**March 2023 Volunteer Coordinators’ Forum**

**Topic: Volunteer Recruitment and Retention**

by Caroline Watson, Volunteer Officer for Sutton Council’s Cultural Services (8 libraries and 3 heritage centres)

In 2017 she started with around 35 volunteers they now have over 130. They have recruited over 100 volunteers but they have joined and left over this time.

They previously had an informal group of volunteers and each location ran this in their own way. A few years ago they formalised their processes and policies. They have a number of different volunteer roles such as book shelving, rhyme time, front of house, stewarding and gardening.

**Recruitment**

Originally they had table within one of their Libraries or Heritage venues - this however did not extend the scope to beyond their customers.

These are **some of the ways they increased their recruitment** of volunteers directing interested residents to their online application form:

· **Social Media** and online posts via our Digital Team and Sutton Council Comms Team (weekly, monthly posts when needed)

· **Spotlight** **on a volunteer or a role** e.g. Volunteer of the Month and talk about their experience of volunteering and why they enjoyed it.

· **In House newsletters** e.g. Insight Newsletter - staff know about the Programme and recommend it to their family or friends

· **External newsletters**, ask other organisations to include in their newsletters, e.g. Sutton Scene, Housing Associations.

· **Their own website** - created short films explaining the volunteer programme

· **Targeted talks** to groups and organisations, e.g. U3A, the Refugee Network Centre

· **Posters on local noticeboards** e.g. local colleges, train stations/coffee shops and community notice boards around the Borough **including outside their own venues.**

· **Attending Local Events** e.g. family fun days, festivals and seasonal events such as the Charter Fair in Cheam - Banners, balloons, giveaways etc to families.

· **Outreach** - proud of as worked well, thinking outside of the box and approached **Supermarkets to have a stall** in their foyer to catch shoppers on the way in and out - Benefits of this widens the circle of new volunteers as many shoppers may not readily visit the library or museums or have access to social media.

· **Volunteer Centre Sutton** who advertise their vacancies through their system and also attend any events they organise such as Drop Ins on Volunteer Week and the Sutton Volunteer Showcase.

· **Word of mouth**

**Retention**

**More important than recruitment, is retention** as we all know it takes time, effort and money to recruit new volunteers. If you manage to retain your volunteers then it will lessen your need to recruit for more.

They have a very high retention rate – **how?** Very basic - **valuing their volunteers**, showing their appreciation and thanks as much as possible.

These are **some of the ways in which they have improved volunteer retention:**

· **Winter and Summer parties for volunteers** with party food, tea and cake and activities e.g. boules on the lawn.

· **Ensure you have a budget to thank volunteers**, may be worth doing a business case / cost analysis to get buy in from managers and senior leaders of the value of parties.

· **Volunteer catch-up sessions** - with tea and cake also - a chance to speak to volunteers in an informal setting to see if they wish to discuss anything, concerns, suggestions, ideas etc. Helps them feel listened to and heard.

· **Annual evaluation questionnaire** - google form with 5 questions just to make it as easy as possible and to collate feedback on what we are doing well and what we can improve upon

· **Each volunteer has a named supervisor** - who they know they can talk to about any issue and they also have scheduled informal meetings with their supervisor every couple of months, to check in. If a volunteer does not feel able to speak to their volunteer supervisor about their concerns for any reason then they know they can contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

· **Volunteers are suitably trained and equipped for the role**. If they are confident in their role then they are more likely to stay in it.

· **Volunteers have the ability to change roles** – there are a variety of roles that people can move between.

· **Adapt roles** **to meet different needs / skillsets of volunteers** e.g. Live Music Rhymetime Sessions

· **Make volunteers feel welcome** - no ‘them and us’

· **Similarities with staff and volunteers** – e.g. volunteer lanyards are similar to staff lanyards which provides a sense of pride and belonging and lockers for belongings.

· **Short am and pm sessions** - start with 2-3 hours so that people are sure they can fit it in their schedule, then they can expand upon this in the future if they like.

· **Keep it simple** – e.g. an easy process to sign in.

· **Train Volunteer Supervisors** to ensure that they embed volunteering into their workload and encourage their staff to interact positively with their volunteers.

· **Ensure all staff make volunteers feel respected, valued and included** each time they volunteer

**· Invest in volunteers** – e.g. **additional training** for those who wish to take this up e.g. Fire Warden Training , Equalities Training and First Aid Training.

· **Make it a fun, sociable space** - encourage volunteers to network and make friends with each other. Many volunteer for the social aspect so they see the volunteering experience not just a way to build skills, make use of their time, give back to the community or increase confidence but a chance to meet up with their fellow friendly volunteers and staff members.

· **Ensure it is fully inclusive** – so that all people including those with learning disabilities or mental health issues can volunteer by linking and liaising with their college or organisation with regard to any support issues they may have.

**Ultimately as long as volunteers feel respected, acknowledged, supported, valued and appreciated they will want to continue to volunteer with your organisation and may well recruit more volunteers into your programme themselves.**

**Other retention ideas** – thank you cards, WhatsApp groups, variety of thank you events, ask for a time commitment 3-6mths.