

Volunteering Success - IP17 GNS Social Supermarket at The Gannon Rooms, Saxmundham

The Challenge at Hand

The charity faced the challenge of ensuring smooth co-ordination and organisation for their volunteer-run services, particularly during high-demand events such as running the Social Supermarket. With a limited team, the organisation needed to effectively manage volunteers' hours, tasks, and logistics to avoid burnout and inefficiencies. Additionally, the charity sought ways to improve communication between volunteers and ensure everyone felt valued and supported while maintaining a keen sense of community and purpose.

Michelle's Approach

Michelle, volunteer coordinator at IP17 GNS, took on the challenge of creating a system that would allow the volunteers to feel connected, organised, and appreciated. A key element of her strategy involved:

- **Organising with Purpose:** Michelle, alongside the team, devised a system to organise volunteer schedules and tasks. This included creating WhatsApp groups for clear and real-time communication, as well as trialling an online database to track volunteer hours and activities. This database helped volunteers stay up to date on events and made it easier to see where their efforts were most needed.
- **Personal Shopper Programme:** A standout feature of the charity's initiative is its personal shopper service, where each user receives dedicated one-on-one support. This not only creates a personalised experience for the users but also ensures that volunteers are fully invested in the needs of those they serve. Volunteers take pride in forming connections with users, offering them consistent, reliable assistance.
- **Team Building and Support:** Michelle's leadership style is rooted in getting to know her volunteers on a personal level. She speaks to them individually to understand their backgrounds, preferences, and skills, ensuring that they are assigned tasks that they enjoy. Additionally, she fosters a sense of camaraderie within the team, often organising social events, such as team lunches, after major events to build morale and celebrate their collective success.

Results!

The results of Michelle's careful co-ordination and the team's hard work have been profound:

- **Increased Efficiency:** With a structured approach to scheduling and task management, volunteers have become well-drilled in their roles. Events such as supermarket runs and food pickups are now more streamlined, with clear roles for each volunteer (e.g., one volunteer to collect from Two Magpies bakery, another to manage supermarket shopping). The effective use of WhatsApp groups allows the team to stay organised and communicate easily, reducing confusion and errors.
 - **Positive Volunteer Experience:** Volunteers report high satisfaction with their roles, with many expressing pride in being part of the team. Michelle's care for her volunteers is clear, as she takes the time to listen to feedback, offers personal support, and ensures that volunteers feel valued. The team dynamic is strong, with volunteers often sharing positive experiences and feedback from the people they support.
 - **Impact on the Community:** Users of the charity's services have expressed great appreciation for the Social Supermarket, noting the impact it has had on their lives. Volunteers not only help with shopping but also build lasting relationships with the users, contributing to the overall success of the program. The "Happy Hearts Wall," where positive feedback from users is shared with volunteers, has further boosted morale and made volunteers feel proud of their contributions.
 - **Creating Purpose:** The sense of purpose within the team is clear. Volunteers are motivated by Michelle's leadership and their shared mission to help others. The charity has become a hub for local community members to come together, work towards a common cause, and make meaningful contributions. The team often enjoys social gatherings after events, reinforcing the bonds between volunteers and creating a supportive, positive environment for everyone involved.
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Lessons Learnt

The success of IP17 GNS's volunteer program highlights the importance of strong leadership, effective organisation, and a sense of community. Michelle's dedication to her volunteers has created an environment where each person feels valued, understood, and motivated to contribute their time and effort. By fostering effective communication, offering personalised support, and creating opportunities for team bonding, the charity has built a loyal and engaged volunteer base that has had a lasting impact on the community.

For other organisations looking to replicate this success, the key takeaway is the importance of knowing your volunteers, supporting clear communication, and organising activities that provide both purpose and satisfaction. By making volunteers feel needed and appreciated, Michelle has cultivated a strong, well-organised team that continues to make a difference in the lives of those they serve.