

Review of
Voluntary Sector Organisations
(Community Learning and Development)

The Girls' Brigade Scotland

13 February 2009

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1. Introduction

In April 2008, the Scottish Government (SG) commissioned HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) to undertake a review of The Girls' Brigade Scotland (GB). HMIE and SG agreed the quality and performance indicators to be used in the review from the framework of indicators within the HMIE publication *How Good Is Our Community Learning and Development?* (HGIOCLD²). The fieldwork for the review took place between September and November 2008.

HM Inspectors visited and interviewed stakeholders in the work of GB Scotland in Renfrew, Airdrie and Bearsden. They interviewed headquarters staff and senior adult volunteers including the National President, the National Director, the National Treasurer and the National Chaplain. They analysed questionnaire responses from 12 internal stakeholders and five external stakeholders.

2. Context and background

The Girls' Brigade in Scotland is a Christian, inter-denominational organisation, operating throughout Scotland at local, divisional and national level. Membership is open to girls and young women from across the social and economic spectrum; from all faiths or none and from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. It seeks, wherever possible, to include those who are challenged by physical or mental disability. The key objects of the organisation are as outlined in the Constitution:

'...to help girls become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and through self control, reverence and a sense of responsibility, find true enrichment of life. This is done by the formation, development, encouragement and support of local groups (known as companies) for the purposes of training and encouraging girls to follow the standard set by the Lord Jesus Christ for the whole of life and to provide positive Christian teaching and education in the development of individual capabilities, skills and understanding of the social challenges facing young people as they grow in wisdom and stature, such education and teaching to include respect for other religions and the promotion of social harmony, equality and diversity in society.'

In 2007 there were 7,300 girls and 1,800 young women in membership of GB companies in Scotland. They are supported by an impressive 2,000 adult volunteer leaders. GB Scotland benefits significantly from the skills and abilities of former youth members who return to give something back to young people in their communities. These volunteers are supported by a small team of three full-time and seven part-time staff based at the Scottish Headquarters in Glasgow. Membership of GB Scotland had been in decline for a number of years. However, senior volunteers believed that improved promotional work would result in this decline being arrested.

3. Key strengths

- The quality and impact of GB Scotland programmes on girls and young women.
- The impact in churches and communities of Brigaders' service to others.
- The contribution made to the development of girls and young women by a large number of enthusiastic and committed adult volunteers.

4. How well did the Girls' Brigade Scotland meet the needs of its stakeholders?

How well did the Girls' Brigade Scotland impact on young people?

Girls and young women gain important skills and qualities from their engagement with GB Scotland. Many of those who engage with the movement develop a strong and lasting commitment to GB Scotland work. Through their activities, members are kept safe, active, healthy, respected and responsible. Engagement in GB companies contributes significantly to leadership development for young women, providing increased levels of confidence and self-esteem. Some former Brigaders have taken up posts in public services such as teaching. GB Scotland has a good record of engaging young women in achievement awards such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Queen's Award, the highest award available to young women within the movement. Girls and young women were well motivated through involvement in local and national competitions. Companies used effective approaches to peer mentoring that resulted in confidence building and positive relationships between different age groups. Younger girls responded well to programme activities led by their older peers. Young leaders were well able to reflect on their learning and identify their personal growth. Brigaders were less reflective about their experiences and could be given more opportunities to think about and build upon the outcomes of their learning. GB Scotland could be more engaged with other local organisations to maximise the contribution they are making in some places for girls who are vulnerable or who have additional support needs.

The quality of learning experiences for young people and adults was well developed. The badge and award schemes for young people provided learning experiences that built confidence and skills and provided a range of learning experiences in the outdoors, in arts and drama, in learning through games and in practical skills like car maintenance or how to manage your finances. Adult leader training was well structured and provided appropriate knowledge and skills for adult leaders. Leaders felt well supported by the wider organisation through monthly meetings and ideas to develop and improve programmes. Effective monitoring of trends in membership showed continuing reductions in membership. Senior staff and volunteers thought this may have bottomed out or even may upturn this year due to new units being established. Commendably, GB Scotland was working collaboratively with other uniformed youth organisations to provide management training across the four uniformed youth organisations.

The capacity of GB Scotland to demonstrate improvements in outcomes over time was not well developed. GB Scotland was delivering important outcomes for girls and young woman and for communities but was unable to demonstrate clearly the difference it was making. More systematic approaches need to be taken to recording and analysing trends in young people's achievements and demonstrating the impact of GB Scotland in communities. Planning is insufficiently outcome focused to inform effective evaluation.

How well did the Girls' Brigade Scotland impact on communities?

Community service is embedded as a key aspect of the work of GB Scotland. This resulted in a wide range of significant impacts on local communities by adult volunteers and girls. Activities included environmental projects, church events and befriending of vulnerable older people. Many community activities were conducted in partnership with local churches. GB Scotland contributes significantly to local and wider fundraising for good causes. Adult volunteers made a significant contribution to their communities through volunteering. However, networks and relationships with other voluntary organisations and public services were generally not well developed. In particular, GB Scotland is well placed to provide support for some girls and young women who are vulnerable, yet does not generally have the links at local level to facilitate this. GB Scotland currently has anecdotal evidence of impact on communities but this needs to be developed further.

How well did the Girls' Brigade Scotland impact on staff and volunteers?

Adult volunteers were highly motivated, confident in their roles, dedicated and committed. They felt valued by the organisation. They were also positive about the support they received from the Scottish HQ. Staff were also highly motivated and committed to the vision and values of GB Scotland. Most had been members of the organisation over many years. Staff had too few systematic opportunities to identify their training and development needs and to have these needs met. For example, they would benefit from more opportunities to share practice and keep abreast of developments in work with young people. Adult volunteers felt appropriately trained and supported. GB Scotland's interest in securing accreditation for their training programmes should be pursued. In this way, adult leaders could secure qualifications that would be transferrable to their working lives.

5. How effective was the Girls Brigade in key aspects of management?

Inclusion, equality and fairness

Commendably, GB Scotland was operating in some of the most disadvantaged communities in Scotland. They were providing safe and supportive opportunities for girls and young women, some of whom had additional support needs. Scottish HQ provided brief, useful guidance notes for adult volunteers on a wide range of additional support needs to enable them to support girls effectively. Local companies had sufficient flexibility to ensure that national fees and the costs of uniforms did not act as a deterrent for members living in more disadvantaged areas. Senior staff and volunteers were aware that GB Scotland needed to increase

participation of girls and young women from black and minority ethnic communities. They also needed to improve networking at local level to promote opportunities to more vulnerable girls and young women.

Participation of service users and other stakeholders

Constitutional change in 2007 had been fully consulted on across the network of adult volunteers. In addition, GB Scotland, in a bid to improve recruitment, had engaged The University of Stirling to consult with members about aspects of modernisation. Young leaders had good opportunities locally to meet with others and contribute to programme development. However, senior staff and volunteers acknowledged that the inclusion of girls and young women within the decision making processes of the organisation at national level was not well developed. Despite the introduction of a communication strategy in November 2007, staff and volunteers still identified communication within the organisation as a significant issue.

Operational planning

GB Scotland's three-year operational plan was clear and progress was reported to SG on a six-monthly basis. Planning for sustainability was embedded, thorough and well considered. However, whilst the need for strategic planning had been recognised, progress in developing a plan had been slow. In taking this next step, senior staff and volunteers need to ensure that plans are outcome focused and measurable. They also need to ensure that the strategic plan is effectively consulted on to secure commitment to it across the organisation. GB Scotland is making a good contribution to key strategic outcomes for Scotland. In its strategic and operational planning it may be useful to link the organisation's expected outcomes to those being pursued by Scottish Government and other public services in Scotland. In particular, senior staff and volunteers need to be alert to the contribution GB Scotland makes to the capacities of *Curriculum for Excellence* in its members.

6. How effective was the leadership of the Girls' Brigade Scotland?

GB Scotland had a good grasp of its strengths and areas for improvement. It had made progress in taking forward strategic issues in the past few years. For example, senior staff and volunteers had effectively managed constitutional change and had improved marketing and promotion. Approaches to risk management were effective. However, the lack of a strategic plan limited the overall effectiveness of GB Scotland in moving forward its role in youth work in Scotland and its contribution to significant national outcomes.

7. What is the Girls' Brigade Scotland's capacity to improve?

GB Scotland has a long tradition of supporting and developing girls and young women in Scotland. It is well managed and delivers effectively for those who are attracted to the movement. The impacts of their work on girls, young women and communities are significant. They contribute to building the capacities of *Curriculum for Excellence* in those who engage with them. They also make important

contributions to the social capital within the communities where they operate. However, the organisation is not well known to the general public. It is also insufficiently engaged with the wider voluntary and public sector at local level. As a result, opportunities for partnership work are not being realised. GB Scotland has the capacity to improve if it tackles systematically the challenges that senior staff and volunteers know need to be addressed.

8. Main points for action

GB Scotland should act on the following recommendations:

- Improve strategic planning to focus the work of GB Scotland over the next few years on key outcomes linked to national priorities.
- Improve communication and consultation across the organisation to ensure that adult volunteers are fully engaged with key organisational priorities.
- Engage girls and young women in decision-making at national level within GB Scotland.
- Improve monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate more fully the impacts of GB Scotland and provide a basis for continuous improvement.

9. What happens next?

In view of the generally positive findings of this review HMIE will disengage from the review process. It recommends that GB Scotland takes forward the main points for action above.

Jim Rooney
Managing Inspector
HMIE

Appendix 1: Quality indicators used to evaluate The Girls' Brigade

HM Inspectors use performance measures and quality indicators when making judgements in their reviews of national voluntary organisations. The quality indicators used were selected from those published in June 2006 in the publication HGIOCLD?2. This publication is available on the website www.hmie.gov.uk.

In the report and this appendix we make clear the judgements made by using these word scale categories:

Excellent	Outstanding, sector leading
Very good	Major strengths
Good	Important strengths with some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Strengths just outweigh weaknesses
Weak	Important weaknesses
Unsatisfactory	Major weaknesses

Improvements in performance	good
Impact on children and young people	very good
Impact on local communities	good
Impact on paid and voluntary staff	good
Inclusion, equality and fairness	good
Participation of service users and stakeholders	satisfactory
Operational planning	satisfactory
Leadership and direction	satisfactory

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