

A GREAT BIG THANK YOU



Volunteers' week is the perfect time to say 'thank you' to all the volunteers who selflessly give their time, energy, and skills to create a brighter world for us all. From lending a helping hand at local events to providing essential services to those in need, volunteers are the heartbeat of our society. Our appreciation for volunteers extends far beyond this week-long celebration, it's something we carry with us every day.

There are numerous reasons why people choose to volunteer, ranging from giving back to the community and helping those in need, to gaining experience and boosting confidence. These are just some of the driving forces behind volunteering. Regardless of your motivation, we value and appreciate each of you.



Volunteers Week is a time to shine a spotlight on these extraordinary individuals and to recognise the invaluable contributions they make each and every day. It's a time to say thank you for the countless hours spent giving back to the community.

So, as we celebrate Volunteers Week, let us take a moment to express our heartfelt thanks to these extraordinary individuals. To the volunteers who give so much of themselves to make a difference, we say thank you. Your kindness, your generosity, and your dedication are truly appreciated, today and every day.

Happy Volunteers Week to all who volunteer. You are the heart of our community, and for that, we are eternally grateful.

Thank you.

VOLUNTEERING AT BOWES RAILWAY MUSEUM

We went to Bowes Railway Museum to chat with their volunteers and learn about their reasons for volunteering.



Name: Steve, Volunteer for 8 Years

Volunteer Role: Key Holder, Joinery volunteer, General Maintenance, Children's Involvement, Events and Promotion.

How did you find out about volunteering at Bowes Railway Museum? I walked into Bowes Railway and just asked. I took early retirement at 62 and needed something to fill my time. I offered to volunteer, and they fit my skills into a number of roles.

What does a typical volunteering day look like? It is whatever you walk into on the day, it could be repairing damage, or could be an ongoing project. We generally have specific tasks and there is always a priority. At the minute, it is to make 3 coal tubs for a village in Wales. All projects vary from day to day, utilising your skillset and helping you learn new skills. No two days are alike.

What do you enjoy most about volunteering with Bowes Railway Museum? The history of the railway. The opportunities, you don't get many opportunities for Joinery and Metalwork anymore. The main thing is, you get back your working life, but on your terms and to your schedule. You are around people you want to be with, and it gives you back a social life. If you have the right attitude, you'll fit in well. There is no fear of failure, and you can learn from your mistakes. You can enjoy yourself and have a laugh.

What would you say to anyone who is looking to get involved in volunteering? Mentally and physically, it can improve your life. Go in with an open mind and don't be frightened. The need for volunteers is great. If you want the best satisfaction out of it, go for something different, variable, and challenging to you. Don't go on face values or perceptions. If it is not for you, you can walk away. The big thing about volunteering is the social aspect and making a difference. There is a buddy system in place, so you won't be on your own. Expect to get hooked!

Volunteering is not for everybody, but there is no harm in giving it a try. The last thing you want is to be, is sitting in a chair doing nothing.

MARKERSTUDY CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING DAY AT TRANSFORM NE



Each year, Markerstudy offer their staff the opportunity to help their communities by encouraging their employees to undertake corporate volunteering days.

As part of their corporate volunteering objective, employees from Markerstudy attended Transform NE in Sulgrave, Washington to help create planting areas for the local community to enjoy.

Since August 2021, Transform North East has enabled better community access to social connection, health and relationship support, training and employment. Many people in the local community reported a sense of abject loneliness during and following the pandemic. Through their friendship group projects, they are meeting with and listening to the needs of the most isolated in the community.

John Finlayson, Strategic Executive from Transform NE said:

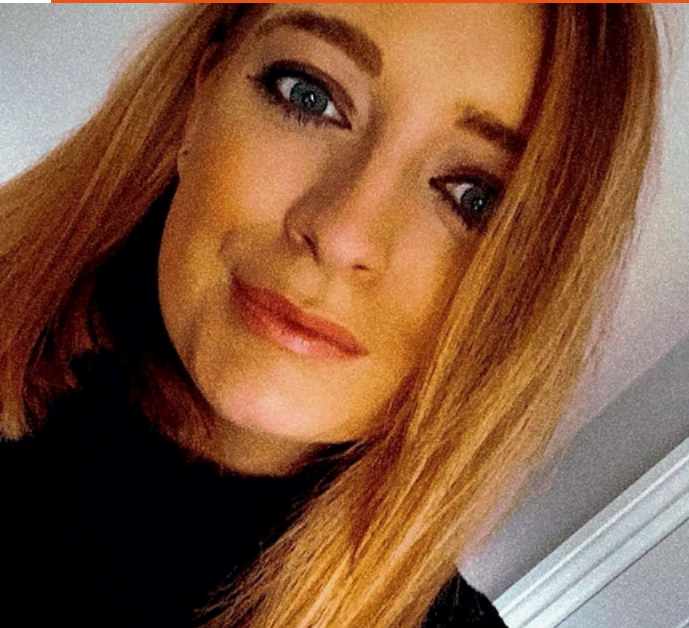
'The benefits of the planting areas will enhance the lives of our community, both in terms of health and wellness, as community members will be engaging in gardening activities that promote physical activity and stress relief - and also in terms of enhancing a sense of pride-of-place and aesthetic value due to the current lack of natural beautification.



The day exceeded our expectations. The Markerstudy volunteer-team's diligence, professionalism and hard work were evident as they transformed our outdoor spaces into beautifully bordered planting areas and boxes. However, it was the team's warmth and enthusiasm for our project that truly made a lasting impression. We are immensely grateful to the Markerstudy Group team for their hard work and the joy they brought to this project.'

Corporate volunteering is a great way for companies to give back to the community while meeting their corporate social responsibility objectives. Participating employees offer their time and skills to various projects across the local community.

WWIN - SPECIALIST DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICE



Hi, I am Sarah Hollis - I am the Volunteer Coordinator at WWIN Specialist Domestic Abuse Services.

Tell us a bit about your role and why you feel a volunteer coordinator is beneficial to your organisation

My role within WWIN is to recruit, manage and retain volunteers. I feel the role of volunteer coordinator is beneficial to our organisation as I work across the wider teams to develop meaningful roles where there is a need for extra support, and find suitable volunteers based on skills, interests, and availability. We already have volunteers based across a range of services including refuge, groupwork and community engagement - with hopes to expand into other services when the programme grows. This helps lessen the workload

for staff and gain expertise in new fields which can strengthen our organisation and the services we provide for service users.

What support do you offer to your volunteers?

Our volunteers receive training, and regular supervision/check ins. I always try and spend time across the different sites where volunteers are based on to ensure they are fitting in well, have no issues and the tasks they are doing are beneficial to gaining knowledge and experience in any areas they wish to develop, as well as being beneficial to the organisation.

Due to the nature of our work - I believe regular check ins are essential to ensure the volunteers wellbeing isn't being affected by their role.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

I love that 2 days are never the same, variety is the spice of life!

I enjoy meeting new people, seeing volunteers progress in their role in both confidence and ability and spending time in the community promoting the services WWIN offers, as well as available volunteer roles.

How do volunteers have an impact on your organisation?

Our volunteers have a variety of skills which brings diversity and enriches the organisation. We have volunteers from several backgrounds which brings a whole new level of expertise to the organisation such as health professionals, mental health professionals and financial experts - all of which are a huge benefit to our service users. The support of our volunteers is vital to the work we do to keep women and children safe.

TOP TIPS FOR VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Engaging volunteers at every stage of their journey is key to making them feel welcomed, appreciated, and heard throughout their experience. Implementing strong processes will help prevent oversights and ensure a positive experience for every volunteer.



Understanding volunteer motivations:

To recruit volunteers effectively, it is essential to understand individual motivations. Some may volunteer for personal development, others to strengthen community bonds, and some to create an impact. Adapting roles to match these motivations can boost engagement and provide volunteers with a more fulfilling experience.

Recruitment and onboarding: A seamless introduction to volunteering is essential. Creating engaging recruitment messages is key, not only to convey your organisation's mission but also to highlight the distinct contributions volunteers can offer. After recruitment, a well-structured

onboarding process establishes a positive beginning. Clearly outlining expectations and goals from the outset ensures everyone is on the same page.

Open communication and feedback channels: Establishing clear and accessible communication pathways is crucial for creating a supportive atmosphere where everyone feels acknowledged and appreciated. Encourage volunteers to express their opinions and feedback through various channels, offering the option to provide feedback anonymously should they wish. By actively listening to feedback and considering comments, you can cultivate trust and confidence among your volunteers.

Training and development: Volunteers bring a variety of unique skills and talents to organisations. Acknowledging and leveraging these abilities will help volunteers feel appreciated and engaged with your organisation. Establishing a culture that promotes ongoing learning will enable volunteers to enhance their existing skills or acquire new ones.

Recognition: Volunteer recognition doesn't have to come at a cost. A simple 'Thank you' will go a long way. Acknowledge volunteer achievements, not just based on hours or years of service, but also personal milestones. Creating a clear and consistent recognition programme will demonstrate appreciation to volunteers and help them feel valued.

INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING

Creating a culture for inclusive volunteering is about fostering an environment where everyone feels welcome, valued, and empowered to contribute, regardless of their background, abilities, or experiences.



The Universal Declaration on Volunteering from The International association for volunteer effort states:

'This Declaration supports the right of every woman, man, and child to associate freely and to volunteer regardless of their cultural and ethnic origin, religion, age, gender, and physical, social, or economic condition. All people in the world should have the right to freely offer their time, talent, and energy to others and to their communities through individual and collective action, without expectation of financial reward.'

It starts with leadership setting the tone, emphasising the importance of diversity and inclusivity in all aspects of the organisation's

operations. Leading an inclusive volunteer programme is all about embracing diversity and ensuring that every member feels valued and heard. It is important to create an environment where differences are not tolerated but celebrated. By leading with empathy, respect, and openness, you can create a volunteer team that not only achieves its goals but also enriches the experience of every member involved.

Recruitment practices should be inclusive, involving underserved communities and using inclusive language, striving for a diverse volunteer group that mirrors the community your organisation serves. Training should encompass sensitivity and inclusivity exercises to equip your team for diverse interactions and scenarios. Prioritise communication by fostering open dialogues, active listening, and being receptive to feedback from all team members.

It is crucial to provide accessible opportunities that accommodate various physical abilities and other needs, ensuring everyone can participate meaningfully, focusing on:

- Creating your volunteer positions with flexibility in mind
- Customising these roles to align with each individual's unique strengths, interests, and goals
- Considering the individual's preferences and motivations for volunteering by incorporating these questions into the application process.
- Focusing on what resonates with the volunteer rather than solely on organisational needs.

By prioritising inclusivity, organisations can create a volunteer culture that is truly reflective of the communities they serve, fostering greater engagement, creativity, and effectiveness in achieving their goals.

Valuing diverse cultures, experiences, and perspectives within the volunteer community not only enhances the volunteer experience but will also amplify your organisation's impact.

ENGAGING YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

Young volunteers bring fresh perspectives, energy, and a strong willingness to learn and adapt, which can invigorate programs and introduce innovative solutions to traditional problems.



Involving young people in volunteering creates a sense of responsibility and community awareness from an early age, encouraging lifelong patterns of giving back and community engagement. For the volunteers, the experience offers life skills such as leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving, while providing valuable experiences that can enhance their CV's and future applications. Additionally, volunteering offers young people the opportunity to explore various career paths and build networks with professionals who can mentor them towards their future goals.

Engaging young volunteers requires organisations to adopt strategies that fit in with the interests and values of younger generations.



First, utilising social media and digital platforms is crucial for outreach, providing an accessible and familiar way for young people to learn about volunteering opportunities. Highlighting the impact of their work, through stories and testimonials, can also help young individuals see the difference they can make.

Organisations should offer diverse roles that cater to different skills and interests, allowing volunteers to find something that genuinely excites them.

Additionally, creating a community feel and a sense of belonging can increase retention; young

volunteers are more likely to stay engaged if they feel part of a team and can build relationships with peers and mentors. Flexibility in commitment levels and roles can also accommodate their often-busy schedules and fit around education priorities.

Finally, providing opportunities for leadership and personal development can attract young volunteers looking to gain experience and skills.

By embracing these strategies, organisations can foster a dynamic and committed pool of young volunteers eager to contribute to their causes.



SUNDERLAND VOLUNTARY SECTOR ALLIANCE SUPPORT

Volunteering in Sunderland has never been more important and valuable to both Voluntary organisations and the communities they serve. At Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance, we can support you with all your volunteering needs.

For Individuals

We work with individuals who are looking to volunteer in Sunderland by matching their skills and experience with appropriate volunteering roles across the city. If you are looking to fill your spare time, change your career or are looking to give something back to the community, there is a volunteering role for everyone. For more information, or support, please visit [I want to volunteer in Sunderland - Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance \(sunderlandvsa.co.uk\)](https://sunderlandvsa.co.uk)

For VCSE organisations

We work with VCSE organisations to ensure that their volunteer programs are robust, effective and volunteer friendly. Our Volunteering programme aims to grow, develop and sustain the citywide volunteering offer to not only support VCSE organisations recruit, retain and develop individual volunteers, but to facilitate more impactful partnership working between businesses and the Voluntary Sector. To find out more about how we can support your organisation, please visit [Recruiting, Retaining and Developing Volunteers - Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance \(sunderlandvsa.co.uk\)](https://sunderlandvsa.co.uk)

For Corporate organisations

Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance host a programme to facilitate corporate volunteering, matching volunteers to the voluntary and community sector in Sunderland. We are here to make the process as easy as possible, ensuring businesses complete their Corporate social Responsibility (CSR) priorities in the most meaningful way, making the most impact to communities in Sunderland. Further information can be found here [Corporate Volunteering - Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance \(sunderlandvsa.co.uk\)](https://sunderlandvsa.co.uk)

Training and Networks

Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance hold a series of free Training and Networking events for VCSE organisations across the city. By carefully considering the sector's needs, we tailor training sessions to address these specific requirements. Additionally, we host a quarterly Volunteer Coordinators Network at different venues across the city, with each session focused around a key theme that reflects the volunteering landscape. To find out more about our Training and Networking offer, please visit [Training and events - Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance \(sunderlandvsa.co.uk\)](https://sunderlandvsa.co.uk)

ROUND UP

Volunteers' Week is a wonderful chance to express gratitude to volunteers, but it's essential to appreciate them consistently throughout the year.

Whether volunteers have long-standing commitments or are new to the team, each individual's contribution is equally significant.

Keep in mind that acknowledging volunteers doesn't always require a financial expense; a heartfelt 'Thank you' can make a big difference.



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Sunderland
VOLUNTARY SECTOR ALLIANCE



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