

# How to.....Keep your Volunteers

When the Institute of Volunteering Research carried out their Best Practice research earlier this year, recruitment was seen as the most important area of concern for Poole and Bournemouth organisations. Yet, and this I find very strange, **11 organisations** said that retention of volunteers was the **third most important** on their list. Taken literally this means finding volunteers is very important, but keeping them isn't! Can we assume from this that volunteers are seen as disposable? How can that be best practice? Especially when you take into consideration:

- the time you spent finding them
- interviewing them
- doing CRB checks and/or taking up ref.s
- inducting and training them
- supporting them.

It's only natural that you will lose volunteers through illness, death, pregnancy etc., and there will always be those who seek constant new challenges every three months, whatever you try to do to keep them.

However, your current volunteers chose to join your organisation for a reason and that was to meet specific needs they had at the time. If you can continue to meet those needs through the voluntary work you offer them, your volunteers will stay.

But how do you ensure this happens? See the list over the page for some ideas:

## VOLUNTEER QUESTIONNAIRE

Or why not use a volunteer questionnaire? (example overleaf) Feel free to add other comments to make it more personal to your organisation.

If you've been holding regular one-to-one sessions you may not need a questionnaire, but it could be useful for those volunteers who are not comfortable speaking openly face-to-face.

It does ask for some very honest feedback. If this is going to be a problem, perhaps ask another organisation if they would receive the replies and collate them for you. However, because a lot of the questions are personal and you are obviously looking to see if there are areas in which you could improve, then the more you can get your volunteers to speak openly the better.

Action/s	Will Try P	Completed P
Many volunteers leave after six months, so discuss their expectations with them when they start. They often leave because they visualised what the work would be like, but when they start they find its: <i>unfulfilling, boring, or not challenging or stimulating enough.</i>		
Hold regular one-to-one sessions with them.		
Aim for a goal for your staff/volunteer team and celebrate accomplishments when goals are achieved.		

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Give volunteers a challenge and set reasonable goals (depending on the volunteer's capability). If they are too low or too high, they could lose interest.		
If you have a staff meeting, ensure that volunteers are invited. (Meetings about salaries and other items which only concern employed staff, could be dealt with at a separate meeting if necessary).		
Try to ensure that your volunteers have a sense of ownership of a client/project.		
For volunteers who like to be kept busy, give them plenty to do. You don't want them leaving because they're bored.		
Remember to ask about events which are important to them in their personal lives.		
Set up a system of recognising long service e.g. certificates, plaques, socials. Put details in your Volunteers Handbook. Don't forget to tell the press for major milestones. (Not every volunteer likes recognition in this way, but you should have it in place for those who do).		
Organise team building events with ideas coming from your staff/volunteers		
Remember to say thank you. Word of mouth if possible after a volunteer has finished their work for the day, but if this isn't possible, a phone call, email or text message. After a particularly large piece of work send a letter signed by the trustees.		
Celebrate Volunteers Week and show how special they are to your organisation.		
Consider carrying out an Impact Assessment on your clients and then share the results with your volunteers. (The Poole Volunteer Centre has a Volunteering England toolkit with an Impact Assessment form inside if you need a template).		
If you have a welcome board in your entrance/reception area (and it won't break confidentiality) ensure photos of your volunteers are included (with their agreement of course)!		
If you produce press releases, ask your volunteers for a quote. The same goes for your newsletter. Ask your volunteers if they would like to submit something.		
Little touches like providing your volunteers with their own tin of extra special biscuits can make a difference to those with a sweet tooth. Or for the health conscious a bowl of fruit.		

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**Try this questionnaire out on your volunteers:**

	Yes	No	N/A
I feel my work makes a difference and helps: (circle choice/s) our clients/service users    the environment    the community our organisation    other voluntary organisations    other volunteers			
The work is interesting and challenging.			
There is plenty of work to do.			
I love seeing the results of my work.			
I feel supported by my line manager			
The environment I work in is pleasant.			
I have received sufficient training to enable me to undertake my work.			
There is a sense of belonging to one big family with staff and other volunteers.			
I am trusted to get on with my job without constant supervision.			
The Volunteer Co-ordinator gives me regular 1-1 sessions and an annual appraisal.			
My travel expenses are always paid.			
The work is helping me to develop new skills.			
I am aware of the boundaries involved when working with clients.			
The Volunteer Co-ordinator understands why I am doing voluntary work.			
I hope to get a reference from my voluntary work to enable me to find paid employment.			
I receive full recognition for the work I do e.g. certificates, mention in newsletters etc.			
When I have ideas relevant to my work, these are always listened to.			
I'm working for an organisation with a high profile which is important to me.			
My opinion is asked for and valued, particularly when it involves decision			

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making.			
There's been an improvement in my self-confidence and esteem since volunteering.			
I know what to do if I have a grievance.			
I know that if I want to take qualifications relevant to my voluntary work, that support would be offered.			
I know that I am covered by insurance.			
I've made new friends since I started here.			

*This snapshot on Keeping your Volunteers was kindly written by Monique Munroe on behalf of Poole & Bournemouth Volunteer Centres.*

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