

Volunteer Coordinator's Forum

29 June 2023

"As a Volunteer Coordinator, what does it mean to work together to overcome challenges?"

Who's Who

Community Works: Mel Willson, Hazel Roper

Mel runs the VCF for Brighton and Hove and Hazel for Adur and Worthing.

This forum is a space to meet and talk through some of the issues impacting on people's volunteering practice. We won't get to solve all of your challenges today, but hopefully you can share ideas that can get you started on solving them.

Your challenges

There were flipcharts in the room, with overarching themed titles - Individuals wrote their challenges on post-it notes and placed each one under the theme they felt each particular challenge was related to.

Hazel then read out the challenges and asked the group to think about any common challenges or themes that they may notice. Mel also wrote on a flipchart any key commonalities noticed.

Themes and challenges:

The below shows each overarching themed titles and the challenges shared on each post-it note.

Inclusion

- Lack of diversity in volunteers.
- Some volunteers are hard to contact if they are not responsive over email or email isn't their preferred method of communication.
- Engaging less well represented communities after years of mistrust.
- Burn out with current political climate.
- Finding balance between inclusion.
- Finding the right role for volunteers.
- Understanding people's barriers.

- Imbalance of demographics.
- Hard to reach clients – how to engage?
- Lack of diversity (working in a small town = mostly white retired volunteers).

Recruitment

- Engaging volunteers and maintaining them. Making some of these fit with organisations timeline.
- Fairly long on-boarding (DBS etc.) can sometimes lose interest from volunteers.
- Lack of new volunteers.
- Recruiting diverse volunteer group.
- Short lead-in time for recruiting volunteers for specific projects.
- Conveying benefits.
- Engaging volunteers with training.
- Understanding the best way to recruit new volunteer.
- Demand for volunteers outweighing gaining new volunteers.

Cost of living

- Volunteers have less time e.g. going back to work/childcare.
- People having to pick up paid work.
- Less time for volunteering as people having to work more to live.
- Being under resourced.
- Childcare costs.
- Engaging students in volunteering with rising living costs, need for paid work.
- Lack of resources.
- Lack of funds.
- Limited budget and price increases.
- Financial costs of dismantling barriers.

Impacts on you, yourself.

- Juggling lots of roles and exhaustion.
- Fewer hours due to reduced funding.
- Partner organisation ceased trading.
- Change of focus to other part of my role.
- Burn out from the pandemic.

- Over stretched.
- Disappointment at not being able to achieve the vision (due to burnout/resource/buy in).
- Isolation. Only Volunteer Coordinator (rest of the team not understanding my role).
- Juggling multiple roles (lack of capacity).
- Burn out, specifically in trying to get feedback and better communication.
- Under invested. Lack of training or resources to effectively support.
- Staff not appreciating volunteer role and see them as unpaid workers.
- Lack of time.
- Not enough time for developing the project, short staffed and priority goes to delivering service day to day to clients.

Supporting Volunteers

- Working part time. It can sometime be two days before I respond.
- Volunteer role suspended.
- Young adult volunteers, me being more a support worker than manager/coordinator. Burnout.
- Staffing capacity to provide the support for student volunteers.
- Getting staff to understand volunteer needs/skills/etc.
- Balance between face to face and online training.

Risk Management

- Assumption on impact on volunteers.
- Managing volunteer vulnerabilities.
- Expectations on volunteers increasing as needs of young adults increase.
- Keeping volunteers practice in line with policy and good practice.
- Compassion fatigue.
- Burnout.

Other

- New management.
- Organisation mindset.
- Cross team working. Working with external partner to achieve same end goal and achieving team specific goal.
- Dependant on marketing support/restrictions of organisation.
- Lack of communication between the trustees.
- Nothing moving forward.

- Lack of buy in from upper management.
- Work outcomes vs Volunteer inclusion.
- Lack of structure.
- Lack of effective communication with decision maker.
- Many Volunteer Coordinator resources being public focussed. We only recruit current clients as volunteers.

Identified common challenges/themes

- Lack of/broken communication; from organisation and volunteers.
- Lack of diversity.
- How to remove barriers.
- Under resourced including capacity, funding, time.
- How to get new volunteers.
- Change in volunteers needs/circumstances in recruitment and ongoing support including impact of cost of living.
- Feeling isolated as volunteer coordinator.
- Impact on self, including burnout and increased expectations from others.
- Job substitution, volunteers in place of paid workers.

Overcoming a challenge

The one theme that stood out was the impact on Volunteer Coordinators personally e.g. burnout. So focussed on this theme as a group by sharing ideas on how to solve, things people already do etc.

- Organisation one-one supervision for Volunteer Coordinators and group supervision for volunteers e.g. for a Trauma based service they have trained counsellors who hold their supervisions.
- Showing the support available for volunteers could appeal to funders and to consider including cost of support in bids. What is best for the organisation is that volunteers are supported.
- Due to recently reduced hours - there has been a delay in replying to volunteers, concerned about needs which are immediate. To look at expectations of each other. Do the systems in place before still work and if not to review and look at possible changes (enabling resetting of expectations).
- Volunteer Coordinator is also a volunteer, with staff picking up emails from three different addresses. Volunteer Coordinator is only in a set amount of time each week so could be time delay in replying to recruitment/enquiries. Maybe to consider volunteer open day, inviting anyone who has got in touch about volunteering which means they are physically there gaining a different perspective and interest, enables them to 'come and ask' and see how it physically works.

- What roles can be done by other people to reduce increased workload and be able to offer support to volunteers e.g. can staff who had volunteers in their team do some of the support.
- For capacity - can some of the involving volunteers be spread across the staff who support volunteers within their team. Project staff supervise the volunteers in each project, spread load, maybe they can do some of the training.
- Have conversations with manager.
- Ongoing relationship with source of volunteers e.g. school.

WRAP-UP

Thanks for sharing your challenges. The key thing you will have noticed is that you individually are not alone with the challenges as you can see you are all experiencing the same things.

We will take away your challenges and themes to look at having as topics at future Volunteer Coordinator Forums (VCF).

You can email us if you have individual queries, please give us some context as to what's going on.