

Let's talk
VOLUNTEERING
Innovation

Volunteering: The 20/20 Vision blog, written by Faye Smith, Volunteering Services Officer, Community Action Suffolk.

Volunteers: Meeting Them Where They're At.

Innovation in Volunteering – Doing Things Differently.

Everyone has something to offer.

So why do we spend so much time and energy in trying to place a willing and enthusiastic volunteer into a predetermined role that we want to fill. Square pegs, round holes. Let me be clear, this blog does not intend to reject the more traditional approaches used within volunteer management, but instead challenges you to expand your approach; *listen* to your volunteer as to how they can add value to your Organisation.

Listen. Not just with your ears.

Listen carefully or you may miss a diamond.

Perhaps it is time to change our thinking.

Change how we do things.

Do things differently.

This blog suggests meeting volunteers *where they are at*. Utilising their skills, energy, and interests as you find them. What drives them, motivates them, energises them.

And in those moments where two open minds meet, innovation emerges from the shadows and your organisation takes on new form.

Perhaps even the language we use needs to change. Why do we call it a 'role description?' – does that sound too much like hard work and commitment? Maybe working with your enthusiastic volunteer you can draw up together *Volunteer Profile* or *Core Objectives* of their time with you.

Again, take the word '*recruit*'. Why do we still use it? Makes me think of applying for a job. What other word can you think of to engage, captivate, and include volunteers into your organisation?

Language: use it wisely.

Case in point: Take an experienced 40 something. Years of experience in finance, project management and creative arts. A willing and enthusiastic volunteer at a local Organisation. Wanting to help change the way things are done, bring more people through the door, engage with diverse audiences.

However, because they were not *met where they were at*, not truly listened to but instead expected to fall in line, this enthusiasm soon waned, and the volunteer walked away. Lost potentially to the sector forever in a cloud of frustration, disillusionment, and disappointment.

But what if things were done differently? What if the Organisation had really listened and actually took on board the comments and ideas within this wisdom? Accommodated this energy and embraced this enthusiasm.

Went off piste.

Changed direction even.

What if?

What if things were done differently?

Now is the time to do things differently.

This blog is part of a 6 month focus on Let's Talk Volunteering. Join in and follow our programme. Facebook @volunteersuffolk & join the CAS network <https://www.communityactionsuffolk.org.uk/join-our-network/>