

Solva Care: volunteers and volunteering



Part 1

What is volunteering?

Volunteering is the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment, or individuals outside (or in addition to) one's immediate family. It is unpaid and undertaken freely and by choice.

Volunteer Now¹

Recruiting volunteers

Volunteers can be recruited using a variety of methods. We know of some projects that have organised an open meeting to inform the community of their plans and were successful in signing up volunteers at the meeting. One put posters at all the bus stops in the area. Advertising in local newsletters or papers is another option. The volunteering organisation in your county may have a website for volunteers that you can join, for example Pembrokeshire Action of Voluntary Services (PAVS)² pointed us towards InfoEngine³, the directory of third sector services in Wales. One thing I have found in our community is that people who are already volunteering for other activities, for instance to run luncheon clubs, coffee mornings etc. are often willing to do more volunteering.

Volunteers tend to be women, working part-time, or retired from paid work. This is also the case in Solva, but men are increasingly showing an interest and are joining the group.

In Solva Care we had a head start with recruiting volunteers. The village questionnaire that the working group distributed around the village in 2013 included a question on whether people would be prepared to volunteer should the project take off. Twenty-five people indicated that they were interested. If you are thinking of doing a survey at the start of your project, then it could be worthwhile including such a question.

¹ www.volunteernow.co.uk

² www.pavs.org.uk

³ en.infoengine.cymru

Reasons for Volunteering

People volunteer for lots of different reasons. It is thought that some don't volunteer because they don't know the benefits for themselves or for others. It is useful for people to reflect on the reasons why they volunteer, and the comments can be used in a recruitment drive. These are some of the reasons why our volunteers joined:

"I decided to get involved with Solva Care as a result of experience with a friend who needed care and had very poor service. When asked if interested, I decided I would do anything to try to improve the situation regarding care and carers."

"...volunteering filled a gap. It made me concentrate on other people's problems rather than dwelling on any of mine! Friendships also made with service users and other volunteers and a feeling of making a difference all be it by doing very small things."

"I volunteered for Solva Care because, as well as doing something for others, it makes me feel better myself. The things I do are small, not arduous and not particularly time consuming. There is no pressure and it certainly appears to make a difference to lots of people. From a purely selfish point of view - I may need a little help myself in years to come!"

"...my reason for joining is simply that i have personally experienced serious health problems for many years and because of the help and support I have had here in Solva it made me realise now I should do something to give back while I can."

Organising your volunteers

Spending time with potential recruits and new volunteers is very important

As Coordinator of Solva Care, I started by arranging an information meeting inviting those who had already expressed an interest, and anyone else, through posters and the village newsletter. We explained what we were planning to do and what would happen next if they signed up, such as a DBS check, induction training and reports. I prepared a volunteer form⁴ for them to complete (name, address, relevant experience, what they could help with, did they have access to a car? etc.).

⁴ Available to download from the resources page of our online Toolkit: solvacare.co.uk/the-solva-care-toolkit/the-solva-care-toolkit-resources

Next step was to arrange DBS checks. We used the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)⁵ who, at the time, provided them for free for volunteers. Now we get them done through Powys County Council and they charge a small fee if the checks are for volunteers. But, there are many organisations offering them so do shop around. Again, it's always worth asking other local charities or organisations that you meet.

I made sure we had all the policies we needed using templates⁶ from the WCVA. We also put third party and personal insurance in place for the volunteers. The volunteers all know that they can phone me, or one of the Trustees, if they run in to any problems whilst volunteering.



Anyone can show an interest in volunteering and I always make time to talk through what Solva Care is about and discuss what they would like to contribute. We do not interview potential volunteers or ask them for references because ours is a small community and we know everyone. In a town or city, you may find it useful to do so.

Deploying and matching volunteers with people

All volunteers indicated on the volunteer form what they were willing to help with. I found out quite quickly that some volunteers like to have regular, weekly tasks, whilst others liked to be more 'ad hoc'. Some are happy to do something on the spur of the moment, and others need more notice. It is possible of course that some people simply do not hit it off. You need, therefore, to be sensitive to the signals you get from either party and be prepared to swap things around.

Training volunteers

The local branch of Volunteering Matters⁷ did the induction training for our volunteers. The Alzheimer's Society⁸ came and gave dementia



⁵ wcva.org.uk

⁶ Available to download from the resources page of our online Toolkit: solvacare.co.uk/the-solva-care-toolkit/the-solva-care-toolkit-resources

⁷ volunteeringmatters.org.uk

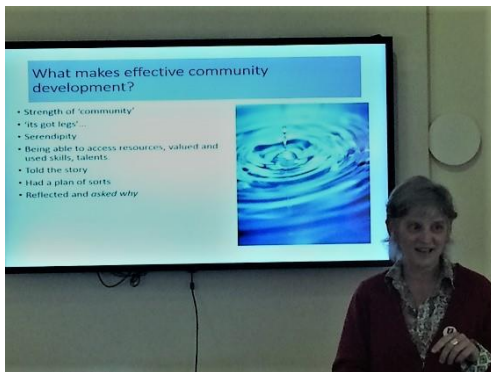
⁸ www.alzheimers.org.uk

awareness training. We have also had first aid training from the British Red Cross Society⁹ and via Pembrokeshire College¹⁰ (The Reach Project).

It can be worthwhile getting in contact with your local voluntary organisation for information, support and training (e.g. the equivalents of PAVS in Pembrokeshire). Your local county council may also offer free training. We often found out about training opportunities through attending events and networking. Apart from induction training, all other training offered is optional. Some volunteers like to attend training courses and others don't. It is useful to have the key health and wellbeing topics covered in your team so that you build knowledge and expertise in your team on important issues faced by your community.

Keeping your volunteers happy

Remember that volunteering is voluntary! It may seem unnecessary to mention, but it could be easy to start treating your volunteers as employees. With the number of volunteers that we have, I rarely have problems finding one when needed, but there is the odd time when that happens. It could be



during school holidays or if there's an event going on in the village. Even if I end up phoning 15-20 people before I find someone, I can never let that show. Also, a volunteer may say that he/she feels bad having to say 'no' sometimes. I always say that they shouldn't – otherwise I would feel bad asking!

I keep in regular contact with my volunteers by going to the weekly coffee morning, stopping for a chat when I bump in to them and taking the time to have a chat when I phone and ask them if they can help. We also have volunteer meet ups once or twice a year, to get together and have a chat. Most of them 'work' individually and may not see much of each other. Sometimes we use these events for feedback and evaluation. At one of our gatherings in a local pub after refreshments I put a sheet of paper with a question on each table and invited the volunteers to scribble down their thoughts on the following:

- How do you feel about being a volunteer?
- What has been the best experience for you?

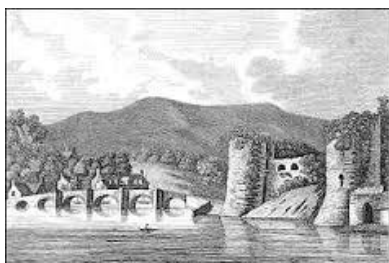
⁹ www.redcross.org.uk

¹⁰ www.pembrokeshire.ac.uk

- What has been your worst experience?
- Have you got any suggestions for improvements?
- Any other comments at all?

An external facilitator can be very useful in running an interactive workshop for volunteers. Getting out of the community for the day to reflect and plan is another. The photo shows Professor Fiona Verity, who is an expert on community development and participatory action research methods, facilitating the workshop on our away day at Cardigan Castle; the programme is below.

Program Volunteer Outing to Cardigan Castle 24 Oct 2017



- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 10.30-ish | Arrival Cardigan Castle and Coffee |
| 10.45 | Welcome by Lena
Introduction of Fiona Verity by Sue Denman |
| 11.00 | Talk ' <i>Constellations and Light</i> '
By Professor Fiona Verity Wales School for Social Care Research, Swansea University. |
| 12.00 | Group discussions on
<i>Thinking about your volunteering role over the past year or so, what has been the most, or one of the most, memorable things that have happened to you and the person/s you support?</i> |
| 12.45 | Feedback from the groups |
| 13.00 | Lunch |
| 14.00 | Tour of Cardigan Castle, then free time until..... |
| 16.00 | Coach leaves for Solva |

Have a good day!

'Topping up' the volunteer force and young volunteers

So far, we have had enough volunteers and new ones are joining on a regular basis, without a need for a recruitment drive. There may be a time though, when quite a few of them will have reached an age when they want to stop and perhaps need support themselves. When that happens, I am hoping that there will be an influx of people who, at present still working, will reach retirement age and be willing to come onboard!

So far it has been difficult to attract young volunteers. We have had a few, one doing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, another studying at Pembrokeshire College and a summer volunteer. To increase our chances of success we intend to approach the local schools.

Feedback from volunteers

Volunteers should be asked, regularly, for feedback, as a group and on an individual basis. This is what some of them wrote at one of our gatherings:

"Wonderful; community-spirited and rewarding. I have made new friends and gained a greater understanding about dementia etc."

"Very rewarding. I get a lot of satisfaction from doing what may seem like a very small service to some. I feel as if I make a difference."

"I feel good about volunteering; the first time I have ever done this. It gives me a feeling of putting something back into the community."

"Feeling that I am making a difference to people's day to day lives."

"Being part of a group is the best thing for me."

The do's and don'ts for volunteers

DO:

- make sure someone knows where you are going.
- bring a charged mobile phone with you.
- let your co-ordinator know if you need to cancel what have undertaken to do.
- give a receipt and count the change back, if you are dealing with someone's money.

DON'T:

- travel if it is not safe (e.g. bad weather conditions).

- put yourself at risk by heavy lifting, climbing step ladders or similar.
- do anything you feel uncomfortable with. Just say that you will pass the request on to your co-ordinator who will come back to them.
- don't hesitate to call your coordinator if you encounter a tricky situation.

The do's and don'ts for a coordinator

DO:

- remember that they are volunteers, giving their time freely – and they have a life.
- try and spread the 'duties' evenly and according to each person's preference.
- keep in regular contact with your volunteers to spot any problems early.
- be supportive and take time if a volunteer wants to talk.
- organise regular events where the volunteers can meet.
- always be appreciative of what they do and say, 'thank you'!

DON'T

- be afraid to say no to a request for help. It may be more appropriate to signpost to another organisation instead.
- try to be available 24/7 – you have a life too.
- don't 'over manage' – be flexible.
- take on more than you can manage.



Part 2

Volunteering

Volunteering is not new! As long as two thousand three hundred years ago, Aristotle asked, "What is the essence of life?" His answer was, "To serve others and to do good." Since that time many well-known, and some anonymous, people have reflected on the reasons why helping others seems to make people happier.

When we in Solva Care have asked these questions of our volunteers, the replies vary little from one person to another – or indeed from the past to the present day.

For some, a life experience of their own – or of someone close to them – makes them realise the value of a helping hand. It may be a childhood experience (e.g. Scouts, Guides or the Boys' Brigade). Sometimes people find themselves with time to spare, maybe in retirement, and others wish to be part of an organisation or charity which they admire. Many people volunteer for more than one organisation.

It is not surprising perhaps that altruism brings pleasure to the giver as well as to the receiver. In addition to the feelings of satisfaction which many volunteers express, they find enjoyment in the comradeship of like-minded people; they often make lasting friendships and enjoy shared experiences.

What others say about volunteering

Was it Shakespeare or Picasso who said,

"The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away."

The view of Oscar Wilde was:

"The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention."

And from an anonymous source:

"The happiest people are not those getting more but those giving more."

Memorably of course, President John F Kennedy, in his inaugural speech in January 1961, told Americans,

"Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country."

Many writings impress that it is small things done by many people which have a huge impact. One of my favourite quotes comes from St David, who encouraged his followers:

"Be joyful ... and do the little things"

A final anonymous thought:

"Volunteers don't get paid because they are priceless."

