Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations

Your local county voluntary council

4. Volunteers

4.21 What do Volunteer Centres do in Wales?

Introduction

Volunteering is an activity which is:

- undertaken freely, by choice;
- undertaken to be of public/ community benefit
- not undertaken for financial gain.

Many people who are volunteers do not think of themselves as such. They may see themselves as ‘helping out’; as being a ‘good neighbour’ or as someone fulfilling a role such as charity trustee or school governor.

Why volunteering is important

According to WCVA’s ‘Third Sector Statistical Resource 2016’, about 938,000 people volunteer or ‘help out’ at activities in third sector organisations in a year and there are about 277,300 governance posts in third sector organisations.

Volunteering has benefits for each individual volunteer, for organisations and groups in which they are involved, and for communities more widely.

For the individual, the most common benefits are enjoyment of a purposeful activity, gaining experience and skills and personal development including building confidence and self-esteem and developing new and positive relationships with others.

For an organisation (some of which are entirely run by volunteers) volunteers bring added value through their personal qualities, the skills which they use and the time they give.

Volunteering is important to communities of both place and interest. It builds social capital in the following ways: developing local service provision; increasing social well-being; democratic participation; inclusion and social cohesion.

People enter volunteering through school, religious bodies and direct contact with volunteer-involving organisations but Volunteer Centres have a role too, and for some people, they are a key source of guidance and help.

Volunteer Centres have an impact on volunteering not only through their brokerage services but also in raising awareness of and promoting volunteering locally, developing opportunities and working with volunteer involving groups to improve their practice.

What Volunteer Centres do

There is a Volunteer Centre in every county in Wales which provides support at a local level for volunteering, for individual volunteers and for volunteer-involving organisations. They have six core functions:

Promoting and celebrating volunteering

Volunteer Centres:

- stimulate and encourage local interest in volunteering and community activity, including through local, regional and national events and campaigns.
- celebrate volunteers and volunteering, for example through their participation in the annual Volunteers Week.
- manage and promote a Wales brand for volunteering: Gwirfoddoli Cymru/Volunteering Wales.

Develop good practice

Volunteer Centres:

- promote good practice in working with volunteers to all volunteer involving organisations.
- organise training and accreditation for potential volunteers, volunteers, volunteer managers and the volunteering infrastructure.
- promote networking opportunities for volunteer managers to engage in peer learning and support.
- promote and support the delivery of the quality mark Investing in Volunteers in Wales.

Develop volunteering opportunities

Volunteer Centres:

- work in close partnership with statutory, private sector and third sector organisations, including community groups and faith groups, to develop local volunteering opportunities.
- understand the potential offered by local communities and work with them to realise this potential through volunteering.
- promote general and informal volunteering within the community, as well as encouraging a broad range of volunteer roles within organisations
- consider the interests of specific groups which face barriers to volunteering when developing opportunities.

- **Policy and campaigning**

Volunteer Centres:

- identify, initiate and respond to proposals or legislation that may impact on volunteering.
- lead on and/or participate in campaigns about issues that affect volunteers or volunteering.
- campaign proactively for a greater appreciation and understanding of volunteering and an increasingly volunteer-friendly climate.
- are represented on the Volunteering Wales Network,which is a national voice for influencing policy and practice in volunteering.

Strategic development of volunteering

As the local experts on volunteering, Volunteer Centres inform strategic thinking and planning at a regional and national level through the Volunteering Service Operational Network and by other means.

Brokerage

Volunteer Centres:

- give support and advice to individuals and groups interested in volunteering and match them with appropriate opportunities locally. The brokerage service is provided to anyone who wants help in finding a suitable volunteering opportunity, including people with additional support needs.
- hold information on a comprehensive range of opportunities and prospective volunteers may refer to www.volunteering-wales.net to find volunteering vacancies, or their local Volunteer Centre. Volunteer Centres keep the data on this website up to date.
- acknowledge that many potential volunteers have a clear idea of what they want to do and with which organisation they want to do it. Such people (the majority of volunteers) do not need the brokerage services of a Volunteer Centre. All volunteers will, however, benefit directly or indirectly from the other core functions of Volunteer Centres which serve to continuously improve and facilitate volunteering in Wales.

In addition to the core functions: funded projects

As well as these core functions, Volunteer Centres receive funding, from time to time, to undertake additional and frequently time limited projects which provide a legacy of learning, good practice or other beneficial outcomes for volunteering. Sometimes these are throughout Wales and sometimes in smaller areas. Some past examples are:

- GwirVol (with Millennium Volunteers), for youth volunteering, funded by the Welsh Government.
- The BIG Lottery funded Wales Volunteering project, mainly for the unemployed and people with higher support needs.

- The Department for Work and Pensions Volunteering Programme for those claiming Job Seekers Allowance, funded by the UK Government

Further Information

The contact for Volunteer Centres can be found on the WCVA/CVC Information sheet 4.1 Thinking about volunteering

Volunteer Centres' contact details are on the website www.volunteering-wales.net which includes around 6,000 volunteering opportunities.

Disclaimer

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

For further information contact

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Produced by WCVA, County Voluntary Councils and Volunteer Centres.
Last Updated:26/09/2016

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