

Case Study
London Borough of Merton
September 2012



Ten Years of Volunteers in Merton Libraries

Background

Volunteers are not new to Merton libraries. They were first introduced as part of the Lending Time Project, which was launched in 2002 and ran over two years. Since then, they have supported activities and events along with services such as the Heritage Centre. Merton's volunteering model has been used to lead the pan-London libraries volunteering project 'Love Libraries Love Volunteering'

The project

In April 2010, Merton Library & Heritage Service entered into a formal agreement with Volunteer Centre Merton (VCM) to recruit volunteers on behalf of the service. This formal agreement was built on the success of the Home Visits Library Service, which has been administered solely by volunteers since April 2008.

It was crucial that in order for the project to be a success, a clear message was communicated to all staff through employee engagement sessions, that volunteers were not there to replace paid staff but to support them. As agreed by StaffSide (*London Borough of Merton's recognised staff consultative body*) volunteers would be recruited to roles that add value to the service and not to replace existing staff roles. Staff also attended training workshops on volunteering and good practice sessions to support them.

Since the launch of the partnership, 660 volunteers have been recruited and Merton now has the highest level of volunteering use of any London authority.

Volunteers support staff in a range of different roles from meeting and greeting customers, shelving and delivering activities and events as well as training. Volunteers make the libraries more reflective of the communities they serve and deliver added value services (e.g. language courses) which staff would not have the resource time or expertise to deliver. Volunteers have enabled staff to focus their time and attention on customer service and core professional duties.



Volunteer Roles

Merton Library & Heritage Service seeks implemented volunteering to help, support and improve service delivery and involve volunteers to:

- offer new services and activities to users
- extend and improve existing services
- free-up staff time to concentrate on core work
- draw on specialist skills not generally available within the library service



The Library Service has five core roles, which are Meet & Greet, IT Support, Children's Activities Support, Outreach and Shelves. These are critical to the project in order to support staff in their roles and in the delivery of services. There are also a number of supplementary roles such as Reading Group and Coffee Morning Co-ordinators, Outreach Officers, Yoga and Aerobics Instructors, Family History and Painting Group Co-ordinators. There are over 40 active role descriptions and more are developed when needs are identified.

Outcomes

The key outcomes of the project have been:

- Recruited 660 volunteers since April 2011
- 35, 371 hours of volunteer time contributed between April 2011 and August 2012.
- Winners of the Team London Award for 'Building Stronger Neighbourhoods' award for Best Practice in Volunteer Management
- Winners of the Local Government Chronicle 2012 Award for Efficiency
- Municipal Journal 2012 Highly Commended – Workforce Transformation category
- Merton Partnership Volunteering Awards 2012 – Volunteer of the Year
- Merton Partnership Volunteering Awards 2012 – Volunteer Host of the Year
- Adult Learners Week 2012 Highly Commended for Libraries Volunteer Champion Project
- Merton's volunteering model has been used to lead the pan-London libraries volunteering project 'Love Libraries Love Volunteering'. The project has recruited an additional 2,884 volunteers to London's libraries since October 2011.
- Recognised as a Volunteering England good practice model for increasing volunteer opportunities whilst being sensitive towards staff roles.
- Receiving national interest from authorities that have heard about Merton's volunteering success.



Success stories:

Frank started volunteering at Pollards Hill Library in January 2010 running a weekly Salsa dancing class. The class has been running successfully since and has had good feedback from customers. Frank is a fantastic communicator and teacher and is now moving into a Skills for Life Volunteer Champion role to capitalise on his skills. He recently attended training on behalf of the library to allow him to deliver ESOL initial assessment sessions, which he has since been doing on a weekly basis. The library has also now funded Frank to start a PTLLS (Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector) course, which will allow him to develop further into a teaching role.

Walid started volunteering at Raynes Park Library in January 2011 and undertakes a variety of volunteer roles such as meeting and greeting, shelving and assisting with library events/activities. Walid is extremely dedicated and volunteers at least 5 days a week, sometimes more. He is well liked by all of the regular customers who have got to know him and is regarded very highly by staff at the library for the support he provides.

Volunteer quotes:

(Diane – Shelver, Wimbledon): “I believe my work means that the books are returned to the shelves more quickly, so the public can find the books more easily. The library also looks better organised and provides a more efficient service. I get satisfaction from knowing that I have contributed to this better organisation/efficiency.”

(Johanna - Shelver, West Barnes): “I find volunteering worthwhile to the community, satisfying in creating my own order, helping, feeling like I am giving back something to the community, and being more involved with West Barnes Library.”

(Samuel - IT Trainer, Morden Library): “It's a joy to know that you are helping others in your community as a volunteer.”

(Walid - various roles at Raynes Park): “I have made new friends and enjoy working as a volunteer because I feel I am giving something back to the community.”

Recognition & Retention of volunteers

Retention of volunteers and recognising their importance and achievements is key. Annual volunteer thank you celebration events have been a huge success and have received excellent feedback from volunteers. Volunteers commented that the events make them feel valued and appreciated and are an opportunity for them to meet up with other volunteers in the service.

New roles continue to be developed. The high numbers of volunteers have exceeded all expectations and work continues to try to increase the quality and range of services provided.



Further information:

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www.merton.gov.uk/libraries

Love Libraries Love Volunteering

<http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/culturetourismand2012/lovelibraries/>