

# Timebanking Q & A

Timebanking UK supports a wide variety of timebanks in more than 200 locations across the country. Among the participants at 'What makes us tick' were representatives of several different models of timebanking. We asked three of them to take questions raised by the rest of the participants.



Philippe



Reyaz



Rachel

## **Philippe Grainger**

Rushey Green Timebank was started by a GP surgery in Catford, South London. Philippe has been the development manager there since 2007.

[www.rgtb.org.uk](http://www.rgtb.org.uk)

## **Reyaz Limalia**

Fair Shares in Gloucestershire started in 1998 and set up the first timebank in the UK. Reyaz has worked there since 2003.

[www.fairshares.org.uk](http://www.fairshares.org.uk)

## **Rachel Taylor**

Newsome Ward Timebanking was founded by members of Newsome Ward Community Forum and United Response in Huddersfield. Rachel has been the Timebanking coordinator since 2008.

[www.newsometimebanking.org.uk](http://www.newsometimebanking.org.uk)

## Who holds the volunteer details?

“That’s the whole point of the timebank - as brokers we can manage this, and make sure any confidential information is not passed about.”

**Reyaz**

“The timebank members’ personal details in paper form and along with any CRBs are held in locked cabinets accessible by the Broker and the Development Manager”

**Philippe**

## What about CRB checks?

“We very rarely do them – VERY RARELY. If someone is working regularly with vulnerable adults or children, then we’ll do it. But generally most participants don’t fall into this category.”

**Reyaz**

“As members of Timebanking UK we would CRB check timebank members where we are responsible for establishing regular one to one exchanges involving vulnerable people. In practice the majority of our exchanges are set up in a public group or community environment. When you’re working with reciprocal exchanges you can endlessly debate who in practice the “vulnerable person” is. Generally people demonstrate their own ability to make judgments for themselves. Where people’s vulnerability is supported as regulated activity by an organisational member, it’s the organisational member’s role (not the Timebank’s) to carry out CRB checks - but for their support staff, not the neighbours.”

**Rachel**

## Does red tape and bureaucracy affect the process?

“Red tape is a problem where we have to supply reams of info and ensure it is crafted to neatly fit the funding stream criteria. It doesn’t affect the CRB process but it is annoying and time consuming to be asked to CRB people for projects that do not represent or require a ‘regulated’ activity with vulnerable adults and children.”

**Philippe**

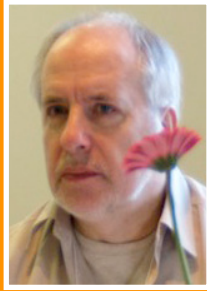
## Is there an optimum size for timebanking to work - town, ward, neighbourhood, estate, street?

“You need to find a group with enough enthusiasm to get started and work in whatever area those people feel a sense of belonging with. It’s best to start small and grow the Timebanking principles gradually into what matters to people. “

**Rachel**

“No – each time bank is different, and it should reflect the community.”

**Reyaz**



“Timebanks can vary a lot, it really depends. If you want to create a meaningful sense of family for people who are isolated and need planned support, then it is best to keep it small to ensure needs are met and no one is forgotten as this can happen in larger contexts.”

**Philippe**

### **How many people and what other support is required to start up a timebanking project? Where do you go for support?**

“It takes perhaps half a dozen people to get started. It is not so much the number that’s important but rather having a shared understanding of what you are trying to achieve with your timebanking. Support can come from other time banks, a local or regional time bank network, and of course Timebanking UK.”

**Philippe**

### **Is it important to distinguish volunteers from timebank “members”?**

“It can be, but I think it depends who your audience is and whether you have shared aims. There’s nothing wrong with volunteering but it’s not the same thing, timebanking isn’t about one issue and doesn’t see some people as in need and the others as volunteers. We try to find ways of working with whatever people have and can do.”

**Rachel**

“I think so. Volunteering traditionally is associated with charitable activity. It tends to be a one way street. People can have very strong mental images when the word volunteer is used. We are talking about people mixing and helping each other. I think it is different. It’s about understanding that as a community we need to share our skills with each other.”

**Reyaz**

“In our experience, most of the people that have joined the time bank didn’t want to volunteer, they wanted to belong and feel part of a group, and liked the idea of trading skills in an ad hoc way.”

**Philippe**

### **How do you resolve timebank deficit, where someone receives but doesn’t give or where no one has skills being asked for?**

“Timebanking is a tool - it’s not just about counting the hours. We use timebanking to make it easier for people to feel part of the community and to encourage people to support each other in taking action together. What matters is whether people share the same intentions not whether they can repay the time or not. In practice it’s always harder to get people to accept help than it is to get them to give it.”

**Rachel**

“This is only really a problem if there isn’t overall balance in the time bank.”

“You are always going to get people who need more than they put in, and others who give more than they ask for. The real problem is if you have someone not even willing to offer any help. We expect members of the timebank to sign up to the same principles so they should be prepared to give and take. Other than that, it’s the job of the timebank to find those skills that are needed, and do some creative recruitment.”

**Reyaz**

“Timebanking is underpinned by the principle that everyone has something to give. There are several ways to deal with this:

- You ensure that services that can be offered are not just manual, intellectual or specialized skills, and include all sorts of knowledge and abilities. For example, to keep an eye on someone’s house and perhaps collect their mail while on holiday doesn’t require a lot of ‘skill’ (unless there are mobility issues). Ditto ringing another member once a week to say hello and make sure they are OK. Same for picking up prescriptions for someone or recounting a story, a trip, helping to clear up after an event, help tidy up the office, or stuffing envelopes. It is often after a person has started to help out at the office or group activities that their self-esteem and self-confidence start to grow and then they take on new challenges and also learn new things.
- You create opportunities for people to earn time credits (for example do some basic admin) and other opportunities to spend them so that they experience the benefits.
- You create opportunities for people to benefit from services that require them to have credits to access such. For example, an outing on a coach, and one must have x amount of credits to go on it otherwise they can’t go! That usually does the trick to get people wanting to earn credits, and may start getting them used to earn credits by helping others or at the office.

However, we have to be kind and sensible. There are people that cannot always give back as much as others because of age, mobility issues or adverse circumstances. There may be members that once were very active, and because of circumstances cannot give time at the moment or for the future. But yet they still feel that they belong and are part of the community. It wouldn’t be right to force them to earn credits when their genuine circumstances prevent them from doing so.”

**Philippe**

**Please can you give top tips to encourage people to get involved in timebanking?**

“Timebanking is all about building confidence and trust. As a broker I always meet with new members. It’s important to spend time with people and listen to what’s going on in their life and what’s important to them. Then you can start to talk to people about what timebanking might mean for them. It’s their choice. I don’t think there are really any short cuts round this first stage.”

**Rachel**

“Remind people that they are not signing their lives away. There is no heavy commitment. It’s just about offering a helping hand now and then, as it suits them. It’s up to them how much or how often they are involved with the scheme.

“This gives them the chance to get involved with their neighbourhood, which people like the idea of, but find it difficult to actually do. Helping other people and getting to know people in your community cannot have a bad side to it.”

**Reyaz**

“You can explain to people that:

- It gives you access to a network of helpers that even if you don't need anything right now, you may need it later.
- You will find people that can come and do simple things for you that traders are not interested in doing.
- It gives you an opportunity to share your experiences and skills that may not have been appreciated before or elsewhere.
- You don't have to be a hero or super skilled – you are welcome as you are.
- You will feel welcome and valued.
- It is not volunteering, you will not be asked to do anything that you feel you must commit to for x amount of days and hours.
- You can say no to something you don't want to do and you will not be judged because of it.
- You will learn from other people, you will acquire new skills.
- You will have fun.
- You will gain friends.
- You may even save money.”

**Philippe**

**Lots of the examples from Newsome had an issue of concern to local people before timebanking was introduced. If the issue is hidden (like social care issues) will timebanking work?**

“Whilst having an issue is a good starting point, I think it's important that timebanks aren't single issue driven. So I don't think you need a specific issue of concern. Just having a group of people who want to develop their community is enough – just wanting to engage with their neighbours.”

**Reyaz**

“Of course, because with Timebanking these things aren't really separate. We have used timebanking to help people organise action to address issues of local concern and worked to include people who are often left out of things. In Newsome people did this with the local campaign about planning permission at Newsome Mill, and with Growing Newsome, the local food growing project.

“What we've been learning and discussed at “What makes us tick” is that we can use timebanking to create a greater sense of belonging with a whole range of enthusiasms around environmental projects, arts projects, children's play schemes, older people's sheltered accommodation. All these have been brought together to support each other with timebanking, which has created new relationships and opportunities for people beyond the timebanking exchanges.”

**Rachel**