



# CULTURE VOLUNTEERS WM

BLACK COUNTRY REPORT

# CULTURE VOLUNTEERS WM ABOUT THE PROJECT

Culture Volunteers WM was a pilot project that set out to provide more opportunities for people to volunteer in the arts, creative and cultural sector. The project was funded by Arts Council England after a successful funding bid made through Culture Central.

It took place in the Black Country, Stoke and Birmingham from October 2022 to March 2024. Creative Black Country, (CBC) led on the project in the Black Country area.

Here's what some of our volunteers and partners have to say:

<https://www.creativeblackcountry.co.uk/culture-volunteer>



WHY  
VOLUNTEER!

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**culture  
volunteer** WM



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



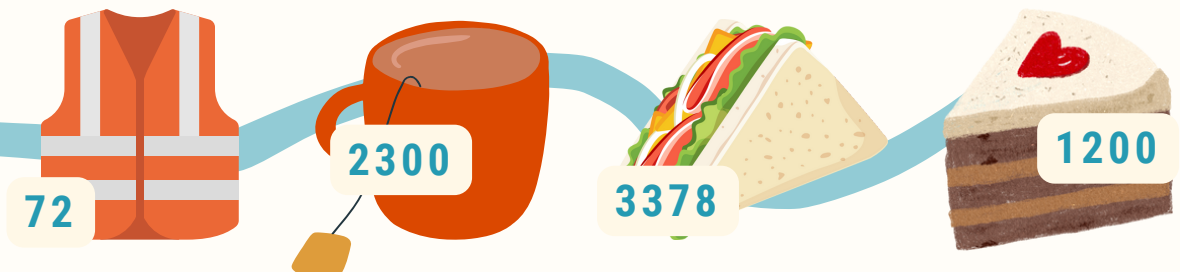
# CULTURE VOLUNTEERS IN NUMBERS



UNDER 18'S = 94  
18-24 YR OLDS = 175  
25+ = 311



AND AN ESTIMATED



## YOUNG PEOPLE WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GAZEBO

One of our key target groups for Culture Volunteers WM were 18–24-year-olds. We were keen to reach those who may have limited access to volunteering opportunities, but who could really benefit from the experience they give.

### WHY WE DID IT ...

Volunteering can be a great way of finding out more about working in arts and culture, and can help young people learn more about themselves too. It shows initiative, develops personal and practical skills, and looks good on a CV. .

Working with the team at Gazebo Theatre, we created and delivered a three month long programme that included options to volunteer for roles at arts, cultural, or community events in the Wolverhampton area.

### ...AND WHAT WE DID

#### **Our volunteering included:**

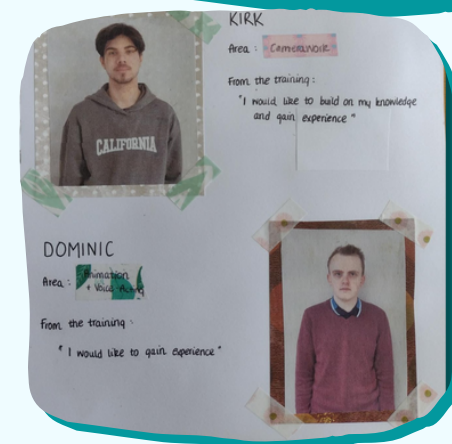
- Supporting the Wolverhampton Literature Festival at venues cross the city, and helping the festivals broadcast partner WCRFM.
- Had basic FoH training in preparation to meet, greet and guide festival audiences.
- Helped with audience management and event evaluation.
- Helped at the community workshops that were held for people to make lanterns for the 'Welcome Spring' parade in Whitmore Reans.
- Tidied up the Community Gardens where the parade finished - getting it ship-shape for visitors on the night.
- Carried lanterns at the parade, took on stewarding roles, and made a film of the event.
- Co-producing a play with the team at Gazebo, working on the script and making props.



What a Team!



Lighting up  
Whitmore Reans -  
Welcome Spring!





# YOUNG PEOPLE WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GAZEBO

## WHAT DID YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT THE PROGRAMME?

- Meeting people who have become 'my people' with a high interest in creativity, networking with different organisations and creating links with them, having support in my future aspirations and support in general
- I enjoyed getting to meet new people and make new friends. I also enjoyed having the opportunities to do volunteering in different areas of the creative industries, that I probably wouldn't have thought to do previously
- The fact that I made many friends, explored the area around me, got to participate in various art forms
- Meeting new people from different creative backgrounds and being able to experience their side of it, doing volunteering in creative places
- I enjoyed the group activities – it has given us all a feeling for different roles and situations
- I was able to see different opportunities that are available in my field of interest
- Meeting new people, trying new things that I never did before, building up my confidence and skills to become a better person, having a focus

## WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT?

- Behind the scenes of events – management and filming, the different types of work required for creative industries, including singing and vocal training, how to create my own workshop
- Music production, singing including warmups, how to facilitate a workshop
- How to work in a team
- I have learnt more about acting and the different workshops that can be done
- I learnt how to operate the camera, project my voice, and the theory behind music/piano skills
- How to build props, operate cameras and to act
- Spray painting, prop making, parade preparation (for the Lantern Festival)
- I have learnt that having a variety of communication skills is something which is essential in this industry
- Time management, teamwork, understanding
- I learnt different skills such as problem-solving, confidence, thinking outside the box
- Film Editing and how to play the guitar
- I have learnt a lot of skills on how to talk to the public when doing voluntary work, I learnt acting skills, also showing people around public spaces, working with young children, helping at the art gallery

## WHAT ARE YOUR NEXT STEPS?

- Continue to build my current, new, and growing knowledge in the creative environment along with building my confidence – ready for university in September
- Try to find employment – possibly in facilitation to young adults
- To be employed / finding a job in the creative industry
- Obtaining links with music industry so I can be employed
- I am waiting on a BBC apprenticeship / work application and to see about going to Plymouth University – both would start September
- Going to university in September – would like to carry on training with Gazebo until September
- To get more experience and hopefully be employed
- Look at further volunteering opportunities, explore college and possible employment
- Get my headshots and showreel sorted and sent off for work

## ACCESS -D/DEAF

### WHY WE DID IT ...

Many arts and cultural organisations want to improve their connections with D/deaf communities, and to make their content and their volunteering accessible to them but don't know where to start. We helped them begin that journey, and remove some of the barriers and fears.

### ... WHAT WE DID

- Held BSL interpreted tours and open days for specific groups from the D/deaf community at both Stourbridge Glass Museum and Wightwick Manor to get to know the spaces and each other..
- Had feedback sessions -getting their thoughts about volunteering, and understanding more about the support they need to participate.
- Provided Basic Deaf Awareness training and some simple, sector specific BSL training for volunteers and staff at both venues.
- Produced a video of the sector specific BSL interpretation for volunteers and staff at Stourbridge Glass Museum for them to use and refresh their skills.
- Worked with D/deaf volunteers, to make BSL interpreted information videos for Stourbridge Glass Museum's website.



Filming at  
Stourbridge Glass  
Museum



BSL collaboration  
with Stourbridge  
Glass Museum



Helping out at  
Wightwick Manor



Wightwick Manor,  
Wolverhampton



## ACCESS – WALSTALL SEND STUDENTS

### WHY WE DID IT ...

Young people with SEND are twice as likely as those without to have a level of wellbeing that will lead to depression. Volunteering can help. It offers opportunities for them to be part of a new and shared experience in the wider community, boosting confidence and skills.

For organisations, bringing young people with SEND into the fold via volunteering begins to break down barriers between the organisation and young people, nurturing greater understanding between everyone involved.

### .... WHAT WE DID

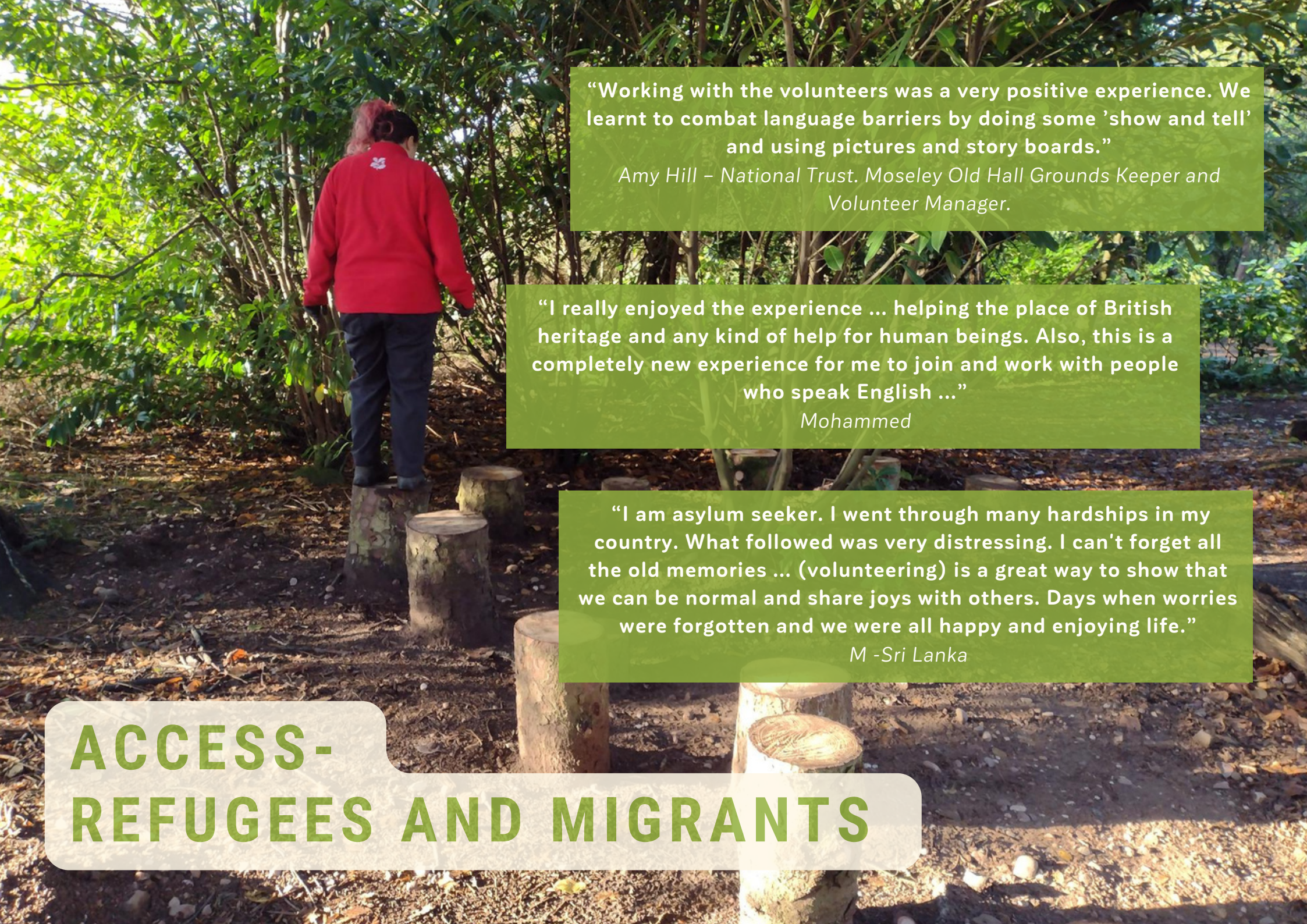
We began with a day of activities aimed at boosting personal confidence and nurturing team-building skills that was designed and delivered by our project partners, Open Theatre. Next, it was off to meet the team at Wolverhampton Art Gallery. We had several visits over a number of weeks, getting to know the spaces and the people there. During those visits we worked alongside the students job coach for their sign-up and inductions - lunches and plenty of cake made that a bit easier! Then came the Literature Festival, and our volunteers were on hand for the full three days, helping to inform and guide visitors, making sure they got the best out of the event.

**"... the relationship, the reassurance, and the rapture that CBC and I created and presented really helped to open their minds to possibilities and their potential. More interns then became interested. This really shows that there are young adults with SEN who want to be involved but just need to be approached differently."**

*Rebecca Clarke -SEND job coach -Walsall College*





A person wearing a red jacket and dark trousers is seen from behind, standing on a path made of tree stumps in a wooded area. The path is made of several cut tree trunks of varying heights, creating a natural staircase. The surrounding area is filled with green foliage and trees, suggesting a forest or garden setting. The lighting is bright, indicating it's daytime.

“Working with the volunteers was a very positive experience. We learnt to combat language barriers by doing some ‘show and tell’ and using pictures and story boards.”

*Amy Hill – National Trust, Moseley Old Hall Grounds Keeper and Volunteer Manager.*

“I really enjoyed the experience ... helping the place of British heritage and any kind of help for human beings. Also, this is a completely new experience for me to join and work with people who speak English ...”

*Mohammed*

“I am asylum seeker. I went through many hardships in my country. What followed was very distressing. I can't forget all the old memories ... (volunteering) is a great way to show that we can be normal and share joys with others. Days when worries were forgotten and we were all happy and enjoying life.”

*M -Sri Lanka*

**ACCESS-  
REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS**



# ACCESS- REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS WITH MOSELEY OLD HALL

## WHY WE DID IT ...

Refugees and migrants can struggle to find opportunities to integrate, improve their English, and understand more about the country and people of their new home. Isolation and loneliness are common problems within these groups

## ... WHAT WE DID

We started with a tour of the house and grounds so our new volunteers could get to know the place and its history, meet staff and volunteers already there, and find out what the volunteer role involved.

The first tasks were simple and easy to demonstrate. – such as raking leaves from the lawns and pathways and tidying the car park.

As confidence grew the team were tasked to do major repairs on the dead hedge along the road boundary, improve and repair the seating by the campfire, and build a new log obstacle course in the adventure play area.

**"It's not just about contributing to society, but also about forging social ties, boosting wellbeing, and feeling like a part of Wolverhampton's community.**

**We at RMC, and our beneficiaries, are immensely thankful".**

Dzenana Masic, ESOL / Functional Skills Tutor. RMC)



Hands-On Action  
at Moseley Old Hal



Some great work  
now completed at  
Moseley Old Hall





"We have a tremendous team of staff and it felt right to start to engage with the community in a different way, and that is one of the reasons why we introduced the volunteers. It was also right because of all of the outreach and the work we do in the community with people from all backgrounds. It was important that we were able to offer a little bit more to people. I'm very conscious that working in the theatre environment builds many skills for people, and I also know that people who have had successful careers are now wanting to give something back themselves; it's a great way for them to do that as well. Working with the Culture Volunteer WM project acted as a bit of a catalyst for us. It all costs money and it costs resource, so having the support from the project has helped us along nicely and probably made it happen a lot quicker than it would have done".

Adrian Jackson, Chief Executive and Artistic Director, Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton.



**AND THERE'S MORE... GRAND THEATRE**



# GRAND THEATRE

## WHY WE DID IT ...

The Grand Theatre is one of Wolverhampton's iconic cultural venues and holds a special place in the hearts of many of the people who live and work there. It had been a decade or more since the theatre last had a team of volunteers on board. The volunteer scheme was designed to provide work experience and opportunities for people living in the local community, as well as help combat loneliness.

## ... WHAT WE DID

- Worked with the theatre team to create and refine the volunteer role, volunteer agreement and policies, and advise on best practice when recruiting and managing a volunteer team.
- Launched a volunteer recruitment drive in the local press and media.
- Held two volunteer recruitment days, which led to 71 people from across the Black Country signing up as volunteers.
- Selected the first 30 volunteers and held 2 induction days where they had a proper chance to get to know each other and meet theatre staff. The day included a presentation about the volunteer role and a tour of the theatre so they could familiarise themselves with the building and where they would be working.



**"I think I need to be able to speak with people – staff or the customers coming in. I like this environment and obviously I've got the opportunity to watch a show ... It's about me being able to give something to help others and get something for myself too, now I'm not working".**  
Pauline - Walsall





**AND SOME MORE...**



## AND SOME MORE

The activities featured aren't the whole story for the Culture Volunteers WM project. There were many other arts and cultural organisations, events, and activities that we were able to support across the Black Country.

Some of these were led by local councils, some by heritage venues, some by CIC's. Others were led by local community groups which are themselves made up of volunteers, and some were led by individual creative practitioners.

Here are a few of the other projects and people we supported: Sandwell Museums and Arts Service, Autin Dance, #Same Difference Festival, Wolverhampton Art Festival, Bearwood Community Hub, Willenhall Lock-Stock Festival, Smethwick Heritage Centre, The Art Yard, Sandwell Youth Festival, Sandwell Big Talent Show, Arty Heidi, and the Dorothy Parkes Centre.



[Smethwick  
Heritage Centre  
Recruitment Day](#)



[Potions,  
Performance and  
Passionate  
Volunteering](#)



['Same Difference'  
Festival,  
Wolverhampton](#)

## HINTS AND TIPS FROM ONE OF OUR PARTNERS

Thinking of recruiting volunteers?

Here are some hints and tips from James Chaplain, Acting Head of Front of House, Grand Theatre, who has been managing the new volunteer team there.

- **Clearly communicate expectations, roles, and the impact of volunteer contributions.**
- **Prioritise training and ongoing support for volunteers.**
- **Regularly acknowledge and appreciate volunteers to motivate and build a positive culture.**
- **Embrace diversity in the volunteer team to widen your scope.**
- **Establish a feedback system for volunteers to share thoughts and concerns, and act on constructive feedback.**
- **Be flexible with schedules and roles, recognising varying commitments and abilities among volunteers.**

# BLACK COUNTRY VOLUNTEER SERVICES

## WHO WE WORKED WITH

The Black Country is blessed with four organisations across the borough designed to support those working with volunteers, and to help those who want to volunteer find the right place to do it.

## WHAT WE DID

Between them, the staff at the four volunteer support services have decades of experience and knowledge when it comes to recruiting, managing, and working with volunteers. Some of the staff are particularly knowledgeable in one aspect or another of volunteering; knowledge that should be shared more widely than just across the borough they work in.

As part of the legacy for the Culture Volunteers WM project they joined forces as Fours4Good, and developed a calendar of training and skills events which was made available to arts and cultural organisations, CIC's, community, and voluntary groups across the whole of the Black Country.

The calendar is regularly updated, and anyone working with volunteers can sign up to receive news of the latest training on offer.

Just as importantly, each of the volunteer services run regular networking events, an opportunity to share experiences, problems, stories both good and bad, and learn from peers in the sector.



The four services in the region are:

**SCVO** - supporting volunteers and organisations who work with them, via Let's Go Sandwell  
Website - [LetsGoSandwell](https://www.letsgosandwell.org))

**One Walsall** - supporting the community, voluntary and charity sector across Walsall.  
Website - [Homepage \(onewalsall.org\)](https://www.onewalsall.org)

**Dudley CVS** - supporting the voluntary and community sector within the Dudley borough.  
Website [Home - Dudley CVS](https://www.dudleycvs.org)

**Wolverhampton Volunteers** – part of Wolverhampton Voluntary & Community Action  
Website - [Wolverhampton Volunteers – The Volunteer Centre for Wolverhampton. \(wtonvolunteers.org\)](https://www.wtonvolunteers.org)





## SOME KEY LEARNINGS



Young people are most interested in volunteering opportunities that will directly support their career choices. Volunteering that offers mainly 'soft skills', though valuable, is of less interest. Targeted volunteering opportunities that lead to clear pathways for training and jobs are what they want. They are driven by what's in it for them

Making volunteering accessible means many, many different things. Restrictions to access can be connected to travel, cost, language, cultural differences, as well as physical, and mental abilities.

Find out individual needs and discuss and agree *reasonable* adjustments. Explain why if it's not possible to do something and see if there's anything else you can offer.

Provide travel and subsistence expenses if you want to open opportunities to people from areas of low economic and cultural wealth.

It takes more time than you can imagine to build relationships with new communities you want to reach. Trust builds slowly and you will need to adapt to their pace. In the 18 months of project delivery, tangible results with D/deaf communities are only really being achieved in the final stages.

In the drive to engage a 'different' type of volunteer - don't accidentally exclude others. ALL volunteers are individuals with their own motivations for coming forward. Respect them.

When it's well thought out and well managed, a volunteer scheme is not a threat to paid jobs.

Show volunteers your appreciation. A genuine thank-you, your time, tea, cake, and listening goes a long way (further than a certificate, pen or t-shirt in most cases).

Vary your volunteering offer where you can. If you only offer the same kind of opportunity the chances are you'll only attract the same kind of volunteer.

Support career choices

Provide expenses

Build relationships

Vary your offer

Say 'thank you'

# THANK YOU

**A project like this cannot work in isolation. It needs many others to support it and in some instances take a leap of faith. A pilot project is a step into the unknown, but it is also a great, and frequently rare opportunity to try things out, learn from shared experiences, and create solid foundations for future progress.**

**'My heartfelt thanks go to everyone who got involved in any way, large or small, who were willing to simply try and see what we could make work, explore the challenges, and experience the joys and jeopardy alongside me. Not everything worked, but you still offered an open hand in support, and I truly value that.'** *Fiona Dye - Project Lead, Black Country*

## **Thank you then to:**

Every single person who volunteered or enquired about volunteering opportunities in arts and culture

My brilliant colleagues at Creative Black Country.

Richard and Grace at Open Theatre, along with 'honorary team member' Liz.

John, Alliyah, and Wendy - project leads in Birmingham and Stoke

Denise, and the rest of the crew at Gazebo

Amy and Pat at the Midland Metropolitan Hospital, Sandwell.

Michelle and Georgina at Wolverhampton Art Gallery and all their lovely volunteers

Alex at New Art Gallery, Walsall

Moemi, and everyone who works or volunteers at Stourbridge Glass Museum

Lauren, Amy, Luke, and Arun from Moseley Old Hall and Wightwick Manor. The NT colleagues and the regular volunteers too. . .

Deirdre, Dawn, and Emma at Zebra Access and Zebra Uno

Maral at Deaf Explorer

Rachael, formerly at Deaf Explorer, and now working as a freelance.

Rosalind at Wolverhampton CEP

Neesha at Sandwell MBC

Everyone at the Art Yard, Brierley Hill

The team at Wolverhampton Community Radio, (WCRFM), especially Stuart and Ian.

Alex and his colleagues at Real Arts Workshops (RAW)

Kirsty and her colleagues at Arena Theatre

Steve and Dzenana at the Refugee and Migrant Centre

Rebecca at Walsall College

Rupinder at Sandwell College

Sally and the crew at Bearwood Community Hub

Jodie and the team at the Dorothy Parkes Centre

Chris at Smethwick Heritage Centre

Julie and Samantha at Sandwell Libraries

Madeline at Sandwell Museums and Arts Services

Heidi at ArtyHeidi

Kirsten and Johnny, Autin Dance

Wayne, Paulina, and Kata, from Wolverhampton Art Festival

Kim, Pete, Eileen, Julie and all their colleagues who work tirelessly to support volunteering across the Black Country.

Bill, Maria and everyone who supports them at Gatis Community Space

Mark and his team at Wildside

