak to*

someone. ... and it gave me new thoughts about what volunteering could offer and what it would bring me as well."

- Feeling a part of the Jewish community ("*being supported within my community*"; *fitting in*" and knowing that the atmosphere will be "*familiar to me from my own community*".)

4.9 In all three Groups there was an assumption that JVN was not only well established as part of the Jewish Community and the Jewish volunteering scene but that it would expand the range of its services in coming years and continue to develop as a 'hub' for volunteers and volunteering. JVN is valued for its responsiveness to the community, organisations and individuals; and for the way it has lowered barriers to volunteering and raised the profile of volunteering. "*It's totally unique in what it does within the Jewish community*".

4.10 Many participants were proud of the way in which JVN had '*shown that Jews are part of the wider community*'. The corollary was that "*In a moral way the community needs JVN ... volunteering is at the heart of Judaism and the community should have it.*"

5. Doing it Better

5.1 From the start of each Focus Group, participants were keen to offer JVN their thoughts about how to improve the quality and range of its existing services. It should be noted, however, that participants' comments on this topic were made from a firm basic viewpoint: that existing services are highly valued and that JVN is now seen as an integral and core part of the Jewish community. Thus participants approached the topic of 'what can JVN do better?' as supportive friends and advisers who simply want to make a good organisation and good services even better – more responsive and more extensive.

Improving the quality and range of existing services

5.2 Group B participants were generally keen that JVN should be able to extend to other individuals the benefits that they themselves had received. Thus they were hoping to see an expansion in JVN's existing services driven by better publicity: "*It's not advertised enough, not known enough*".

5.3 There was much discussion in all groups, but especially amongst the volunteers, about, on the one hand, improving the user-friendliness of the matching facility on the JVN website and securing detailed information about the expertise of potential volunteers; and, on the other hand, about ensuring that there was a personal telephone service available for those who were less comfortable with IT or who had specialist needs. Detailed suggestions for improving the website matching facility included simplifying the search process ("*it felt so complicated, it felt so detailed and demanding*"); allowing potential volunteers to state skills, preferences and priorities; improving the accuracy of the vacancy descriptions; advertising 'opportunities of the week'; and allowing people to search for opportunities by organisation. It was also suggested that the log-in font should be larger, that there should

be a facility for reminding people of passwords; and that telephone contacts should be prominent for those with queries or experiencing problems.

5.4 Group C participants from the smaller charities echoed a number of the suggestions from Group B in focusing most of their comments on how to improve the existing volunteer matching service. They too thought that the website should give more opportunities for volunteers to describe their skills and aspirations and, likewise, they wanted more opportunity for individual organisations to provide information about themselves on the JVN website. They also thought the JVN website could be expanded to provide more signposting to other resources beyond JVN itself.

5.5 Group C also wanted JVN to be more involved in 'screening' potential volunteers – perhaps as a particular service which organisations could request. They envisaged a role for JVN in checking references, doing risk assessments and finding out the details of the background of potential volunteers: *"We don't know anything about the people who come through JVN – they're strangers really"*. This service, they thought, might have the added benefit of minimising the number of potential volunteers who turned out to be unsuitable for their particular organisations.

5.6 Group C also saw a role for JVN in 'managing expectations'. For example, they wondered whether JVN could do more to prepare people for possible rejection for a particular volunteering opportunity. Likewise they thought JVN could have a role in preparing smaller charities to follow best practice in involving volunteers. This latter point chimed with suggestions by Group B participants who felt that JVN should take a quality control role in relation to volunteering opportunities; for example checking that opportunities are actually suitable for volunteers and that organisations seeking volunteers are well run and behaving ethically. *"JVN has to filter its opportunities to make sure they are appropriate."*

5.7 In addition to wanting a more sophisticated matching service, Group C participants were looking to JVN to provide more training opportunities for their staff and volunteers (including repeating courses on a cyclical basis). They were also keen for JVN to promote the idea of volunteering within the Jewish community and for JVN to be the public face of Jewish volunteering beyond the community: *"You can never do enough promoting"* and *"[JVN should] emphasise the ethics of volunteering"*.

5.8 Some of the representatives from the larger charities in Group A were keen to emphasise that JVN could improve and expand its existing provision by collaborating more with the larger Jewish charities, encouraging networking between Jewish organisations, and encouraging larger Jewish charities to help smaller ones. *"Use the large organisations and what they can bring to other organisations."* This approach, it was suggested, could also help JVN to widen the geographical areas it covers.

5.9 A few participants in Group A went further and wondered whether a consortium of larger Jewish charities could in fact take over much of what JVN currently does. In response to this suggestion, others in the Group pointed out that even if there were such a consortium there would still be a need for some dedicated staff.

Developing and providing additional services

5.10 Whereas Group B and Group C participants were mostly keen for JVN to improve and develop existing core services around volunteer recruitment and training, Group A participants had a number of suggestions for additional services that they would welcome; in some cases because many of JVN's existing services are not needed by larger charities with their own in-house expertise. Thus several Group A participants were keen to see JVN provide 'research and intelligence' functions related to volunteering; for example, systematic data collection and analysis about recruitment and retention across the Jewish community; and more knowledge building around characteristics, motivation, needs and commitment of volunteers: *"Find out why people are volunteering; find out what they need"* and *"Statistical analysis – what are the ages, is there a spike in a certain group?"*. Some mentioned particular questions about volunteering in the Jewish community which it would be helpful to have addressed by research; for example how volunteering patterns change over the life cycle and why some expressions of interest in volunteering do not translate into volunteer commitment.

5.11 Group A also suggested that JVN should offer advice and support of various kinds to Jewish charities, particularly smaller ones which do not have specialist expertise in-house. Such advice, it was suggested, should include not only good practice guidance in relation to volunteers, but also, for example, advice on mergers and other organisational challenges; information about current public policies affecting charities such as changes in criminal record checking procedures; and encouragement of new enterprises and innovation. One participant thought that such advice could be provided by a JVN scheme to get experts on volunteering to give advice 'pro bono'; for example, by *"creating a pool of experts on volunteering that charities can call on"*. Where JVN could not itself provide advice, it was hoped that it could at least provide information sheets on frequently-arising topics and/or signposting to specialists – an idea echoed in Group C's discussions.

5.12 There was some discussion and disagreement within Group A about whether the Jewish community needs its own facility on all issues to do with volunteering and whether people should be encouraged to make more use of generic organisations such as the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. This point was also raised in Group C where participants were hoping that JVN could act as a link between them and national organisations which provide services to the voluntary sector, including training, guidance and signposting to specialist expertise and training.

5.13 There was interest in Group A in JVN providing 'virtual' training and networking opportunities for volunteer-involving organisations; extending its services to reach beyond North London; coordinating Jewish community initiatives on volunteering; and doing more to encourage involvement of non-Jewish volunteers. There was a suggestion that JVN should develop a pool or data base of volunteers willing to work occasionally on specific activities for a range of charities ('episodic' or 'event' volunteering).

5.14 Group B participants thought that JVN should offer volunteers and potential volunteers orientation to volunteering; for example the values underpinning it; how it is organised and regulated; good management practice and why organisations involve volunteers. They would also welcome opportunities to meet other volunteers as well as training on general topics relevant to volunteers such as ethical behaviour; IT skills; and moving from volunteering to paid work.

5.15 An additional service that Group C participants would like JVN to provide relates to publicity. As their own resources for publicising themselves are so limited they would like JVN to provide publicity for their organisations at the same time as it publicises itself: *"Partnering for publicity e.g. in Jewish News"*.

6. Developing JVN as an Organisation

6.1 As volunteers and as representatives of Jewish charities, participants were generally well aware of the challenges of funding and developing Jewish communal organisations including JVN. On this topic too, many suggestions were offered – but always in a spirit of support and cooperation and in the context of the high value placed on the work that JVN currently does.

Suggestions around JVN's strategic direction

6.2 Group A and Group C participants were keen for JVN to identify more clearly its core business: *"we need a clear message about what JVN does"*. Most thought that JVN's core business should be the encouragement, support and coordination of volunteering in and for the Jewish community. *"May be the job of JVN is to bring [organisations] together and show how to collaborate on a formal basis."* This latter point reflected the esteem which attaches to JVN because it is seen as truly cross-communal and set apart from community 'politics'. Group C participants emphasised that any future structure of JVN should ensure its continued status as a cross-communal charity.

6.3 Alongside clarifying its core business, Groups A and C thought JVN should take care not to duplicate services or activities which are, or could be, provided by other organisations – including other volunteer-involving organisations within and beyond the Jewish community and other voluntary sector umbrella or coordinating bodies.

Suggestions around PR and Marketing:

6.4 Group A participants (mostly from larger and medium organisations) felt that if the 'core business' or 'USP' was clear and focused on providing services around volunteers, it would be possible to sell a clear message to potential funders, including community philanthropists: *"Play on the USP and go out and sell it"*. Related to this, Group A thought that the JVN 'brand' needed further development and that it should proudly identify JVN's responsiveness to the needs of the Jewish community. *"As a brand, the word JVN is linked to volunteering. Work out what the mission is and then redefine what the brand is."*

Suggestions around funding, fundraising and fees

6.5 Focus Group participants were generally receptive to the idea of JVN charging for some of its services although there was no consensus about which services are suitable for charging and which should be free or subject to a voluntary donation. Some participants were uneasy about JVN charging for its mainstream services. *"Should you be charging for the core thing you were set up to provide?"* Others pointed out that the organisations which most need support from JVN (mostly smaller charities) are likely to be the ones which are least likely to be able to pay for those services. *"Will the JVN end up losing those they are helping the most?"*

6.6. Training for volunteers and volunteer managers was seen by both Groups A and C as a service which JVN could and should provide but which JVN should also charge for: *"People value stuff if they pay"*. It was also thought that organisational consultancy could be a charged-for service and that recruitment of volunteers for events could be a good source of new income for JVN. At the same time, Group A participants pointed to a general reluctance in the Jewish community to pay for services and warned that where services are charged for there may be higher expectations about quality and accountability: *"If you are buying a service you expect a return on your investment"*.

6.7 Group A participants (themselves all from charities which are currently members of JVN), as well as Group C participants from the smaller agencies, discussed JVN's existing concept of 'membership'. They all thought there should be different categories of organisational membership and that each category should offer specific and clear member benefits – leaving members the option to pay for additional services they needed. The possibility was raised that 'non-member organisations' should then pay for all the services they obtain from JVN, although many were uneasy about the possibility that charges might be set at different levels for different 'customers' (volunteers and charities) or even waived for some.

6.8 Group A also discussed the responsibilities of the larger Jewish charities in relation to JVN. Some participants thought that the larger charities – individually or as a consortium - could actually take over most of the work currently done by JVN and carry the cost of it.

Others thought, however, that the larger charities should be willing and able to make a financial contribution to the running costs of JVN, as a contribution to the general good of the community rather than as an exchange for services.

6.9 The services and benefits which JVN currently provides for smaller charities, which are now seen as crucial for their sustainability, was a topic which was never far from the discussions in Groups A and C about funding for JVN. Contemplating the challenges of JVN obtaining core funding on a long term basis, Group A participants wondered whether JVN might need to move *“away from being totally voluntary to being a consultancy service that small organisations could tap in to”*.

6.10 Group B participants (volunteers and potential volunteers) did not think it was feasible to consider charging volunteers for the matching service; costs of matching needed to be borne by the recruiting organisations: *“It costs me to volunteer so to pay on top of it, I couldn't stomach it “*. However, they did not rule out the possibility of charging a fee for access to the matching website over a defined period or requesting donations from volunteers who were successfully placed with charities. And Group A participants thought it would be feasible for JVN to charge charities for placing interns (as distinct from volunteers).

Part B – The Findings and their Implications for JVN

7. Key Emerging Findings

7.1 In the context of JVN's current efforts to review its achievements and plan its future direction, some of the findings from the focus groups seem to merit special consideration by JVN's senior managers and lay leaders.

7.2 Those who have used JVN's services during its relatively short life time are generally very appreciative and positive about JVN as an organisation. They also see it as an established part of the Jewish voluntary and charity scene, occupying a valued niche position. There is wide agreement that JVN's existing work in the area of volunteer recruitment and training could be built upon, refined and expanded.

7.3 Yet there is concern about how few Jewish people know about the work of JVN and what it can offer. The hope is that more people can benefit from the services it offers, especially in relation to recruiting volunteers, providing training for volunteers and volunteer managers and promoting the idea of volunteering within the Jewish community.

7.4 There is wide agreement that the volunteer 'matching' service is excellent and should be at the heart of JVN's 'offer'. Charities which have used the service are appreciative and volunteers who have been successfully placed are keen to thank JVN and recount how it has impacted on their lives. All the same, the main users of the JVN website, which is at the

heart of its matching service, feel that major improvements are now needed to the website in terms of user-friendliness and data collection capability.

7.5 After volunteer recruitment and training, the aspect of JVN's current work which is most valued is its networking role; facilitation of linkages between Jewish charities and between Jewish charities and the wider community. Volunteers would also welcome JVN taking a role in facilitating networking for volunteers. Although this networking facilitating function is not – from a JVN strategic perspective – an essential part of the volunteering matching work which JVN does, it is now seen as a key pillar of Jewish voluntary sector infrastructure.

7.6 The very largest Jewish charities feel that they could in part manage without JVN but some of the smaller charities are dependent on JVN not only for help with volunteer recruitment and training but also for a range of other support and advice services. It seems that JVN is currently providing infrastructure support which is sorely needed – at least by the many smaller to medium sized Jewish charities.

7.7 There is little objection in principle to JVN charging organisations for training provision. There is less consensus about what other services could be charged for, about how a JVN membership scheme might work, and about appropriate levels of charging.

7.8 There are some hard-to-measure but highly appreciated aspects of how JVN currently works, including the sense of a personalised and responsive service, the way it promotes the idea of volunteering, and the recognition that it is a truly cross-communal and trustworthy organisation.

8. Key Questions for JVN's Leadership

8.1 These findings send clear signals to JVN's leaders about which areas of its current work are most valued and in which areas JVN has found its niche over its short life-span. They also raise some questions which should perhaps be tackled as part of the JVN's strategic review process.

8.2 There seems to be a clear need within the Jewish community for some means by which volunteer-involving organisations and other charities can share good practice, support each other, and obtain information about current trends and available resources. This kind of facilitating or 'umbrella' or 'infrastructure' role seems to have fallen to JVN in recent years; partly because nobody else is seen to be doing it within the Jewish community and partly because JVN is trusted and respected as a cross-communal, non-partisan organisation. The question for JVN now is whether it wants to continue to perform this role and, if so, to what extent and how it should be funded.

8.3 Although there is apparently no objection in principle to JVN making charges for some of its services, there was no emerging consensus from the focus groups about which services can or should be charged for or at what levels. JVN may need to commission very specific

market research to establish best options for a charging policy. However, before it does so, it might be helpful to consider the possibilities around establishing membership systems; ones that would include entitlement to some benefits without further charges.

8.4 This might be an appropriate moment for JVN to consider which kinds of training it should provide in the future and for whom. In considering this question, JVN might want to take into account a number of factors which have emerged from the focus groups including: costs and charging; whether to provide only training which is directly relevant to the core mission of volunteering; and how far JVN could simply signpost potential trainees to generic services provided for the wider community.

8.5 Finally, it seems that JVN's leadership needs to think about whether it needs to invest even more in its own marketing and communications strategy. The focus group data suggest that, despite additional efforts made in the last year to increase knowledge of JVN, there is still a feeling that many people who could benefit from its services do not know about the organisation.

Appendix 1

Participants in Groups A and C came from the following organisations:

All Aboard
Board of Deputies
Eemunah
GIFT
JAMI
Jewish Care
JLGB
Jewish Women's Aid (JWA)
Judith Trust
LEAD (Jewish Leadership Excellence and Development)
London School of Jewish Studies (LSJS)
Maccabi GB
Mitzvah Day
Nightingale
Norwood (2)
Paperweight
René Cassin
Reuth (2)
TAG
WIZO
World Jewish Relief

Appendix 2

Example invitation letter:

March 8th 2013

Dear CX

I am writing to you personally to ask for your help with a review of activities which JVN is going to be doing in the next few weeks.

It is now just over 5 years since JVN was formed. In that time, and with your help, we have grown, developed and responded to changing needs. Now we feel it is time to find out whether we are doing the right things to support your charity and its volunteer needs. And we would really appreciate your help with this.

Over the next few weeks we will be conducting research, including some focus groups, to look at JVN's current approaches – including how it communicates its 'brand' and what it has to offer charities like yours. So we would like to invite you, as one of a small number of Charity Directors, to participate in a small focus group on 17 April from 12 noon to 2.00pm. We know you are busy and so we would like to offer you a working lunch on that day to minimise the time you need to be away from your own work.

The findings from our research will be used to develop a coordinated strategy which will form the basis of our future development. Your input into this process is important to us and so I do hope you will feel able to accept my invitation.

Best regards

Leonie Lewis
Director



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Wohl Campus for Jewish Education
44a Albert Road
London
NW4 2SJ

www.jvn.org.uk
020 8203 6427
info@jvn.org.uk

Chair of Trustees: David Lazarus
President: Rosalind Preston OBE
Director: Leonie Lewis