

**Case Study**  
**London Borough of**  
**Redbridge 2**  
**September 2012**

**LOVE**  
**LIBRARIES**

**LOVE**  
**VOLUNTEERING**

## **Partnership Working**

### **Preparing the ground for volunteering at Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure Library Service**

#### **Abstract**

This case study highlights the importance that Volunteer Centre Redbridge and Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure (VRCL) Library Service attached to thorough planning when developing the volunteering programme for libraries. This included:

- Consulting staff and trade unions on the roles and responsibilities that volunteers would have in the organisation;
- Having a clear view of the duties that volunteers would undertake and
- Supporting and training the staff who would be supervising volunteers from day-to-day.
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Working closely together has enabled library staff to have a much better understanding of the support available from Volunteer Centre Redbridge and helped Volunteer Centre staff to understand the challenges and opportunities facing colleagues in libraries.

The Volunteer Policy & Procedures developed through this initiative will be used as a template to draft VRCL's policies and will be applied in all sports, culture and leisure services.

#### **The issue / Background**

Volunteer Centre Redbridge and VRCL Library Service recognised that the volunteering programme being developed required careful planning in order to secure the best possible outcome for volunteers, the libraries that would host them and the staff who would supervise volunteers from day-to-day.

Although the manager in charge of developing the volunteering programme clearly recognised the added value that volunteers could bring to the services provided by libraries for Redbridge's communities, the introduction of the volunteering programme came soon after staff redundancies and preceded a major refurbishment of Redbridge Central Library. It was made clear at the outset that volunteers were not being recruited to take the jobs of paid staff and were not being deployed to substitute for any redundant employees. Nonetheless, it was extremely important

both to consult staff about the role of volunteers, enduring any concerns they had were addressed, and to provide thorough training for those supervising volunteers; the 'Volunteering Champions' based in Redbridge's 12 libraries.

## Partners and funding

Key partners in this project were Team London, to whom we are grateful for providing the funding to kick-start the volunteering programme; Vision Redbridge Library Service, which deploys and manages the volunteers recruited through this programme and Volunteer Centre Redbridge, which is hosted by RedbridgeCVS and has developed and promoted volunteering opportunities, worked with library service managers to create a Volunteer Policy and Procedures and trained library service staff to write engaging role descriptions and recruit volunteers for long and short term opportunities.

## What we did

Volunteer Centre Redbridge and VRCL Library Service had already begun working together to develop a Volunteer Policy & Procedures and role descriptions for library service volunteers when Team London's 'Love Libraries; Love Volunteering' initiative was announced.

Early in the process it was recognised that some staff members might quite naturally feel concerned about the involvement of volunteers in library service provision, especially if they were unclear about volunteers' roles or feared that their own jobs might be under threat. This would not have been a conducive environment into which to introduce volunteers and could have led to volunteering placements coming to a quick and unsatisfactory end.

Volunteer Centre Redbridge has a policy of not working with organisations planning to replace paid staff posts with volunteers and Library Service managers were also keen to ensure that volunteers were not substituted for staff posts. Staff members were therefore asked to comment on the Volunteer Policy & Procedures and role descriptions before they were sent to trade union representatives for their comments and amendments. Only then were the Policy & Procedures sent to VRCL's Board of Trustees to be ratified and adopted.

Meanwhile Volunteer Centre Redbridge was developing bespoke training for the branch-based Volunteering Champions, to ensure that they felt comfortable applying the Policy & Procedures and confident in recruiting and supporting the volunteers reporting to them.

## Data

Two training sessions were developed and run. Overall 14 Volunteer Champions received training on implementing VRCL Library Service's Volunteer Policy & Procedures and in recruiting and selecting volunteers. These Champions had a goal of recruiting and engaging 100 volunteers by autumn 2012. In fact more than 130 have been recruited so far.

## Evidence

Feedback from the trained Volunteer Champions was very positive. Comments from participants included:

- *That we can refer people to the Volunteer Centre*
- *I learnt the importance of putting people at ease when interviewing for volunteering roles*
- *Learnt about all the opportunities for volunteers and how the process will work*
- *Feel much more confident that I know how to recruit volunteers*
- *Great interview techniques, lots of knowledge and things to think about*
- *Will feel confident dealing with applicants who come into the branch enquiring about volunteering opps*
- *Knowing more about overall process, how to respond to customers and even send them to other opportunities if necessary*

## The impact

VRCL Library Service has created 11 roles/100 individual opportunities for volunteers, attracting people from Redbridge's diverse communities to volunteer; many for the first time. More than 130 volunteers have been recruited since the 'Love Libraries: Love Volunteering' initiative began.

- Volunteer Centre Redbridge and VRCL have built a strong and ongoing relationship, enabling the Volunteer Centre to play a key role in recruiting for all future volunteering opportunities in libraries.
- VRCL library staff have developed close working relationships and feel comfortable phoning and emailing one another to ask questions and share information.
- Library service staff are much more aware about the services offered by Volunteer Centre Redbridge and can signpost potential volunteers to other opportunities available through VCR.

## Key learning points

The response to advertised opportunities was phenomenal and far more people expressed an interest than library service staff could deal with. The manager driving the volunteering programme for VRCL Library Service went on maternity leave just as recruitment was starting and her role in the process could not be fully covered by existing staff, already working at full capacity. This resulted in a backlog of applications and some people losing interest or complaining that they had not been contacted after submitting completed forms.

The learning from this is that the volunteering programme needs a member of the senior management team to champion and oversee the process across the service as a whole, as this is too large a task for staff working at individual branches.

Staff will now have a much clearer idea of the numbers of volunteers and skill-sets required in each branch and will be aware of how much admin support is needed to enable recruitment to take place quickly and smoothly in future. In particular, recruitment for seasonal opportunities could take place according to a pre-agreed annual timetable. It would also be good practice to send an email acknowledging receipt of completed application forms and give applicants an idea of the recruitment timescale. Volunteer Centre Redbridge could be called upon to help to interview potential volunteers in future; for example organising group information sessions or interview days at the Volunteer Centre in central Ilford.

## Future plans

The Library Service volunteering programme is going from strength to strength and has proved to be hugely popular with local people. The programme is now embedded and it will be much easier to recruit for school holiday activities in future. Now would be a good time for Volunteer Centre Redbridge and VRCL Library Service to develop a training course for Volunteering Champions on supporting and developing volunteers.

## Further information

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