

Volunteer Value

Background: At the core of Active Dorset's engagement with low levels of physical activity is the development of a volunteer workforce within the county. The creation of a new facility in Bournemouth, designed as a hub for advocating and encouraging more active lifestyles, has focused this work.

What we did: Interest and local buy-in, as the new community building was being planned and constructed, was generated throughout 2017-18 with key partnerships and relationships established locally. Adverts for new volunteers were generated within a specifically designed set of community engagement events informed by local groups and individuals. These events and associated communication, including open access to the new building, continue to be a feature of the volunteer recruitment.

What happened: A core of committed volunteers has emerged through this process. A group of men and women aged between 30 and late 60s collectively motivated by a real need to be involved in engaged in promoting and helping their local area. They differ in some of the traditional needs of volunteers (e.g. relation to employment opportunities) but want to both be busy themselves and see their much-loved local area more active.

Together (Rachelle, Keith and Geoff) now constantly encourage 'people like them' locally to join them. They offer a wealth of life experience and knowledge which they use to actively communicate and promote events. Increasingly the community hub is starting to function as a place where other activities including keep-fit, park run, boot camp, football and cricket can take place. They run the café, market activity through public screens and social media, liaise and inform the Active Partnership and identify new opportunities to engage the local community.

What is said: "Great from the start with the open and welcoming atmosphere from the Active Dorset staff, board and partners"

"Our views are shared, we take control of things, but need to change perception of area"

"I don't feel any barriers between paid and voluntary staff, great that we can bring our families in, there is lots to do but want to make it busier".

What's being learnt: The language and local engagement from the start is crucial, allowing potential volunteers to decide in their own time if it is for them, creating the chance for people to see what these opportunities are first.

- Always have an open and welcoming approach, be there in the workplace
- Never underestimate local word of mouth contacts and networks
- Have a formal training/induction process
- Take the time to chat, discuss and share experience
- Local experience and knowledge is an invaluable asset.

