

Newsletter - Summer 2017

Celebrating our Volunteers:

Volunteers Week (1-7 June 17) celebrates the difference volunteers make to every community across the country. Oxfordshire is no different. Thousands of individuals are active every day of the week in a range of activities as broad as the day is long. It is Community First Oxfordshire's (CFO's) role to get out there in the community and support existing and help develop new opportunities. All our activity contributes to doing just that, from Community-Led and Neighbourhood Planning to community halls, retail and transport.

Here's a flavour. In the last five years CFO has supported some 50 Community-Led Plans, with 800+ volunteers involved in setting up some 200+ community projects: new clubs and societies, support networks for elderly and vulnerable people, community hall improvements, traffic calming, footpath improvements, business directories, affordable housing, tourism projects... The list goes on and on and is incredibly inspiring, testimony to what can be achieved when people pull together. Likewise, our Community Halls Service is there to support management committee volunteers - there are some 2000+ helping run 300+ venues. In the last three-years (based on a conservative estimate of 1hr per volunteer per week per year over 3 years) community hall volunteering has generated over 340,000 volunteer hours. Elsewhere, our Community Transport Service helps support the 1200 volunteers running 60+ schemes.

A lot of this volunteering could be called 'informal'. Community activity is not always based around set opportunities but is rather people getting involved and doing something when they can and where they can. A lot of people wouldn't even call themselves volunteers. They have just seen something that they think is needed and come together with others do 'just do it'. This is perhaps how we should see, understand and promote volunteering, less as an active 'choice' but rather a natural expression of living in a given place.



Extension to Eynsham Skatepark, achieved by volunteers

Issue Highlights

Volunteers Week -	Page 2
OCVA supporting volunteers -	Page 4
How to find more volunteers -	Page 6
Volunteering with South Oxfordshire District Council -	Page 10
MAD week-	Page 11



Volunteering

Volunteering cont/...

Yet there are challenges, of course. While some volunteering happens spontaneously, a lot of it needs to be nurtured and supported, hence the CFO role. And we know that many of those involved in volunteering are getting older, the pressures of family life, childcare etc. making it difficult for those of working age and with families to get involved. In many places, there is not enough new blood coming through to replace those who have been involved for a number of years and wish to step back. CFO continues to work with communities and our partners to develop innovative solutions to this issue, which will, naturally vary from place to place. And in these days of austerity, when every penny must be accounted for, it is worth making the point that a little investment goes a long way. For example, CFO recently estimated using, using a very conservative approach, that every £1 spent on Community-Led Planning support is likely to yield at least £1.50 in social value.

That is the focus of this Newsletter: the value that volunteers bring and the support they require to ensure that they continue to provide such a vital, community-affirming role.

Tom McCulloch, Director: CFO

Volunteers' Week 1-7th June

Volunteers' Week is an annual event which takes place at the start of June. It celebrates the contribution made by millions of volunteers across the UK. It's run by National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in partnership with Volunteer Development Scotland, Volunteer Now (Northern Ireland) and Wales Council for Voluntary Action.

From showcasing the different volunteering roles on offer, taster sessions and team challenges with new partners, to volunteer recruitment events, awards ceremonies and launching new volunteering campaigns, events take place throughout the country.

Everyone is invited to join this national celebration of volunteers and volunteering, it's up to you to decide exactly how you join in.

Making the difference

*Thoughts from a Volunteer Driver.
Wantage Independent Advice Centre*

When I retired I wanted to do some voluntary work. Volunteer driving gives me the flexibility I wanted, by not committing me to a regular day or time each week. Although, I am prepared to do local runs, I particularly enjoy taking clients farther afield, often to the hospitals in Oxford. My family would say I like to talk, but as a driver I have now learned the joy of listening. My many clients have led such varied lives with such different experiences and I enjoy listening to stories and consider it a great privilege to share their memories.

I have heard so much about different parts of this country and abroad and have enjoyed funny, sad and surprising childhood memories and experiences. I am very aware that I may be the only person my client talks to that day, so I hope to relieve a little loneliness or give some reassurance as we chat.

It has made me appreciate more sincerely the good health I have experienced so far in life. I have seen how illness can have life changing effects, often with a tinge of sadness when thinking of what life may have been like. However, I have certainly been humbled by some clients who manage to live with their problems with dignity whilst maintaining a positive outlook and still manage to count their blessings.

Unfortunately, although we all want to be well-cared for when we need help, it is often easy for us to feel too busy and unable to offer help needed by members of our community. I hope that my volunteer driving helps clients who need help now and with luck, there will be a volunteer driver available when I need a lift. Perhaps they may enjoy my stories about being a volunteer driver!

Why Volunteer?

Peoples reasons will all be different, but you must enjoy it and get something out of it personally

One day, I might need someone like me.

**After a hard, stressful day at work, I needed something totally different to do with my spare time.
(Volunteer with Props/ Village Hall)**

**Being able to give something back to the community and it's future and because I care.
(Neighbourhood Planning Volunteer)**

**Helping join people together in common goals gives people a sense of belonging and ownership of their community's future.
(Village Shop volunteer)**

*Important to be part of a community that cares and is fully inclusive.
(Oil Scheme volunteer)*

*You either get on and do things or make excuses!
(Village Hall volunteer)*

**Making a difference and bringing new and exciting things to the community
(Parish Councillor and NP volunteer)**

Partnership Working - Supporting Volunteers



Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action

Celebrating Voluntary Action

Could you be a friend to an isolated elderly person in your community? Would you like to improve your local environment and join a team committed to making it a safer, pleasanter place to live?



Have you moved to Oxfordshire and want to meet new people? Are you keen to get experience in admin and IT to strengthen your CV and job applications?

Whatever your reason for volunteering, this is the perfect time to get involved! OCVA is busy getting ready for National Volunteers' Week – a nationwide celebration of voluntary activity from 1st - 7th June, and there are lots of ways you can be part of the action...

Volunteers' Week

Full details of everything taking place in the week can be found at ocva.org.uk, but please do get in touch, our Volunteer Centre Co-ordinator Emily Shaw would love to hear from you. Alternatively, you can visit Emily on the second Wednesday of every month at the Job Centre where she runs a drop-in open to everyone between 10am and 1pm.

We look forward to hearing from you!
Emily Shaw, OCVA: ocva.org.uk
emily.shaw@ocva.org.uk / 01865 251946

Join a free workshop

New to volunteering? Not sure if it's for you? Come along to one of 3 'Introduction to Volunteering' workshops to learn about the benefits of volunteering, how to find opportunities in your local community and hear from groups who would love you to join them. Give volunteering a go and join a one-off volunteering activity.



Dip your toe in the world of volunteering by spending an hour or two at one of the taster activities being held around the county. The full calendar of events to join will be on the OCVA website.

National Volunteers' Week in Oxfordshire 'You Make The Difference'

There are lots of ways you can find out more about volunteering in Oxfordshire during Volunteers' Week, including having the chance to take part in one-off taster activities! For details of everything going on visit www.ocva.org.uk or call 01865 251946 and ask for Emily.



FREE Introduction to Volunteering Workshops

5th June, 12 – 1:30pm: Barton Neighbourhood Centre
6th June, 10:30 – 12 noon: Rose Hill Community Centre
7th June, 5:30 – 7pm: Museum of Modern Art

Email vol@ocva.org.uk or call 01865 251946 to register



Capture your volunteering in a photograph and enter the OCVA competition. This year's National Volunteers' Week theme is 'You Make the Difference' and the OCVA photo competition is a chance for you to showcase the difference you make. The winning photos will form the front page of the new county wide volunteering website.



Starting a Community Time Bank



Setting up a new charity is exciting, challenging and takes a lot more time than you imagine at the start. The time bank in Oxford started by Community First staff member Fiona Mullins is an example.



The time bank is completely free to join. For every hour of help that you give, you receive one time credit. Members use their time credits to ask for help with the things that they need. Everyone has something to offer and everyone's time is valued equally. The sorts of things that members offer or request are: doing errands, giving lifts, visiting, help with form filling, typing/word processing, letter writing, budgeting, computer skills, design work, book keeping, shopping, housework, simple decorating, washing/ ironing, plant watering, teach reading, dog walking, moving/lifting, leafleting, gardening, home repairs, cycle repairs, car washing, sewing, knitting, woodwork, metalwork, odd jobs, general help, story-telling/reading aloud. Organisations can use time credits to encourage volunteers to help them and earn credits by offering their facilities for events.

The support provided has ranged from very few hours some months up to 40 hours per month at its peak. Many more hours are put in by time bank members at regular weekly activities and running the time bank. The time bank offers practical support, reduces the risk of isolation, and involves a wide range of people from

different cultures, income and educational background, many of whom do not see themselves as 'volunteers'.

Two volunteers started this time bank for people in Cowley, Oxford, in 2012. Fiona Mullins (now Community First) and Hannah Fenton (now Good Food Oxford) each gave 1 day a week to broker exchanges, administration, run events and fund-raise. Ruth Moore was employed to run the time bank in 2014 and 2015 as a part time role. Since then it has been run by one part time volunteer, Tracy Foster, with support from 5 other trustees. As far as we know this is still the only time bank in Oxfordshire although there are over 200 across the country.

A time bank requires either funding for the crucial central role of time broker or enthusiastic and capable people within the community to manage it as volunteers. In the early stages, we had two keen volunteers, a couple of supportive local advisors, help from a large time bank (Gloucester Fair Shares) and free training by the national time bank network. Once we registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) we got funding from The Funding Network, the City Council and others, which helped the time bank to grow quite rapidly for two years. But as funding got more difficult to obtain we have scaled back to a voluntary operation with less activity. This works as the people running it keep things simple. It is also very rewarding to be part of a project that generates many hours of meaningful and fun connections among people with lots of positive feedback.

Fiona Mullins, Community Engagement: CFO

ourcommunitytime.org.uk



Volunteers do it with Farmers!

THE FARMING COMMUNITY NETWORK

The Farming Community Network is a voluntary organisation and charity providing support to members of the farming community through difficult times. It is a network of over 400 volunteers working across England and Wales. Many of the volunteers are involved in farming, or have close links with agriculture and therefore have a great understanding of the issues farmers, farm workers and their families regularly face. Volunteers provide practical and pastoral support to anyone who seeks help. The caller is then offered the opportunity to meet face to face with a volunteer, who remains in contact to "walk with" that farmer for as long as the support is needed.

There is an FCN group based in the Thames Valley covering the counties of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. Volunteers in these counties have supported farmers coping with the stress of a bovine TB breakdown in their cattle, financial problems following death of the main income provider, business readjustment as dairy prices have fallen, relationship difficulties, depression, isolation and loneliness. Duty of care for the needs of the volunteers is paramount. As a voluntary organisation, with a Christian foundation, each local Group has a volunteer Chaplain to provide pastoral care and Supervision to the volunteers.

Farming is a precarious business. Perhaps one of the only businesses which has little control over the prices received for the product produced and at the mercies of a range of external factors like the weather. Farm incomes vary depending on a range of factors and, unlike many business, the interweaving of business and personal income can sometimes be difficult to manage. The average age of a farmer is upwards of 60, and many find that there is not enough income to support the next generation, who may then have leave the land for other occupations.

The complex interweaving of family and working relationships can be stressful, and a variable income stream can make it sometimes difficult for younger people to enter the industry. The days of large numbers of people working on a farm have gone and with an increasing lack of understanding of what farming is about in the local rural population, farmers can often feel isolated and marginalised from the general rural population.

Farming is a highly visible occupation in one sense, as it shapes the landscape and countryside, but the true nature and stress of the work and the pressures on income is often hidden. Sometimes this can bring farmers into conflict with local people wanting the quieter life of the rural idyll. The need to maximise economic potential by diversifying into other areas of income generation, such as industrial units in the farmyard, can put farmers into conflict with the local population. The incidences of depression, loneliness, suicide and indeed accidental injury is very high.

Helpline number 03000 111 999 and ask to be referred to the Bucks Oxon and Berkshire Coordinator. It is manned 16 hours a day from 7am to 11pm, 365 days a year.

E: chris@fcn.org.uk You can also follow FCN on Facebook and Twitter (@FCN charity).

For more general information: Glyn Evans, Regional Director [central region] gevans@fcn.org.uk

Tel: 07581 4917. *The Farming Community Network: fcn.org.uk*

How do we find more volunteers?

Case Study: Little Milton Volunteer Summit

The Little Milton parish council called an initial 'Volunteer Summit' meeting on 23 May 2017 to discuss how to find people to manage the institutions that support village life. These include the village hall, the community shop, the church, school board of governors and the parish council plus many others. In total the village has at least 22 groups that rely on volunteers to provide the activities that make this village a great place.

Finding people for the committees is becoming a major concern as people in key roles on all of the main committees will be standing down in the next 2 years. The Volunteer Summit was called to discuss succession planning in preparation for the likely changes ahead. It was open to all but mainly attended by committee members who are 'the usual suspects' who are doing everything and feeling over-worked.

Next step

People need to understand what each committee does. The meeting agreed to have a stall at the village fete in June with basic information and contact details for each group and representatives from the committees there to explain more to those who are interested.

This does not take much work to organise so is an easy way to try to interest people in the activities that take place. Conversations will not focus on getting people signed-up but will discover who may be interested. The summit group will review this approach. If it works it could be done annually and at other events that attract lots of villagers.

Other ideas discussed in this meeting were:

- The focus needs to be on **spreading the word about these great institutions** that support good stuff and what they do to make the village a great place. Ideas include the newsletter, website, the village fete (see above) and word of mouth.
- **Specific requests to specific people** work better than a blanket village wide call for volunteers, which typically gets nil response. A personal approach allows for reassurance and explanation.
- There are many tasks that people can help with that do not require full trustee responsibilities. Helping out at events or on specific time limited tasks can **give people confidence** and over time may lead onto taking on more of a commitment. People can gain experience by volunteering and make connections with people in the village.
- Committee trustees are responsible for governance, which is **separate from managing activities** (although the same people often do both).
- Let's ask: **how can we do things differently?** The committees may wish to review and update their constitution and review their practices, allow trial periods, encourage observers and delegate tasks to non-committee members.
- **Be approachable.** Committee members with high levels of expertise and who have been in post for many years may come across as a bit 'scary', daunting or as part of a 'clique'.



Little Milton Village Hall

Improving your local community

Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association (OPFA) works to ensure that people of all ages and abilities have access to good quality local facilities for outdoor sport and play. This includes play areas, playing fields, multi-use games areas and pavilions. Most rural community outdoor playing spaces in Oxfordshire are managed by volunteers, including members of parish councils.

The work that these volunteers do is vital; publically accessible local outdoor facilities are spaces for the whole community to use. OPFA knows from experience that if a recreation space is well maintained, with good quality, up-to-date equipment, the community will use it.

The work that these volunteers do helps directly to improve the physical, social and mental well-being of their community, and to combat isolation.

As a volunteer you may know what you want to achieve, but don't know how to get there. OPFA offers the advice and moral support to help play space managers to do their job well. We also work with communities facing significant new housing development. We help to assess what additional or improved outdoor

recreational space provision you should be pressing for, ensuring that you can make the most of developer contributions. This will ensure that your facilities are adequate for an increased population size.

*Nicole O'Donnell, OPFA Community Development Officer.
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Oxfordshire's Countryside relies on Volunteers!

Within the Campaign to Protect Rural England, they are critical to everything we do. As well as our trustee board, we have a network of professional advisors, who volunteer their expertise to give us and the public advice on everything from footpaths to historic buildings. Then across the County, we have a network of District Committees made up of people passionate about their local patch. They are very much our eyes and ears on the ground. Virtually every planning application in Oxfordshire is scrutinised by a CPRE volunteer to check it supports countryside policies.

Always room for a few more though, so we'd love to hear from anyone who might be interested in getting involved.

Helen Marshall, Director CPRE Oxfordshire

T: 01491 612079, E: administrator@cpreoxon.org.uk, W: cpreoxon.org.uk





Views from Community Volunteers

A Parish Councillor for Brize Norton

What made you decided to get involved with your community action?

My involvement with the Parish Council was a slow burner. Having become a member of an action group opposing new housing, I realised I was interested in what was happening in my local area. Once I started working part time, I had more time to commit to the village and agreed to join the Parish Council.

Chair of Neighbourhood Plan Group

I met the current Parish Chairman and was subsequently asked to research and write responses on behalf of the Parish Council.

What skills and experience do you have that is useful to your volunteering role?

Structured planning, administration, organisation, management and people skills are essential to succeed in my career

Similar skills are required in the community action role as a volunteer, helping guide and develop the Neighbourhood Plan.

What are your aspirations for your community by doing this volunteering?

Being able to improve and protect the village environment we live in by helping to bring the community together, and for the future.

To safeguard the community against the constant fear of being overrun by unwanted and speculative developments. To make our village community a safe and admired environment in which to live.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Working with Companies to source Volunteers for your Charity.

Don't instantly dismiss it. By volunteering for a charity or project, employees are getting a first hand look at your activities and the impact you make.

Work out responsibilities and manage expectation from the start. Covering everything from how many volunteers are needed to contact with service users.

Be clear about any costs. Make sure everyone knows who is providing what. You don't want your charity to be out of pocket.

Think outside the box. Employee volunteering doesn't have to involve manual labour. Are you working with a company that has a skill set you could utilise, or is there something your charity could really use help with that you could approach a particular business for?

Don't forget to follow it up. Something as simple as a certificate for each team member and a follow-up email to the team leader thanking them for all their hard work can really help cement relationships.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' staff volunteering

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are supporting NCVO's Volunteers' Week (1-7 June) by holding an event to encourage staff to give during work time. Their new staff volunteering policy allows staff to take two days leave each year to give something back to the community.

Council Staff Volunteering Case Study

Who are you? Beth Elkins, Development and Regeneration Project Officer

Who did you volunteer for? Sustainable Wantage, environmental community group

What did you do? Sustainable Wantage needed a volunteer to manage events for Save the Children's 'Den Day'. I organised activities, drew up a schedule, arranged refreshments and advertising.

How much time did you spend volunteering? I used my two days volunteering leave and my own personal time.

How did you arrange your volunteering? I wanted to volunteer in my home town, so I contacted the town council direct.

Would you recommend other staff use their volunteering leave? Absolutely! It's a great employee benefit and it's a good opportunity to showcase the councils' commitment and enthusiasm for local communities.

What were the benefits of volunteering? It felt good to get out into the community and do something positive, fun and tangible. I've built new relationships and I'm still in touch with Sustainable Wantage.

Do you have any advice for someone interested in volunteering? I recommend choosing a short-term project that matches your skillset. This way you'll see the results of your efforts and your volunteering leave won't be spent training you to do the task in hand.

If your organisation is looking for volunteers, either now or in the future contact volunteer.support@southandvale.gov.uk or call 01235 422 109. Both councils will be regularly advertising volunteering opportunities for their staff to get involved.



MAD week (Make A Difference)



CFO is working with OCVA , Volunteer Link Up and Bartholomew School in Enysham as part of MAD week. **MAD week is a positive response to a national call for young people to play a more active role in their communities**, The UK wide #iwill campaign aims to embed social action in the lives of 10- 20 year olds. It aims to foster a culture of volunteering which becomes a habit for life and one young people will share with family and friends.

CFO has offered placements to two year 12 students for a week in July. Their brief is to research and develop a

programme of events and activities that will be used to engage young people in the Neighbourhood planning and Community led planning processes. CFO will then share this material with local groups. We will have a full report of their time with us in the next newsletter.

For further information: *Hilary Lombard, CFO. hilary.lombard@communityfirstoxon.org*

Looking for more information?

The NVCO almanac, published in May 2017, has really interesting facts and figures on why people volunteer and what the barriers are: NVCO website

Studies show that volunteers live longer and happier lives!

Support Offered - Volunteer Training

Abingdon and Witney College are offering a variety of 3 hour workshops for volunteers during Volunteers week. Based in Kidlington, Cowley and Blackbird Leys topics range from building resilience, conflict resolution, mentoring skills to team building and communication skills.

Contact: Sue Funge, Senior Community Development Manager: sue.funge@abingdon-witney.ac.uk
01235 216 310

Volunteering Opportunities:





Introducing new Chair of CFO - John Cunningham



Why become the trustee of a charity?

Being a trustee can be rewarding and enjoyable.

By bringing your skills and experience to the role of a trustee, and in my case as chairman, the involvement with a charitable trust is a great way to become actively involved in causes which matter to you. Trustees can and should come from all walks of life and being a trustee is an ideal way to meet and interact with others for the good of and in support of the community. Being a trustee should be a tangible demonstration of your desire to work with voluntary organisations for which you feel a passion.

Being chairman will, I hope, enable me to contribute to the role and expose me to new experiences in the voluntary sector. There will be exciting new challenges and no doubt, on occasions, difficulties, to overcome. As chairman, I know I must never lose sight of the fact that I am part of a team and there is an opportunity of working together to share skills and experiences for the good of the charity.

So why become involved with Community First Oxfordshire?

I have had limited experiences working in a voluntary capacity with a number of charities so when I was asked to become involved with Community First Oxfordshire I set about researching its work and became totally overwhelmed by its breadth and scope of interests.

It is all too easy to stand back and blame "the cuts" for changes to a range of services but here is an organisation with a small highly professional team of staff who bring about tangible benefits.

CFO is currently working on some exciting new opportunities, including a community development exemplar on a major housing development and a community-led housing initiative. Watch this space! These will be further examples of what CFO does whilst at the same time as expanding and supporting other vital works ranging from advice on planning issues, village hall developments, community shops and transport. There are even more initiatives in support of communities under consideration.

Just a few examples of some (but not all) of the projects on hand and which I am honoured to have been invited to become involved. I will do all in my power to give support and encouragement to an outstanding, and highly expert team working for the good of Oxfordshire.

If any of these articles has inspired you, or you would like further information, please contact us as below:

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