

Celebrating Volunteers' Week 2009

Local charity launches a volunteer scheme to help city through the recession

The recession means that support services such as debt advice and relationship counseling are in huge demand. These services are often provided by volunteer-run organisations and as a result, volunteers are needed now more than ever.

Therefore, it's more important than ever that volunteers are recognised and celebrated during national Volunteers' Week 2009, which runs from 1st - 7th June.

In response to the recession, Nottingham charity the Partnership Council is launching a range of activities designed to encourage and support volunteering - to help existing voluntary organisations whilst setting up new community support services such as youth clubs.

Moby Farrands, the charity's Volunteering Development Worker, explains:

"Volunteering can help people find work and has also been shown to be good for your health and wellbeing, so it's great for individuals, especially those who've recently lost their jobs because of the recession. Beyond that, it's also essential for the whole community - especially now, with the increasing demand for support services."

Moby continues:

"In addition, voluntary activities such as neighbourhood clean up days and residents' groups help to bring communities together, strengthening people's pride in their local area and creating a sense of community spirit. For instance, getting to know neighbours often makes people feel safer and happier than more expensive measures such as CCTV cameras."

The knock on effects of volunteering are hugely beneficial for Nottingham as a whole, as well as for a huge number of individuals."

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The Partnership Council is hoping its new scheme will help to tackle some of the reasons why people don't volunteer. For example, worries about how volunteering will affect benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance, lack of confidence or time, believing you're too young, old or inexperienced or not wanting to commit to regular volunteering.

For instance, the charity's programme of volunteering activities will offer people the chance to volunteer at one-off events such as neighbourhood clean-up days, free events for families and recession-busting swap shops, where people can pick up items they need for free, in exchange for donating their own unwanted clothes and toys for example.

Plus, the Partnership Council is planning to support new and existing voluntary groups to launch new support services including activities for children and young people, events for older people, neighbourhood clean up days and environmental projects designed to help people save money.

Ruth Greenberg, Chief Officer of the Partnership Council says:

"It's clear that volunteers are needed now, more than ever, especially with the voluntary sector providing so many much-needed services at present. Plus of course, the recession and increasing redundancies means that more people could be benefiting from volunteering. Moby's role is essential in helping people get into volunteering, by bridging the gap between the barriers to volunteering and the practical benefits of doing so.

Plus, of course, many voluntary organisations are being affected financially by the recession themselves, making them even more reliant on volunteer support at a time when their services are being severely stretched."

Voluntary organisations in Nottingham include the Nottingham Credit Union, a non-profit-making, socially responsible provider of financial services. Like a bank, the NCU offers saving and loan services (at an extremely low rate of interest) with volunteer cashiers working from community centres and schools. The NCU is open to everyone, especially those who can't access financial services elsewhere because of debt problems or a low income for example.

Similarly, the Radford Care Group, a charity based in Radford, relies on volunteer support to run many of its activities for older people - designed to help older people remain independent - including exercise classes, entertainment, day trips, friendship groups and home visits.

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Moby says:

“Without volunteers, services like the NCU and Radford Care Group wouldn’t exist, which would in turn affect people’s lives and also put public sector services such as the NHS under even more pressure. Through our new scheme, we’re aiming to support these kinds of organisations whilst helping volunteers to start new activities in their own local area. This will help to boost communities all over Nottingham, whilst providing more opportunities for individuals wishing to volunteer.”

“The Government has invested £10 million in creating £40,000 new volunteering opportunities, but as Moby concludes, these opportunities won’t necessarily be taken up if people aren’t helped to volunteer.

It’s important to recognise that there are barriers to volunteering and that people need a helping hand to get started. As a city, we can’t just assume that people will volunteer, we need to educate, encourage and reward volunteering and create opportunities that are right for different communities and individuals.”

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