**Tips On Retaining Volunteers Through COVID-19**

Volunteers give their time throughout the year to so many different charities and community groups and not just during a pandemic such as Covid-19. However, what happens when your charity can no longer utilise your existing volunteers as your current services have had to close in the short-term but you will need your volunteers after Covid-19? ***How do you keep your existing team of volunteers, engaged and interested so they return to your charity to volunteer in the future?***

Here are some top tips on how charities and organisations can keep their existing team of volunteers retained and motivated during a crisis:

* **Check In** with your volunteers via telephone call, text or email to see how they are doing. Let them know your organisation is thinking of them and are looking forward to having them back volunteering when you all can. This could be done every week or two if resources allow. Calling or texting allows you to communicate with older volunteers who may not have access to the internet or use a computer. A volunteer newsletter would help to share information that may be of interest to all volunteers.
* **Volunteer Group Chats**. Set up a what's app group, snapchat or facebook group so volunteers can be linked together to share any news, photos or updates with one another. In times of social distancing, this is a quick and easy way of keeping volunteers networks informed and up-to-date. Individuals feel a sense of inclusion and have the opportunity to connect with volunteers for a personal boost when they may need it if they are feeling isolated from family and friends.
* **Stay Connected Visually**. Bring together your existing team of volunteers virtually using Skype, Microsoft Teams or Facebook messenger video call. You could organise a bi-monthly Coffee and Chat Video Meeting, have a themed topic of sharing cooking, baking, gardening ideas, etc. Why not do a Virtual Quiz to bring your team together so volunteers can get to see each other and build relationships in a fun but informal way? You could also have themed topics of discussions around volunteering in your organisation or discuss and implement ideas on online Volunteer Fundraising to help generate income for your charity.
* **Volunteer Recruitment Plan**. If you (may) need new volunteers, try to think “out the box” in relation to volunteer recruitment. You could you ask your existing volunteers to join a Volunteer Group virtually or via email to gain their ideas about how your organisation could potentially recruit volunteers in the future. Why not ask your current volunteers to review your website and give feedback on how it could be improved for new volunteers? Could they review your volunteering posters or leaflets or help with ideas about how else new volunteers could be recruited? Perhaps you could you develop a Volunteer Recruitment Plan for the next 12 months utilising the ideas of your existing volunteers.
* **Volunteer Case Studies.** During Covid-19 could you encourage your volunteers to do volunteer case studies of why they volunteer, what they do, what benefits it brings to them, your organisation and the local community? These could then be shared throughout the year to showcase the amazing work they do and will hopefully encourage more people to volunteer. Could you design a simple case study form and ask them to complete and return with a picture? You could then build up a bank of volunteer case studies to share on your website, newsletter, social media, networks and the local media which provides good publicity but would also help support a volunteer recruitment campaign.
* **Video Messages**. Could you encourage your volunteers to record a short video on their smart phones about why they volunteer so again these could be posted throughout the year? You could build up a bank of videos to use on social media and your website. Going digital to promote volunteering is a new concept for many organisations but this is definitely becoming a fast and cost-effective way of attracting new volunteers to organisations.
* **Say Thank You!** As always remember to say Thank you to your volunteers for all their hard work they do throughout the year. Could you send computerised thank you cards to all your volunteers to say Thank You and that you are thinking of them and to keep smiling? It's always nice to receive a message or card in times when we are all socially isolated. It’s nice to show your volunteers you care & this will hopefully help to keep them motivated and retained so after Covid-19 they will return and be back making a difference to your service users, organisation and community