

# Managers' Experiences



Introduction to Managing Volunteers

# Managers' experiences

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# Personal insight interviews

**F**inding out how other people do things often helps us work better or be inspired to think of different ways to do this for ourselves. Here we look at the experiences of four different volunteer managers to hear their stories. Maybe there are some experiences and situations you have in common and their solutions might help you.

❖ Learning about the experiences of others is very important for Volunteer Managers' own professional development.

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### Tailored volunteer experience

## Emma Corrigan, Regional Volunteer Manager, Shelter

Being a well-known national charity certainly helps Shelter attract applications from volunteers but they don't treat them all the same in spite of being such a big organisation. Shelter helps millions of people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness and campaigns to prevent it in the first place. Much of their work centres around dealing with the legal issues people face with housing.



Their volunteers represent all areas of the community—students interested in law, social work and the criminal justice system, people who have volunteered in an advice capacity before, and past clients wanting to help someone out who is facing the same difficulties that they did. Volunteering for Shelter gives them skills and experience to help in their career or get back into work after a break. For some people, they just have spare time and want to put it to good use volunteering.

Recruiting volunteers is done through local volunteer centres, colleges and universities community venues, national websites such as [ivo.org](http://ivo.org) and [The Guardian online](http://TheGuardian.com), and through [Shelter's own website](http://Shelter.org.uk).

"It's important to try to use several methods as different people engage with different formats. We try to be as accessible as we can. What is successful in one part of the country might not be somewhere else, so we use different methods for different areas," says Emma.

Interviews are informal, talking to people about their interests, describing the role and sharing what the office environment is like.

"It can be tricky to work out what volunteers really want. Often they are keen to say yes to everything at interview. We have set questions we ask, but also adapt these depending on the role. Sometimes we'll ask candidates to do a short test to ascertain skills. A lot of

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our opportunities are open to people of any ability, but if a particular skill is required, for example telephone support, we'll role play a conversation to see what people's confidence levels are like. This helps us to see what support a volunteer might need to succeed in their role."

Shelter is experimenting with running taster days, or allowing trial periods—to give volunteers the opportunity to try the role before committing to it.

"We find it leads to volunteers staying with us longer and feeling more committed and engaged."

Although Shelter is a huge national organisation with over 1000 volunteers, all volunteers receive a tailored training experience working to a personal development plan.

"This makes sure Shelter addresses the volunteer's personal objectives from the outset," says Emma.

Recognising the contributions of volunteers is an integral part of the whole volunteering package and is achieved by verbal acknowledgement and certificates of achievement together with celebrations in Volunteer's Week among other activities. Emma firmly believes that taking the time to talk to volunteers about their personal interests also goes a long way to engaging with individuals.

CV support and development is offered to volunteers leaving Shelter and anyone who has volunteered for more than three months can use Shelter as a reference.

"We'd like to offer more to our volunteers and as part of our ongoing strategy we are exploring ways to develop our offer including offering accredited training courses."

All Shelter volunteers receive mandatory training—which mirrors that of their staff. This covers essentials such as health and safety, safeguarding, manual handling, data protection, equality and diversity using the in-house e-learning system. Volunteers are able to print out certificates to add to their personal records. For some volunteers their training will be 'on the job'—being coached and mentored by colleagues or other volunteers. Some volunteers receive formalised training suitable for their role—such as training on personal safety and boundaries for volunteers in support work teams.

Shelter use standardised procedures for dealing with performance issues to ensure everyone is comfortable with the process. Sometimes an opportunity is not a good fit for a person and the difficult decision to end a volunteer's experience is made.

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Emma explains, “Before this happens we explore the training and support offered and look to see if any alternative opportunities available within Shelter might be more suitable. My role sees me supporting teams to do this and sometimes help support and signpost a volunteer to find a satisfying opportunity within a different organisation. It is really important to find the right fit for the volunteer and host organisation.”

Emma believes talking with volunteers is a vital role. When she started with Shelter, there were some administration volunteers who weren't feeling engaged. Emma talked to them and asked about their personal development needs.

“One volunteer explained that although she was satisfied doing admin volunteering, the reason she'd come to us was to get involved in our work supporting clients and helping them with their housing issues. As a result I helped her transition to a new role—Advice Support, where she was matched with one of our advisors and began shadowing and taking part in helping to deliver a different part of the work that we do. It was of greater value to us as it enabled the advisor she was helping to see more clients, more efficiently. She stayed on as a volunteer, and eventually applied and was successful in gaining paid employment with us in a client-facing role.”

As a large organisation, each department organises the reimbursement of expenses individually. Volunteers provide receipts and where possible, are paid back immediately. There are some difficulties with remote offices and volunteers travelling from outside the area. Volunteers are encouraged to engage with the service closest to their homes and use the most effective form of public transport.

Emma's goal is to support services and build staff skills and confidence to make Shelter's offices great places for volunteers to engage.

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### A UK-first volunteering project

## Morven MacLean, Macmillan Volunteering Manager, Glasgow Libraries



**M**orven MacLean has volunteered for various organisations since the age of ten and has always worked in the voluntary sector. She moved to Glasgow specifically to take on the challenge of introducing this UK-first volunteering project. She also continues to volunteer herself as a member of the Board of Directors of Glasgow Women's Aid, an anti-domestic abuse charity with 37 refuge spaces for women and children around Glasgow.

Volunteers are at the heart of the Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries programme, a partnership between Macmillan and Glasgow Life, the organisation responsible for the culture, arts and sports in Glasgow, Scotland. A project team of ten is responsible for 150 volunteers increasing to 300 over the next 18 months. They provide information and support to people living with and beyond cancer in an informal, non-clinical café environment within the libraries.

Morven says nearly everyone who volunteers has a connection with cancer. They have had cancer themselves or a friend or relative has. The programme is diverse, with volunteers aged 16–78. Twenty-five percent of the volunteers are aged 18–25. There are retired people, unemployed people looking for experience to help their job prospects, part time workers and students. As with most volunteer-involving organisations, there are more female than male volunteers but Morven points out this probably reflects this type of volunteer role, “Women tend to be attracted more to caring and listening roles but I am actively engaged in targeted recruitment to redress this imbalance.”

Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries go way beyond the usual thank you rewards for their volunteers but rather ensure the value of the volunteer role is embedded in the organisation. They do give their volunteers thank you, Christmas and birthday cards but also

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try to cater to the individual. For example, some volunteers have such a strong resonance with the cause that for them, seeing the impact of their volunteering is highly motivational. A regular e-newsletter is sent out which includes statistics on how many people have received support and feedback from service users. In the 18 months since the programme was started, over 2,600 people have used the service. Regular press releases are also sent out profiling individual volunteers and their contribution to the programme.

“Some of our volunteers particularly like this public recognition of their efforts,” says Morven.

Volunteers are also valued by being an active part of the structure and governance of the programme.

“We ask their opinion and have volunteers on our steering group and sub-groups. Their voices need to be heard and they need to know we listen and use their opinions to shape the development of the programme.”

In common with many Macmillan-funded projects, the partnership with Glasgow Libraries will continue but the volunteer management staff roles currently funded by Macmillan will, in time, be adopted by library staff, ensuring sustainability of the service beyond Macmillan funding. The development of volunteers into lead or senior roles and the upskilling of library staff in volunteer management are essential to the sustainability of the programme. This process will be phased in over six years.

Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries has a comprehensive written volunteer role description, policy and strategy. All out-of pocket expenses are reimbursed including up to £4.50 travel costs per day. Volunteers keep receipts and claim the cash back in their local library then and there. Volunteers generally only work two-and-a-half hour shifts as the role can at times, be emotionally very draining but if anyone did work a whole day, they would also get a lunch allowance.

Morven believes that a ‘very robust recruitment process’ means there are few problems with volunteer performance but occasionally they do arise. Having quarterly one-to-one support meetings with all volunteers helps to catch problems before they become big issues.

In the 18 months the programme has been running, there have only been two major issues with volunteers. One was a lady who had real anger issues and shouted at a staff member.



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“As she had volunteered for a listening role, she was clearly unsuitable. She selected herself off the programme which was the best thing for her and us,” says Morven.

When problems arise, the volunteer manager will revisit the role description with the volunteer, to check they understand their remit, identify training and learning needs, perhaps encourage the volunteer to take a break or try a different role and occasionally redirect them to opportunities elsewhere. The approach is person-centred and will be adapted to individuals. However the organisation’s problem-solving procedure ensures that volunteers are treated fairly and that staff have clear guidance on how to manage problems.

The Volunteer Policy has a comprehensive section on resolving problems. Morven believes the strong governance structure really helps to quickly resolve most performance issues.

One of the key benefits for volunteers with Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries is the training provided. A lot of resources are put into training in cancer awareness, cancer treatment, listening skills, clearly understanding boundaries and core duties of the volunteer role. None of the programme staff are clinicians so cancer specialists are brought in to deliver these parts of the course. An induction with the Volunteer Manager then follows the training. An annual learning programme available to all volunteers has different training sessions offered each month covering different aspects of care and support for people affected by cancer. Care is taken to offer these sessions on different days and times each month, making them accessible to all.

Attracting 150 volunteers and aiming for 300 in the next 18 months is no mean feat and a lot of resources are put into the advertising and recruitment process. Adverts are put in supermarkets, GP surgeries, churches, mosques, Facebook, volunteering and [Macmillan websites](#) and talks about volunteering are given to different community groups. A monthly column is written for a community newspaper which showcases different volunteers.

“We make a point of involving volunteers from diverse backgrounds in media work to show potential volunteers that we are inclusive,” says Morven.

To accurately reflect the local demographics, there are targeted campaigns for particular ethnic groups.



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Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries staff attend Asian festivals and celebrations of new temple or mosque openings, exhibitions and shows to encourage more volunteers from those sectors of the community.

Although most of the volunteers are over 18 and work in the libraries listening and providing information to cancer patients, there are a number of other volunteer roles within the programme.



“We have event volunteers who can be as young as 16. They attend conferences, fairs, shows and Christmas events staffing information stands promoting our cancer services and volunteering opportunities for Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries. We also have volunteer photographers and those who do media work.”

Morven is particularly keen on maintaining organisational structure.

“If someone comes along with skills we can't involve at the moment, we don't just make up a role for them. We have a wish list—things we would like to do if we have the time and skills to do them. At the moment we have a 16-year-old student who is doing a research project for us gathering information on other services, such as addictions, housing, women's services, etc., to which we can signpost our service users. When he initially came to us, we did not have a suitable role for him but I kept his details and when this project came up on our wish list, asked if he would be interested.”

Macmillan @ Glasgow Libraries will eventually operate in 33 libraries and two leisure centres across the city, providing cancer information, emotional support and access to benefits advice for anyone affected by cancer. It is hoped this model of volunteer-led cancer support will be replicated in other library services and community spaces across the UK.

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### Volunteer network changing the world for those affected by stroke

## Lisa McDermott, National Volunteer and Involvement Co-ordinator (England), Stroke Association



The Stroke Association is the leading stroke charity in the UK and its volunteers support the charity to raise awareness, fundraise, support people affected by stroke, promote the Association and lead other volunteers. Without the 4000-strong network of volunteers, the Stroke Association would not be able to offer the range of services and support it does. Over 60,000 people a year are helped by their Life After Stroke Services and there are over 100 voluntary groups. Over the last ten years, volunteers at 'Know Your Blood Pressure' events have saved thousands of people from potential strokes by identifying they have high blood pressure.

People volunteer for the Stroke Association for a wide variety of reasons. Many volunteers will have had a stroke themselves and want to use their experience of stroke to help others. Others will either care for, or know someone who has had a stroke, and perhaps want to give something back to an organisation that supported them or the person affected by stroke. Many volunteers are looking to gain new skills and experiences either to facilitate a change in career or complement their studies. Significantly, 15% of volunteers are disabled, many of whom are stroke survivors.

Recognising and rewarding volunteers is vitally important to the Stroke Association. Every year during Volunteers' Week volunteers receive a letter from the Chief Executive and a certificate of recognition. Some volunteer managers will arrange award ceremonies or celebration lunches to present the certificates. In the past few years the Stroke Association has also had a virtual celebration of volunteering during Volunteers' Week—staff, volunteers, stroke survivors, carers and anyone else who wants to can celebrate volunteering through tweeting, posting on their Facebook page or posting messages of support on the [Stroke Association website](#).

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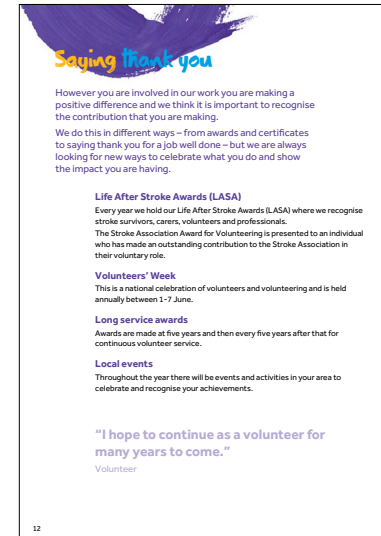
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Annual volunteer conferences are also held throughout the UK where the charity has the opportunity to recognise the contribution that volunteers make but also provide additional training and updates. The Stroke Association also recognises the length of time that volunteers have given to the charity through volunteering.

The annual [Life After Stroke Awards \(LASA\)](#) includes a category for volunteers. Volunteers are also nominated for external awards such as the Third Sector Excellence Awards.

A variety of methods are used to recruit volunteers which include:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- The Stroke Association website which has a postcode driven volunteer opportunity search <http://www.stroke.org/involved/volunteer>
- <http://www.do-it.org.uk/>
- <http://ivo.org/>
- [The Guardian](#) (free online facility)
- Posters
- Volunteer Centres
- [Gumtree](#)
- Charity recruitment sites like [CharityJob](#) and [TPP Not For Profit](#) who advertise volunteer opportunities for free
- Word of mouth
- @volunteerhour on Twitter #volunteerhour (every Wednesday between 3pm–4pm they will retweet opportunities)
- [Vinspired](#)
- Recruitment fairs/speed dating recruitment events
- Specialist organisations like REACH.



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“Our most successful methods of recruitment are probably [Do-it](#), volunteer centres and word of mouth,” says Lisa.

For some roles volunteers attend a face-to-face interview. This is very much a two-way process and enables the Stroke Association to give the volunteer information about the organisation and the role for which they are applying for, and gives the volunteer an opportunity to ask questions and get a feel for the organisation. For most other roles some type of interview takes place but this can be on the phone or via a webcam.

Training methods at the Stroke Association are always under review but includes face-to-face training on befriending, working with stroke survivors who have communication difficulties, boundaries, stroke awareness and prevention (includes how to take a blood pressure) and training for the network of Stroke Ambassadors who raise awareness of stroke in their local communities.

The Stroke Association also has an innovative online training system (i-learn) which enables all volunteers to access a wide range of training courses from home or from their volunteering location.

The Stroke Association encourages volunteer managers to provide ongoing support to volunteers via group or one-on-one review and support meetings. Whilst these are primarily there to ensure an ongoing dialogue with volunteers, they can be also used to address issues if held at an appropriate time.

Volunteer managers are trained to deal with performance issues and conflict with volunteers as soon as possible.

Lisa says, “We try to educate volunteer managers that a hands off approach to volunteer management and/or ignoring these types of issues is not going to be successful in the long run.

“Most performance issues and conflict are generally dealt with informally at a local level. If this is not possible, we do have a Problem Solving Policy which can be used if a volunteer is complained about or makes a complaint. If something cannot be dealt with at a local level, I, or one of my colleagues, might be asked to investigate or review the evidence in order to make a decision about what action should be taken. Thankfully, these are few and far between.”

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The Stroke Association tries to ensure no volunteer is out of pocket as a result of donating their time. Volunteer expenses are made via BACS payments following the Stroke Association's Volunteer Expense Policy and Procedure. This outlines what people can claim for and how they can make a claim. Volunteers complete a volunteer expense/mileage form and attach any receipts which is then signed off by their manager and presented for payment.

To engage people effectively, volunteer managers are encouraged to take the time to get to know potential volunteers. Finding out about what a potential volunteers' skills and interests are and how they would like to be involved is the first step to finding a good fit.

As the editor for the volunteer newsletter Lisa often features articles about volunteers which she says is great way of recognising the work that volunteers do.

“Volunteers add an enormous amount of value to our work and we feel it is important to acknowledge and celebrate that. Saying thank you to volunteers is great but we are trying to encourage volunteer managers not only to say thank you but to explain why they are saying thank you. By demonstrating the impact that an individual volunteer is having and the difference they are making can be extremely powerful.”

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### Increasing use of technology to support volunteers

## Laura Hamilton, Volunteer Manager, George House Trust



**G**eorge House Trust is an HIV charity based in the North West of England.

It was started by six volunteers in 1985 and now has 15 paid staff and over 130 volunteers working together.

Their vision is for all people living with HIV in North West England to live happy and healthy lives free from stigma and discrimination and for everyone to know their HIV status and be HIV aware.

Last year volunteers gave 9817 hours of their time to help George House Trust work towards this vision.

Many volunteers are motivated to give something back to George House Trust and particularly to raise awareness and challenge stigma about HIV, based on their own experiences. Over half the volunteers are living with HIV, a third are from Black African communities and nearly 40% identify as gay men.

Laura and the staff team invest a lot of time into really getting to know all the volunteers to understand what motivates them and what makes them tick.

“As a Volunteer Manager this is essential to match people to the right roles and to be able to mobilise people to help with activities. But it’s also important that all the relationships with volunteers don’t centre around me. Providing staff with the opportunity to work alongside volunteers and get to know them is important.”

Laura says feedback from volunteers is that they really feel part of the team and at the heart of the organisation’s work so clearly this investment in time pays off.

Recognising and valuing the contribution of volunteers is an integral part of the organisation’s culture. Information on involving volunteers is included in the staff induction

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packs and in-house training covers working with volunteers, making the point that appreciating and thanking them all year round is important.

As part of the most recent Volunteers' Week, all staff, volunteers and trustees were given the opportunity to nominate an individual volunteer and write a paragraph about their contribution to the George House Trust. Posters were produced and put up around the building featuring photos of the volunteers and why they had been nominated. These volunteer profiles were also used for a social media campaign on Twitter and Facebook. During this week, volunteers also took over the George House Trust Blog to share their experiences of volunteering.



“This was a great way to involve the whole organisation in rewarding and recognising the impact of volunteering”, says Laura.

“We are using social media much more to thank volunteers and are also nominating them for external awards.”

As well as publicly acknowledging the contribution individual volunteers make to George House Trust, sharing such stories on social media platforms gives the volunteer's friends and family the opportunity to praise their efforts too. Feedback from volunteers who have been featured in this way is that they really appreciate the acknowledgement.

Many volunteers for George House Trust are on low incomes so reimbursing their expenses promptly is a priority says Laura. Expenses can be reimbursed in cash or by BACS payment into the volunteer's bank account. They can also submit their expenses claim online, via the Trust's volunteer web portal. Out-of-pocket travel expenses are paid, together with support with childcare costs incurred through attending induction and essential update training. If volunteers are helping for more than four hours (or over a mealtime), they also get up to £4 towards the cost of a meal. Volunteer expenses are budgeted for and built into funding bids for new projects and activities.



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George House Trust has a documented volunteer 'problem solving procedure' and volunteers can also raise issues via the organisation's Complaints Policy, but most issues are resolved before getting to the formal stage.

Laura explains, "As a Volunteer Manager within a relatively small organisation, I work to support staff to feel confident about raising issues directly and constructively with volunteers. Staff can often feel awkward about addressing issues with volunteers—especially as they are 'giving their time for free'. We provide training in how to give feedback to volunteers which has definitely improved people's confidence about tackling issues. One of the biggest things I have learnt in my job has been the importance of supporting and empowering staff to raise issues directly with volunteers, rather than all issues being passed to me to resolve. Feedback from an immediate supervisor who has a strong working relationship with the volunteer is often much more impactful."

Volunteer role descriptions and induction training help to communicate expectations clearly to volunteers and to flag up what to do if they are finding a situation challenging or are unhappy in their role. But as Laura recognises, it is important not to ignore issues around volunteer performance.

"Not all volunteers work out—sometimes there can be very real issues that need to be addressed."

Solutions to volunteer performance issues vary depending on the situation. Additional training can help, or changing to a better suiting role. Sometimes a volunteer's behaviour will change just by receiving constructive feedback.

As with any staff, it is important to treat the volunteer fairly and allow them to represent themselves. At George House Trust, all meetings dealing with performance review are documented, any changes required are laid out clearly and the volunteer is given advance notice of formal meetings and the opportunity to have a support person accompany them.

The views of volunteers and paid staff members are considered equally.

"Sometimes there is conflict or a clash of personalities within the team and it is important to ensure that both volunteers and paid staff are heard and involved in working towards a solution."

Understanding HIV and the issues experienced by George House Trust users is at the centre of the comprehensive induction training all new volunteers go through. It also covers the

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vision, mission and services of George House Trust, the particular issues of confidentiality, boundaries and safeguarding, together with support mechanisms for volunteers.

Skills-based training is also given for certain roles, for example, customer service training for volunteer receptionists and mentoring and listening skills training for mentors and befrienders.

George House Trust also runs annual HIV and safeguarding updates for volunteers. There are regular team meetings for different roles, some of which contain an element of training or practice sessions.

Increasingly technology is used to enable wider access to learning resources. Some induction courses have been delivered via a Moodle E-Learning platform and Laura says they are looking to extend this to an ongoing programme of e-Learning for existing volunteers. Webinars are used to deliver briefing sessions to volunteers for one-off fundraising and events.

Technology is also helping staff manage volunteers and engage with a broader range of volunteers when looking for people to help. George House Trust has started to use a web-based Constituent Relationship Management (CRM) software package [CiviCRM](#) to manage volunteers. Laura says this has really supported the staff team in communicating with volunteers and enables people to easily identify volunteers for tasks. Texting and interacting on social media also offer opportunities to engage with volunteers more easily and is widely used within the organisation.

In common with other organisations involving volunteers, George House Trust uses lots of different methods to recruit including:

- the [George House Trust website](#) and social media pages
- advertising in local volunteer centres and on the [Do-it](#) website
- advertising on [ivo.org](#)
- advertising on [The Guardian](#) website

Share your wisdom + Gain experience  
= help others live well with HIV

"Whilst I was volunteering at George House Trust, I gained a lot of skills - I feel more confident, I can make my own decisions, I have learned new things, I have made friends"

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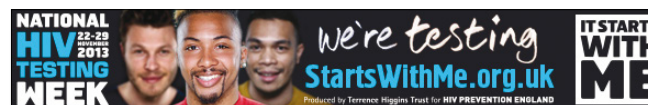
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- advertising in specialist publications—for example for people living with HIV, or the communities most affected by HIV (e.g., LGBT communities or Black African communities)
- university careers service and community engagement programmes
- having a presence at community events or events at colleges and universities
- giving talks at the George House Trust's group spaces for people living with HIV and posters/flyers in the building
- through word of mouth—encouraging volunteers to talk to others about volunteering with George House Trust.

Volunteers are asked to complete an online application and then invited to a group interview. The group interview explores individual motivations for volunteering and people's individual existing skills and experience to enable George House Trust to match them to roles. Occasionally individual interviews are offered if people can't make the group session or want to offer specialist skills to the organisation. Either two staff members or a staff member with an experienced volunteer interview potential volunteers, reinforcing the culture of valuing volunteers in all parts of the organisation's work, including volunteer involvement.

Looking at volunteer applications from the last three months:

- 32% heard of volunteering through the [George House Trust website](#)
- 18% through word of mouth
- 18% through the George House Trust Services Team
- 8% through a Volunteer Centre
- 5% from an information stall at an event
- 3% through social media
- 16% through other methods including Google, jobs websites or Doctors.



[The George House Trust website](#) provides information about what volunteering involves and to help people choose a volunteer role that's right for them. People can also access the

