

Spotlight

Volunteering

Featuring:

The power of volunteering - personal stories
from Gateshead

Pages 4, 8 and 14

Also in this issue

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Vision for Volunteering - aims and aspirations

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Skilled employee volunteering with Sector Connector

Cover photo: A man in overalls kneels in front of a train at the Tanfield Railway



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About this magazine

Connected Voice is published four times a year. We aim to make sure all information is correct and up to date but we do not accept liability for any mistakes that may inadvertently appear. Views and opinions in this magazine are not necessarily those of Connected Voice.

Images: as part of our commitment to accessibility, we describe images for those using screen readers.

If you have any queries about this magazine email connect@connectedvoice.org.uk

Issue 13: Volunteering

Our spring 2023 issue is dedicated to volunteering. It's been a year since we opened the Gateshead Volunteer Centre and a little over a year since our skilled employee volunteering programme, Sector Connector, took off. We're delighted to share success stories from each of these projects that support volunteering across Gateshead and Newcastle.

2022 also saw the launch of England's Vision for Volunteering and you can learn more about this on page six.

We hope you enjoy reading the personal volunteering stories and feel inspired to get involved ●

Volunteering

Lisa Goodwin
Chief Executive



I am so pleased to be writing an editorial for a magazine which has a focus on volunteering. It is a dream come true for me that we now have a volunteering service within Connected Voice.

When I was being interviewed for this job I was asked to prepare my vision for what the organisation would be like in the future. I said support for volunteering should be at the heart of it – because how can you run a support and advice service for the VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise) sector and not also have a role in supporting and developing volunteering – the thing that our sector is built on? Two thirds of the VCSE organisations in our area have an income of under £50,000 per year. They are small, community based organisations which only function because of the amazing volunteers they have.

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It has been a pleasure to watch Gateshead Volunteer Centre develop since April last year, and to be able to fill a gap there in ensuring that VCSE organisations have some help with

finding the volunteers they need. We know that advances in technology mean not everyone needs help to find volunteering roles. We focus on those who do need that support, and on making sure that smaller organisations without the marketing power of larger charities have a fair chance at attracting volunteers.

We have started working more closely with the fabulous staff at Volunteer Centre Newcastle, to ensure that we can provide a more holistic service on volunteering. This has included supporting some of their training events, but also benefitting from the advice and support of their parent organisation, Volunteering Matters, as we developed our employee volunteering programme, Sector Connector.

It has been great to have the capacity to support local employers to get into volunteering through Sector Connector. We know when done well, this has lasting benefits for the VCSE organisations they are supporting. Our aspiration for Sector Connector is about creating meaningful and lasting relationships between the VCSE organisation and the private sector organisation supporting them. It may start with a workshop, but once we connect people, we often find that the relationships flourish, and sometimes an organisation might end up with a new trustee or a new regular volunteer. As Stewart says in his article on page 12, VCSE organisations don't have the capacity to have an 'expert' in everything. We can help bring a bit of expertise in from local private sector firms who want to support our sector – and it is a joy to see the mutual benefit this brings ●

Spotlight: Paul Carter, The Soundroom

Paul Carter
Trustee and Volunteer



Paul Carter, is a Trustee with [The Soundroom Community Music Charity](#), based in Gateshead. He explains how volunteering helped him to find purpose as well as challenging established views.

How and why did you get involved in volunteering?

I'd decided to stop working in the company I had founded, and take some time to find out what the next challenge for me would be. I suppose it's what a lot of people do when they retire, or semi-retire. Very quickly I realised that being part of a team, and interacting with people where the only thing you share is work, was something I really missed. Add in the fact that the pandemic had kept people apart for so long, and I was starting to climb the walls! Fortunately, I found the directory of voluntary roles with the help and matchmaking service Gateshead Volunteer Centre provides.

Kate at Gateshead Volunteer Centre was brilliant. She found out what I could reasonably offer - finding a perfect match for my availability and skills. If she ever decides to go into the dating business I think she could do well... On a serious note, matching people with opportunities is great - but she also took the time to check in to make sure it was working from both sides. This is so important, because you want to feel like someone cares if you're happy.

Where do you volunteer and what do you do?

I started with two voluntary roles - one as a driver for FareShare, and the second as a bit of a 'Jack Of All Trades' for The Soundroom. I was amazed at how welcome I was made to feel by both organisations, and how valued my contribution was.

“It helps when you're working with other volunteers, because you soon realise everyone's there because they want to be - not because they have to be.”

I settled into being able to offer things I was good at doing, because I was happy doing them. Having started out doing DIY work to help renovate the existing studios, then moving on to playing in one of the 'Café Bands', I used my background in business and running a commercial recording studio to offer advice where I could - and am delighted to say I've now been appointed as one of The Soundroom Trustees.

What difference has volunteering made to you and how does it make you feel?

“The main difference for me has been a fairly dramatic change in attitude to charity, and understanding people with different needs.”

I no longer fear or avoid people with learning difficulties, and have found it very moving to be accepted and welcomed by those who I once felt quite uncomfortable around.



What difference does your volunteering make for others?

I hope that I've enabled The Soundroom to progress a little further and faster by devoting some of my time to tackling issues they have. The music cafés in particular are attracting more clients than they have in a long time, and I hope some of that is down to my involvement.

The Soundroom is so important to the people it serves - and probably one of Gateshead's best kept secrets. The number of local bands (young and old, new and established), and variety of local community groups who share the building every day is remarkable. The Soundroom provides rehearsal rooms, recording facilities, and creative spaces for local organisations - using music and movement to improve the lives of a lot of local communities. It sounds very grand, but the reality is that the staff and volunteers provide things like music cafés that enable people with special needs to enjoy

entertainment that they might simply not have access to. The time and support it provides for carers is also something that you just know is really appreciated.

“ I've learned that the smallest act of kindness can make a huge difference to someone's life – not least your own.

Working as a Trustee is challenging and rewarding, but we can't forget the fact that the Soundroom still needs cleaning, locking up, painting, and the music café karaoke has to happen. The daily volunteer work never goes away, and I try to do my bit whenever I can. Volunteers keep places like this going - so if you have any time you can spend with us, why not get in touch? You'll really be appreciated.

Find the perfect voluntary role for you on the [OurGateshead](#) website ●



Above: a colourful sign reads Project Soundroom. Community Music



Photo left: Two young people stand at a mixing desk

Photo above: a closeup of someone playing guitar on stage

Volunteering is Changing!

Kate Marshall
Volunteer Officer, Gateshead
Volunteer Centre



Vision for Volunteering is a ten-year project with £600,000 Government Investment. It launched in May 2022, across 300 organisations, including NAVCA, NCVO, Sport England, Volunteering Matters, and the Association of Volunteer Managers. The first 18-month phase of the project focusses on how volunteering must adapt and evolve in five key areas.

1. Awareness and appreciation

Volunteering is invaluable and should be part of everyday life. Opportunities should be clear, concise, and easy to access. Groups need to grab the attention of volunteers while they can, sharing success stories and illustrating volunteering. Bringing volunteering to life and enabling people to see themselves in the roles by highlighting current volunteers and the positive impact they have experienced.

Aims by 2032:

- Sharing volunteer stories and being proud of them
- Understand how volunteers want to engage
- Volunteer voices are the driving force
- Volunteering is recognised by all as enriching lives and communities
- Central and local government celebrate volunteers

66 Volunteering is invaluable and should be part of everyday life

How the Vision for Volunteering aims to make England 'The best place in the world to be a volunteer by 2032'

2. Power

Volunteering often involves an organisation taking charge and identifying what community action is needed. Projects should be driven by volunteers themselves and what they think is needed.

All volunteers have different skills, experience, and knowledge. Each one has a different story. Volunteering can be a driving force in creating a fairer society. The vision aims to devolve the power to communities themselves.

Aims by 2032

- Everyone engaging in their community
- Working alongside volunteers being accountable to the community
- Volunteers supported to move between roles
- Decisions are made by those that are best placed to make them
- Recognise who and what is missing
- Emerging social movements, causes and campaigns are supported

3. Equity and inclusion

Volunteering needs to be accessible and welcoming to everyone, everywhere, to ensure that the benefits of volunteering to both individuals and communities are equally shared.

Volunteering is not inclusive for

all people, in respect to both participation and their experiences. Individuals from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to volunteer. Young people, disabled people and people from ethnically minoritised communities reported a negative experience when volunteering.

While trying to volunteer many people experience racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism, and many other forms of discrimination.

Aims by 2032:

- Establish cultures that are inclusive
- Listen to groups, remove barriers, and provide additional support
- Encourage people to raise concerns about discrimination
- Increase legitimacy and trust
- Data which is consistently captured and used to drive change
- Resources, networks, time and sharing good practice with those who support volunteers

4. Collaboration

Part of all volunteering should be natural and spontaneous. There needs to be community led volunteering - residents and community members coming together with a shared drive and collaboration. Rather than top-down project work, this is bottom up, which fits more into the locality working models, especially in Gateshead.

Aims by 2032:

- Organisations support communities to drive their own collaborative activity
- Volunteers playing an essential role in collaborations
- Collaborations supporting new people and projects
- Sharing volunteers and skills, experience, talent across projects
- Recruit, train, and work with volunteers jointly
- Volunteers and paid employees

How can I get involved?

Currently, volunteers and organisations are being asked to:

[Make a commitment](#)

[Sign up to keep in touch](#)

working well together

5. Experimentation

During Covid-19 innovative ideas and the natural development of ways residents could help each other emerged. Mutual Aid groups were a new development in Gateshead. These appeared to help residents without any of the bureaucratic systems.

The pandemic demonstrates that plans can't be made for everything. Change will happen and volunteers need to respond. To do this they need to be fluid and ready to move with the times. Volunteering should welcome change and embrace it. Questions need to be asked to find out what worked well and repeat it. Technology is another emerging trend. Not all volunteers are skilled in technology, how will they be supported?

Aims by 2032:

- Experimentation is built into volunteering
- Communities encouraged to experiment and develop their own ideas
- Enabling an environment of experimentation
- Trusting relationships, avoiding bureaucratic systems
- Encouraging a learning culture
- Learn from mistakes and develop best practice

During phase one, The Vision for Volunteering Team will continue to deliver engagement with partners and provide training and tools, continue to share stories of positive change, champion the Vision and collect evidence and share learning.

The second phase of the vision will be engagement, discovery and deliberation to change the volunteering environment.

Learn more at www.visionforvolunteering.org.uk ●

Spotlight: Yusuf Balkas, NEDES

Yusuf Balkas
Volunteer, North East
Diversity, Education
and Solidarity



Yusuf is a volunteer with North East Diversity, Education and Solidarity (NEDES), based in Gateshead but developing projects across the North East.

Yusuf attended the Gateshead Volunteer Coordinator's Network Meeting last December to talk about NEDES, but his personal story about how volunteering has helped him in the UK was so inspiring, we asked him to share it with a wider audience.

How and why did you get involved with volunteering?

I had been a volunteer for 20 years before coming to the UK, in different countries including Tajikistan and Tanzania. When I was working as a maths teacher I was teaching voluntarily on Saturdays and also organising extra activities with teachers and students. This included collecting food, clothes and money for those in need. I also helped to open a new water well in Tanzania.

When I came to the UK in 2019, as an asylum seeker, I had a bit of a hard time. I needed to leave my family in another country when I requested asylum in the UK. When the Home Office settled me in a hotel in Leeds, the days were long within the walls of the hotel, and day by day it became like a snake, because there was an uncertainty of what would happen.

I had no idea how long the asylum process would take. I didn't know when or if I could see my kids and wife. As I was waiting in the hotel, doing nothing, I started to think I was useless.

“For me there were two options, either 1) go crazy or 2) do something good for myself and for the community

So I searched for activities where I could meet people, from churches etc. I found lots of activities but

joining these activities required me to buy a bus ticket - but I didn't have bus ticket money. Then I met Rose from the Health Access for Refugees Programme (HARP). I joined their activities and went on to do training for volunteering.

When, suddenly, the Home Office sent me to Gateshead I was a bit sad, but then Mr. Hakan invited me to volunteer with Comfrey Project. I helped with their family summer programmes and distributed food packages during the pandemic. I also volunteered with Curious Monkey's open days.

And now, three friends and I have established NEDES, which gives us even greater opportunity to be part of the wider community.

What difference has volunteering made to you?

“Volunteering brought me to life!

I was feeling useless because waiting with nothing to do is horrible. It can make you mad because living in limbo is one of the reasons for poor mental health. I asked myself 'what was the meaning of life, why do I live if I do nothing for goodness and community.' So primarily, volunteering helped me to feel better.

I improved my speaking in English and gained self-confidence as I was hesitant to talk because of my poor English.

“ I learned lots of new things about the UK culture and people (for example, jumping the queue is a deadly sin!)

I met lots of new people and made new friends. I added to my CV and in my job interviews I could mention volunteering. So volunteering opened doors for me and helped to accelerate my integration into the UK. I learnt more about new technology and am now working full-time as a Quality Assurance Software Developer.

How Does volunteering make you feel?

“ Instead of cursing the darkness it is better to light a candle (Anon)

Even though I had lots of problems I needed to make the effort to do something myself. So by volunteering I started to feel better

and my mood changed. I am happiest when I am volunteering.

If I had to sum up volunteering in just three words they would be: happiness, engagement and wellbeing.

What difference does your volunteering make for others?

Through volunteering with NEDES I can support social cohesion and other asylum seekers and refugees to rebuild their families and communities.

I recommend volunteering to all my friends as it is necessary for their future and for their mood. Also I encouraged my daughter to volunteer, so supporting a new generation of volunteers.

Tolstoy says: 'All great literature is one of two stories; a man goes on a journey or a stranger comes to town.' So I came to this city and Gateshead embraced me, so thank you to everyone in my volunteer journey who has helped and supported me.



Photo: Yusuf talks to a group of children at an activity table outside in a community garden

Gateshead Volunteer Centre

Marie Wisson
Gateshead Volunteering
Development Officer



Our aspirations for volunteering in Gateshead for the next three years and beyond

The Gateshead Volunteer Centre (GVC) 'opened' in June 2022. It is managed by Connected Voice and funded by Gateshead Council for the first three years. It is not based in one building, as staff move around within the communities of Gateshead, where need is identified. It works closely with Newcastle and other regional Volunteer Centres to encourage volunteering, promote the value of volunteering and encourage best practice. We're working towards the nationally recognised Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation (VCQA) quality mark in 2023, which provides assurance that GVC is providing a high quality and effective local service. Accreditation is based around:

- Strategic development of volunteering
- Good practice development
- Brokerage
- Developing volunteering opportunities
- Voice of volunteering

Gateshead Volunteer Centre aspires to:

1. Make volunteering in Gateshead easier to access

Volunteering should be open to all regardless of background or ability. By developing and promoting the OurGateshead website as a central volunteering portal we will work to increase the reach of volunteering opportunities. We will work with organisations who involve volunteers to ensure their roles are open to and appropriate for a wide range of different people.

2. Focus on the people who need additional help to volunteer

By targeting our support for those people who may need some confidence building or additional practical support, we will help to break

down barriers to volunteering and encourage as many people as possible to volunteer. We will work with organisations who have extensive local knowledge and the specialist skills to support a diverse range of volunteers.

3. Increase skills and support employment

Volunteering is a recognised vehicle for skills development and experience, which provides a pathway into education, employment, or training. By working with local organisations we will help people achieve their potential through volunteering.

4. Support the people who support volunteers

We recognise the importance of volunteer professionals. By developing a vibrant Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators' Network, we will provide peer support, encourage collaboration, and share and promote best practice.

5. Build understanding of the value of volunteering

We know that volunteering creates social capital and helps to build resilient communities. We will work strategically to promote the value of volunteering and its mutual benefits by celebrating the impact of volunteering on individuals, organisations and the wider community.

Help and support is available

Whether you're an organisation or an individual, you can contact GVC about anything regarding volunteering! Contact Marie Wisson and Kate Marshall at:

volunteering@connectedvoice.org.uk ●

Elements - An Essential Resource for Volunteers

Giovanni Spatuzzi
Deputy Chief Executive,
Connected Voice



Since Elements was launched in June 2022, over 600 people have enrolled on its courses. The benefits of Elements are that it is accessible 24/7 and allows people to study in their own time and at their own pace. There are currently four e-learning courses available:

- [Good Governance](#): Essential learning for new and existing trustees
- [Good Fundraising](#): Success with grant applications
- [Understanding Your Charity's Finances](#)
- [Adult Safeguarding Essentials](#)

Each e-learning course uses an interactive mix of videos and questions and participants will receive a certificate on completion. People can start and stop the course as they wish and each course takes around one hour to complete.

Adult Safeguarding Essentials is free to everyone. The other e-learning courses cost just £12 per person. Any organisation with an annual income under £10,000 can access the courses for free.

Elements is a partnership between Connected Voice, VODA North Tyneside and Northumberland CVA. Elements allows Connected Voice to expand its traditional support by offering three service tiers. Tier 1: information sheets, tier 2: digital training, and tier 3: face to face training.

The next Elements courses due to launch in 2023 are children's safeguarding, going green, and cyber security.

Elements strives to support the knowledge and practice of volunteers, trustees and staff working in voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations across the North of Tyne area and Gateshead.

“Simple clear explanations, plenty of practice with the example to complete but with the guide of the correct answers. Cost was low and fair

Feedback on Understanding Your Charity's Finance

“I've worked with many CICs and charity boards, but now I really understand their roles and responsibilities, making future collaborations much easier

Feedback on Good Governance

“It really summarised the key points of applications perfectly and was a great skills refresher without containing an overwhelming amount of info

Feedback on Good Fundraising

“The information was presented very well. All new volunteers should watch it. It was a thorough run-through of the elements involved with Adult Safeguarding.

Feedback on Adult Safeguarding

Skilled Employee Volunteering with Sector Connector

Stewart Turnbull
Volunteering Development
Officer



Sector Connector, as the name suggests, is all about making connections. In our case, we connect skilled volunteers from local businesses to the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector.

According to Connected Voice's own research from 2018/2019, and NCVO's 2019 research, there are between 4,000 – 5,000 VCSE organisations operating across Newcastle and Gateshead. Every single one is doing amazing work in their own particular field.

The VCSE sector undertakes critical and often life transforming work. Supporting our communities across a range of issues from eating disorders to advice for asylum seekers and refugees and pretty much everyone and everything in between.

Many of these organisations are run entirely by volunteers. Others rely heavily on volunteer support. So much so that, if that support weren't there, then, probably, the organisation simply wouldn't be able to operate or help as many people as they do.

It is not uncommon for those working and volunteering in the sector to wear many hats. You may have heard the expression

"The Accidental IT person" This is where someone, anyone, in the office might have a smidgen of IT savvy and, as a result, they become the 'go-to' person for anything IT related. Before they know it, they are *THE* IT person. In this scenario, you can substitute IT for just about anything.

The Office Manager is also the HR Lead, for example. A Receptionist may have additional responsibility for Health and Safety. Or, the Fundraiser is also tasked with looking after the website, communications and social media ... you get the picture.

It goes without saying that you may well be brilliant and doing lots of jobs and covering many different roles. But, should you have to? Do you want to? Plus, it can be exhausting and easily lead to burn out. This is where Sector Connector can help to make the difference. To bring some added value to the situation.

There is, without doubt, a huge range of skills, knowledge and experience that exists within our local business community. Increasingly, businesses and their employees are seeking out ways in which they can get more involved with the communities in which they operate. To make a positive

“It is not uncommon for those working and volunteering in the sector to wear many hats

“Increasingly, businesses, and their employees, are seeking out ways in which they can get more involved with the communities in which they operate.

difference and add some social value.

A great example is Alex Fearon, an Email Marketing expert and founder of [Maybe Later](#). Alex told me that:

“One of my business goals for 2022 was to get more involved in my local VCSE sector community. Volunteering for the Sector Connector Programme, from Connected Voice, has not only introduced me to local organisations and causes I didn’t even know existed, but open and honest workshop feedback from attendees has given me the information I need to improve session content and delivery. Volunteering with them gives me immense personal and professional satisfaction, and I can’t wait to further my involvement.”



Alex from Maybe Later speaking at a recent Sector Connector

Alex has delivered two Sector Connector workshops so far. She is keen to stay involved, with the option of delivering more workshops as well as offering her expertise by volunteering on a one-to-one basis to support a VCSE organisation.

Sector Connector is offering, or has offered, one to one support and workshops to a number of VCSE sector organisations around:

- Health and Safety
- Document Storage and Archiving
- Getting Ready for Social Investment
- Not for Profit Recruitment
- GDPR
- Storytelling for the VCSE Sector
- Brand Strategy



Jen from Glass Digital supporting attendees with their websites as they work on laptops together

- Marketing
- WordPress Websites
- Strategic Leadership
- Telecoms

This is not an exhaustive list and if you require a particular area of support not mentioned above, get in touch and talk to us. It’s our job to try and find that support for you.

Sector Connector is part of a bigger partnership, funded by the National Lottery Communities Fund that sees VODA, Northumberland CVA, Newcastle Volunteer Centre and Connected Voice make our region an area of excellence for volunteering. (Learn more on p18).

For voluntary and community organisations, Sector Connector offers the chance to benefit from in-kind support from local experts, get practical help and to establish and nurture ongoing relationships with local business people.

Sector Connector is a great way for businesses to demonstrate their support for the local community and to upskill their employees by giving them the opportunity to apply their skills in a new environment. It’s also a chance for businesses to network within the voluntary and community sector and build relationships with new organisations.

Whether you work for a VCSE organisation that is looking for support or if your business would like to make a positive difference through skilled employee volunteering, email stewart.turnbull@connectedvoice.org.uk call: 0191 235 7039 or visit www.connectedvoice.org.uk/services/connected-voice-volunteering

You can also check out my [blog about the benefits of skilled employee volunteering](#) to both businesses and VCSE organisations ●

Spotlight: Mahnoor Mansoor, Peace of Mind

Mahnoor Mansoor
Volunteer, Peace of Mind



Mahnoor explains how her volunteering at Peace of Mind came full circle. She works for the Citizen's Advice Bureau alongside staff from Gateshead Volunteer Centre within the Locality Hubs. In her spare time she returns to Peace of Mind where she uses her work knowledge to help others. Peace of Mind is also a member of the Connected Voice Haref Network.

Peace of Mind seeks to empower individuals through group support, signposting and mutual aid. It offers emotional and practical support and helps with any refugee and asylum related issues. Volunteers work to reduce food poverty and financial hardship by the provision of welfare and benefits advice, educational (cultural, language and social) classes, workshops, emergency food parcels and hygiene supplies. It works in partnership with a wide range of organisations and agencies such as Gateshead Council, Refugee Resettlement Team, Migrant Help, Northumbria Police, Citizens Advice Gateshead and other local support organisations.

How and why did you get involved with volunteering?

I've been volunteering for Peace of Mind for eight years. I became involved at the beginning, when the project was set up as a self-help group in 2014. My volunteering role involves welcoming new families and making them aware of the services Peace of Mind offers, and I provide additional help and advice to service users.

I started volunteering because I wanted to gain confidence and skills that I could use later in life, and most importantly to help vulnerable people who were new in the country and didn't have any

information about how to adjust in their new environment.

What difference has volunteering made to you?

I have become more confident, social and have learned an immense amount of skills that have helped me become more independent and responsible. It has also increased my awareness of things going on in our community. My volunteering with Peace of Mind undoubtedly helped me get my current job as a Social Welfare Advisor. As a volunteer, I can now use my work knowledge to support others even more.

“If I had to sum up volunteering in just three words I would, of course, say 'peace of mind'. It has not only helped me improve my mental health, but I always feel over the moon when my little effort has helped someone else to put their mind at ease

How does volunteering make you feel?

Volunteering helped me gain self-confidence, self-esteem and life satisfaction. When I moved to a different country and starting a new life as a teenager, it really affected my mental health. Volunteering kept me busy and involved me in the community.

I knew from the beginning of my volunteering journey that this is

something that I would continue to do for the rest of my life. As a result I chose a career path that purely intends to help people live a better life.

“ The satisfaction and happiness you get when you have helped someone feels rewarding

What difference does your volunteering make for others?

Volunteering is important as it offers essential help to worthwhile causes, people in need, and the wider community. Indeed, many organisations and charities rely on the generosity of volunteers as often they're self-financing, and cannot afford to pay salaries.

“ Volunteering unites people from different backgrounds where everyone is treated equally with respect, despite their race, gender, colour or religion

I encourage our young people to start volunteering. It is the perfect way to discover something you may be really good at as you develop a new skill and these skills will help you grow and achieve your dreams and goals in life.

Sara Muzaffar is the founder of Peace of Mind and has been

volunteering for nine years. Sara says:

These nine years have transformed my life completely, from not knowing how to write a simple email to writing funding bids. The learning, skills and experience gained through my role at Peace of Mind has enhanced my CV. As a charity it helps us to engage a more diverse range of skills, experience and knowledge. Volunteering helps us to deliver a greater number of services and projects in a more efficient way which can help save money and resources, and reduce the operating costs of our charity.

I feel more of an important part of the society I live in. I feel a sense of belonging. I also feel proud to have been able to make a difference to the lives of others, as a refugee myself, and Mahnoor's story is testament to how volunteering can transform lives.

“ Volunteers make a lasting difference to the communities and volunteering makes a lasting difference to the individuals, by connecting them with others and making the community a better place to live

Photos right: Peace of Mind volunteers wrap gifts and a group of volunteers stand smiling for the camera holding bags of gifts



Volunteering at Skills4Work

Tracey Wallace
Development
Manager

Marie Wisson from Gateshead Volunteer Centre met with Tracey Wallace at Skills4Work, to learn more about the charity and the impact they have on young people in Gateshead. Marie also caught up with some of their regular volunteers to find out what difference volunteering has made for them.

What does your organisation do?

Skills4Work is a small charity based in Birtley that supports young people from across Gateshead between the ages of 18-30 who have a mild learning need and/or poor mental health, and who don't meet the criteria for adult services support. They support young adults to make the difficult transition from education to the workplace through building key transferable skills, self-esteem and self-confidence. Skills4Work has so far supported 16 young people into paid employment and a further 56 into volunteering or progression to their next step in life.

“Volunteering allows young people to understand their potential to go into paid employment

“Gaining work related skills through volunteering is a key aspect of why young people join us. Volunteering allows the young people to understand their potential to go into paid employment and how they personally can contribute to and enrich any workforce they

are part of.” Tracey Wallace, Development Manager

Tell us about your key projects

Individual Learning Plans support members through a bespoke journey of training, skills development, volunteering and placements. A wide variety of stakeholders are engaged, including parents/carers, family members, volunteers and the local business community.

Weekly work placements give people an opportunity to engage with others, and develop work and transferable life skills. Tracey continues: **“All our young adults aspire to go into paid employment and it is made clear to all our partners that it's about empowering young people to have a sense of worth and learn in a real-life setting.”**

Skills gained through voluntary placements include, for example: teamwork; problem solving; budgeting; and independent travel and are discussed during taught employment sessions. The 22 Skills4Work Community Volunteers supporting the young people can see their development and progression which is really rewarding – all whilst supporting the local community themselves.

What do people gain from volunteering?

Shaun started by volunteering and is now a paid member of the staff with Skills4Work every Monday and Tuesday morning. He says “It

helps me by giving me purpose and a routine. It also helps with getting in funding for the organisation so I get a lot out of the charity and in return I get a good outcome for the charity. I still volunteer - at the Co Op as part of my work placement programme, alongside Skills4Work wellbeing sessions, with Etika Trust, and I am also a qualified walk leader volunteer."

Shaun challenges himself through his volunteering "I like to push myself as much as I possibly can in my own individual way" and is proud of his progression both personally and professionally, feeling accomplished every time he completes a personal challenge.

"I also enjoy helping at our three community lunches for 70 isolated older people each month across Birtley - especially the bingo calling! I don't like being the centre of attention, so several years ago that would have made me poop my pants - I would have been way too scared!"

Through Skills4Work, Andrew recently started volunteering with Tanfield Railway. He has a long running interest in transport and engineering and wanted to be more independent. He said "I am delighted that I have been given this opportunity at Tanfield Railway, I have always enjoyed local history and engineering and this volunteering allows me to be more involved in both. I was made very welcome at the induction day

and the team I'm working with have made me very welcome."

Tanfield Railway, at Marley Hill on the very edge of Gateshead, is the world's oldest railway and is almost entirely volunteer run. Simon Smith, General Manager, says "It is great to see that Andrew's enthusiasm is supported by an ability to carefully follow instructions to complete tasks he is given. He has met with quite a few of our established railway volunteers and always seems relaxed when in conversation with them. An external observer would not immediately distinguish Andrew as a new volunteer at the railway... the evidence so far is that Andrew and railway volunteering are going to be a good fit."

Tanfield Railway allocated a volunteer buddy to Andrew which means that he has a consistent contact and they have been flexible with when he can get there on public transport - which has helped with Andrew's confidence in travelling independently further afield. As Tracey explains, volunteering is a great way to explore opportunities and it is important that forward thinking organisations like Tanfield Railway embrace a diverse workforce and recognise what this can offer. "It's all about recognising and harnessing an individual's skills. Because Andrew has been welcomed, he will stay and grow with the organisation and can bring reliability and long term support."

Photo left : Shaun sits smiling at a desk with a computer



Photo right: Andrew, dressed in overalls kneels at the wheels of the train to polish it



North of Tyne Volunteering Project

Stewart Turnbull
Volunteering Development
Officer



Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, the project aims to establish the North of Tyne as an 'area of excellence' for supporting volunteering over the next four years.

North Tyneside VODA is the project lead, and Connected Voice is a partner in the project, along with Northumberland Community Voluntary Action, North of Tyne Combined Authority and Newcastle Volunteer Centre.

The focus for the partnership is on:

1. Developing innovative systems to support the effective recruitment and co-ordination of volunteers at scale;
2. Developing a strong system of support and collaboration for neighbourhood-level mutual aid activity; and,
3. Creating a strong employee-volunteering scene, enabling private sector organisations to easily support their local communities.

Connected Voice Sector Connector programme concentrates on this third point, creating a strong employee-volunteering scene, enabling private sector organisations to easily support their local communities.

The Sector Connector model was successfully rolled out in North Tyneside five years ago. Picking up the baton, Connected Voice Sector Connector is already making great strides. We are working with businesses that want to make a positive impact and add social value to their

local communities, by connecting them to VCSE sector organisations who need skilled, volunteer support.

Showcasing free to attend workshops, as well as one-to-one support, Sector Connector has already brought together a range of businesses and VCSE sector organisations around the following areas:

- Branding
- Marketing
- Effective Storytelling for the VCSE Sector
- Strategic Leadership
- Social Investment
- Health and Safety
- Coaching

If you work in the VCSE sector and would like to explore how your organisation might benefit from skilled volunteer support through the Sector Connector programme, please get in touch to discuss things in more detail.

If you work for a local business with aspirations to get more involved and make a positive impact in your community we'd love to hear from you. There are lots of opportunities to help and different ways to get involved.

For more information and informal chat please contact Stewart Turnbull

E: stewart.turnbull@connectedvoice.org.uk

T: 0191 235 7039

Join the Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators' Network

The Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators' Network is a peer support network for those working alongside and supervising volunteers in the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector within Gateshead.

The group aims to provide a safe space for support and advice, to encourage and promote excellence in volunteering across Gateshead.

Membership is free and open to anyone working alongside or supervising volunteers within Gateshead. The Network has held three meetings since July 2022 and now has a membership of 92 volunteer engagement professionals.

Quarterly meetings include shared learning on best practice and innovation, networking, training and guest speakers, problem-solving, volunteering trends, and recognising and promoting volunteer involvement and experience.

Sessions are held in community venues across Gateshead and members help to shape the

content of the meetings. It's an opportunity to take stock, celebrate your own impact, create new connections and collaborations, plan for the future and build sustainable relationships.

If you would like more information or to join, please get in at touch at volunteering@connectedvoice.org.uk

“ Just a quick email to say thank you for the meeting today – it felt a very welcoming forum and I look forward to working more with you.

“ Thank you for another great networking meeting today! It is lovely to be in face-to-face sessions and bouncing ideas of each other too.



Photo above: A group of around 12 people sit round a set of tables in discussion at the Gateshead Volunteer Coordinators' Network meeting

Contact us

Connected Voice

Support and
Development

Expert support services that enable voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations to set up, be sustainable and informed, achieve their objectives and come together.

connect@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 235 7021

Connected Voice

Business
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Quality and cost-effective financial support services that meet the growing needs of charities, community organisations and social enterprises.

cbsteam@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 235 7020

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Connected Voice is a registered charity (number 1125877) and company limited by guarantee (number 6681475) registered in England and Wales. Our registered office is as above.

Connected Voice

Advocacy

Free professional support to individuals to help them be aware of their rights and choices, make informed decisions, advocate for themselves and facilitate their voices being heard.

advocacy@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 235 7013

Connected Voice

Haref

Working with communities and organisations throughout Newcastle and Gateshead to reduce health inequalities linked to ethnicity and culture.

haref@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 235 7022

Connected Voice

Volunteering

Supporting volunteering across Newcastle and Gateshead through employee volunteering (Sector Connector), promoting volunteering opportunities and offering advice.

volunteering@connectedvoice.org.uk
0191 235 7038 (Gateshead Volunteer Centre)
0191 235 7039 (Sector Connector Newcastle)