

A volunteering vision for Hastings

A project carried out by **Hastings Voluntary Action** in partnership with wider stakeholders and based on research undertaken by the **Institute of Volunteering Research at the University of East Anglia**

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Introduction

Hastings is a great place to volunteer and perhaps the town's greatest assets is one of the most active and vibrant VCSE sectors in the country. Together our volunteers, and the organisations they serve, create events and opportunities, offer support, develop people and places, campaign and advocate on local, national and global issues.

People volunteer for all sorts of reasons; to contribute to a cause or an organisation they are passionate about, to learn new skills or build a pathway into new social networks, employment or further training. Local volunteers make Hastings a better place for everyone, and we celebrate each and every one of them.

However, we also know that volunteering is changing in all kinds of ways and, as a town, we need to continually explore how we recruit, support and retain volunteers in ways which keep pace with the way in which people want to be involved.

This strategy has been through extensive research, consultation and engagement. It is the culmination of the largest ever study into local volunteering patterns and we are grateful to everyone who took part, and particularly to the team at the Institute for Volunteering Research who conducted the work and ensured that the evidence on which we have based our approach was independent and rigorous.

There is no “magic bullet” to creating the volunteer workforce for the future – particularly in these difficult and uncertain times – but we hope the steps we are bringing forward provide a clear framework for the type of actions we can take to make Hastings one of the best and most satisfying places to volunteer your time and skills.



The Evidence - Our research and what we discovered

HVA were delighted to collaborate with the Institute for Volunteering Research on this, the largest ever study of volunteering ever undertaken in Hastings and crucially an independent objective body of evidence from which we can develop a local strategy. There is much in their report to reflect on, but we have identified the following issues as being crucial to our further discussions.

- The report highlights that we have within our VCSE sector the energy, potential and creativity to make Hastings one of the best places to volunteer. There are many examples of good practice where volunteers are really proud and engaged. It is also clear that many organisations are going the extra mile to create opportunities for people who have additional support needs. We should rightly be proud of this and find ways of celebrating the work we do and share good practice.
- We have more people wanting to make a contribution and more organisations wanting to involve them than the national average – Hastings is truly a “can do” community with many, many assets.
- However, the report also illustrates the many ways in which volunteering is changing. The national trends analysis tells us that we need to recognise and embrace this in our thinking. The use of technology, for example, can be a way of connecting people and opportunities.
- As we begin to emerge from the COVID-19 period, we need to look at the impact this has had on volunteering. In some respects, COVID proved there was energy within local communities to support each other and the period saw the development of a strong commitment to mutual aid. The development of HEART, together with local neighbourhood activity, is a clear example of this. But there is also evidence that post-COVID some volunteers have been more reluctant to return to previous levels of activity. It is also unclear whether periods of economic uncertainty will result in people returning to volunteering in order to help others in need, or whether we will see even more people stepping away from volunteering as times become more difficult for more of us.
- More flexible approaches to volunteering which can meet individual circumstances and are more focused around individual tasks rather than time might point a way forward. We also need to recognise that there may be ways the application process can be improved, so that a connection between a volunteer and an organisation does not feel like too long a process. Prior to its county-wide roll out, Hastings will soon be trialling a new digital volunteering platform which we hope may help streamline a volunteer’s journey and make it easier for a volunteer to move between [at least some] volunteer roles.
- We need to find ways to profile and celebrate the work of local volunteers (and describe the economic contribution they make to the Town). Volunteers are, after all, the best ambassadors, and how they describe their experience is crucial.
- This local volunteering strategy we need to be open to new ideas, be honest about what is working less well, and be inclusive in recognising the needs of future volunteers.

Our Vision

Our vision for volunteering is underpinned by 3 core principles.

1. That our VCSE sector is celebrated and supported in their work with volunteers with good quality infrastructure, advice, training, and the ability to learn and develop good practice and approaches in partnership with others.
2. That all people [that want to], should have an opportunity to volunteer and have a quality experience that they find rewarding and feel they want to recommend to others.
3. That people feel they have an opportunity to make a difference and can make the change they want through their volunteering.



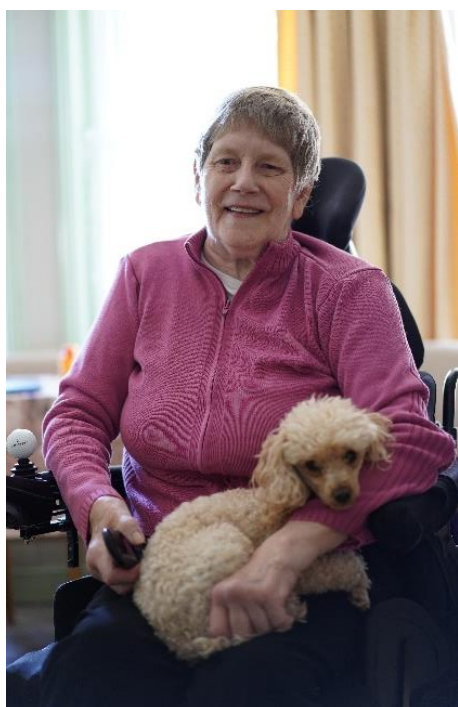
The Change we want to make

1. To celebrate our VCSE sector and support them in their work with volunteers with good quality infrastructure advice, training and the ability to learn and develop good practice approaches in partnership with others	
Building more capacity and expertise & sharing good practice and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to organise regular opportunities for VCSE organisations to share experiences. - to discuss with East Sussex College Group existing workforce development opportunities to promote for volunteers and those who support them - to develop, organise and promote joint learning or training opportunities for volunteers and volunteer coordinators
Getting opportunities to the widest possible audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to pilot, evaluate and embed a new online platform for VCSE groups and potential volunteers in Hastings - to consider, with partners, the delivery of a town centre pop-up volunteering hub to provide regular opportunities for potential volunteers to discuss their wishes in person - to profile local opportunities on a weekly basis via news bulletins social media - increasing the number of local employers who support celebrate or facilitate their employees into volunteering
Providing dedicated volunteering support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to maintain at least the currently level of generic volunteer placement support at HVA and seek to expand this to at least a full-time role or equivalent. - to develop, in partnership, a more integrated follow up offer for volunteers with additional support needs. - new volunteering opportunities such as “team”, “pop-up” or project based i.e. open access (turn up and do) volunteering opportunities 4 x per year. - to develop resources, with appropriate champions, to enable provision of targeted advice and support around recruitment and retention of trustees/committee members.
Reducing Delay or Barriers to volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to work with partners to develop approaches to narrowing the gap between an individual seeking to volunteer with an organisation and starting their volunteer experience. - To review the availability and accessibility of DBS checking services and ensure that this is not causing significant delays to volunteers commencing their work
“No strings” volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enable people to try out volunteering quickly and easily without having to give a long-term commitment by increasing the amount of “taster” opportunities delivered by Volunteer involving organisations.

2. That all people should have an opportunity to volunteer and have a quality experience that they find rewarding and feel able to recommend to others	
Promoting diversity and inclusion in volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to host regular conversations around volunteer diversification and good practice and offer designated training to volunteer involving organisations to promote inclusion and diversity in the marketing, recruitment and development of volunteers. - to build upon previous learning gathered from the Centre for Ageing Better, the Ageing Network and other partners and use that learning to support people to volunteer for as long as they want to, even if their circumstances change. - to develop and grow more connections with groups that are led by or work alongside ethnic minorities that are known to be less-represented within the voluntary sector
Find ways to reach groups who are under-represented in volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to use learning, connections and partnerships gathered by the HVA Men's Health and Wellbeing project to find ways to increase the number of men accessing volunteering opportunities. - to explore more of a locality focused approach to volunteering, and seek to support existing or emerging community leaders specifically, and use this approach to mitigate where there may be an actual or perceived dilution of strong local leadership.
Developing a "new generation of volunteers"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to work with a diverse range of organisations that involve or seek to reach young people, especially those that target young people who may be NEET or otherwise disengaged. - to undertake a specific study with East Sussex College Group, the Youth Council and the Youth partnership to better understand the volunteering aspirations and needs of younger people and use this to inform further partnership activity. - to be an active partner to the East Sussex Youth Volunteering initiative to promote good practice and develop further opportunities for young people to volunteer. - to progress in conjunction with the Youth Partnership a more integrated approach to the promotion of volunteering for young people and roll this out at event such as fresher's week at the College and as part of the Citizenship curriculum to Year 11 students within local schools.
Recognising and celebrating volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to develop a joined-up approach between the private, public and voluntary sectors to a local Volunteers Week campaign promoted throughout the Borough. - to organise an annual event to make awards to local volunteers nominated as having made a significant contribution through their volunteering role. - to ensure that these celebrations reflect the full range of volunteers, particularly those from backgrounds whose contributions are featured less often.

Making it as easy as possible to make a difference in your neighbourhood (micro-grant support)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - where volunteers want to start a local initiative but need a small amount of investment to get started, to review the availability of “micro-grants” of up to £1000 to invest in local activism and maintain the momentum, work and energy of local volunteers. - to explore with local employers a local seedcorn sponsorship fund through which local employers can donate directly into local volunteer led activity.
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3. People can make the change they want through their volunteering	
Helping volunteers achieve their goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - where volunteers are seeking to use their volunteering experience, to offer a number and range of volunteering opportunities with associated training which leads to a qualification or credits. - to work with private public and voluntary sector organisations to extend the number of local employers who seek information about a candidate’s volunteering and recognise the value of this experience as part of their job recruitment processes.



Conclusion

We want as many volunteer organisations and individuals to help implement this new Volunteering Strategy. We will be working to develop an action plan and a timeline so that this work has a clear time-frame and purpose. Volunteer Coordinator forum members will be invited to review the work as it unfolds to ensure that the ideas we are describing here translate into practical actions which can make a real difference on the ground.



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