

Notes from volunteering drop-in session 27 January 2022

What brings you the most satisfaction from your volunteering?

Volunteers felt that it's important for volunteering to be a two-way process; they need to feel a benefit themselves as well as feeling that they are giving their time. Satisfaction came from:

- Positive feedback from others
- Seeing others making progress
- Being with people – camaraderie, connection
- Mental health benefit
- Getting out in nature
- A sense of purpose
- Feeling of making a difference
- Visiting people benefitting from projects

Is your enjoyment of volunteering linked to how it is organized?

It became clear that how volunteers are managed and organized makes a big difference:

Positives

- Meeting once a month socially with tea and cake to talk about volunteering experiences
- A sense of being valued and appreciated by volunteer organisers
- Feeling part of a team
- Being part of a WhatsApp group
- Feeling that you are, as a group, working towards an objective(/s) and have direction
- Being able to have honest conversations with co-workers
- Being asked for opinion, being referred to

Negatives

- Moving from volunteer to volunteer organizer made it feel like work
- Feeling left alone to recruit/organize/manage others
- Not feeling empowered – always having to ask what allowed to do
- Dealing with niggling issues, complaints etc.
- Lack of communication, not being told what to do
- Suggestions being ignored, not being engaged

How easy is it to walk away from a volunteering role?

Volunteers felt that it is important to be able to walk away if you are not in the right role. It is important for organisations to let volunteers know that this is ok, and perhaps direct to another organization/back to Volunteer Norfolk so that they are not lost to volunteering altogether.

- Some people might become volunteers because they were asked and couldn't say no
- It is important to leave if/when the role is too much for you or you feel stuck in a rut
- The role might not be what you anticipated, there might be an alternative role better suited to
- Not positive experience to continue if you don't enjoy it
- Important for the group/co-workers to be open with one another
- Some people might wish to stop volunteering but stay involved and there is benefit to this
- Organisations may be able to pre-empt someone leaving and find them a more suitable role

What helps volunteers to feel valued?

- Informal annual review on 1:1 basis with team leader
- Being invited to talk about what is going well/developmental ideas
- When you feel that your voice is being heard
- Being encouraged to be open and honest and receiving the same in return
- A sense of being included and being part of a team
- Wellbeing check-in at start and finish of meetings, encouraged to state limitations
- See leaders stating their limitations – leading by example

How can you help volunteers who are working on their own?

- If volunteers feel isolated, it helps to buddy them up with someone else
- Worth ensuring people rotate who they are working with to get to meet more people
- Keep an eye on volunteers working alone and chat to them when you can
- Create opportunities for the whole team to chat together informally
- Create times and spaces for volunteers to bond with one another
- Organise wellbeing support and/or structured training

Is volunteering work or pleasure?

- Both paid jobs and volunteering roles can be both
- Can be considered a vocation, or a ministry, rather than work or pleasure

What frustrations do you face in your volunteering role(s)?

As a volunteer manager:

- Lack of resources – use of buildings etc.
- Working with specific outside agencies, especially large, faceless ones
- Red tape preventing good ideas getting off the ground quickly
- Paperwork, committee work etc. seen as more frustrating than grassroots work
- Juggling things like who is able to fulfil what role
- Expense associated with training volunteers, grant applications

Fewer frustrations as a volunteer than as a volunteer manager. Might be helpful for volunteers to be responsible for one aspect/sub-committee etc., rather than taking a management role.

What would improve your situation as a volunteer/volunteer manager?

- Increased supervision, advice, suggestions, ideas from others
- Some advantages to being an established charity
- Structured training available to all

Voluntary Norfolk's Volunteer Passport Scheme

Introduction to volunteering, or can be used as a refresher or a chance to reflect on volunteering experiences. Six-week programme, free of charge and open to any volunteers. Forms a volunteering "CV", which keeps a record of training and experience. May enable volunteers to move between roles more easily and help volunteer managers to assess newly recruited volunteers' skills and experience.

Themed drop-in sessions for volunteers

It was suggested that volunteers might benefit from drop-in sessions with other who are working on similar projects, e.g., community gardens, or farm groups. This idea to be explored further by NGCN.

How do you recruit your volunteers?

- Multi-generational volunteers encouraged by getting parents of children involved
- Good for children to see multiple generations volunteering as normal
- Word of mouth recruitment is common
- Local newspapers and newsletters
- Social media