

Case Study
London Borough of Ealing
September 2012

LOVE
LIBRARIES

LOVE
VOLUNTEERING

Developing Staff-Volunteer Relations in Ealing

Abstract

Having struggled to involve volunteers successfully in 2010, Ealing Libraries planned a re-launch of its volunteer programme with support from Love Libraries and Ealing Volunteer Centre. Staff were involved in the development of this new programme through a focus group, a staff survey, and staff training workshops. The new volunteer programme is proving successful so far, and staff attitudes towards the involvement of volunteers appear to be becoming more positive.

The issue / background

In spring 2010, after discussion with trade unions, Ealing Libraries began to involve volunteers in its services for the first time. Training in basic volunteer management was delivered in-house to 10 Library Supervisors and the Borough Archivist. Other staff were informed of the new volunteer programme through email updates, and were sent the relevant policies and guidance in electronic form.

Only 10 volunteers took on new volunteer roles in 2010. Feedback from library staff was that some of the volunteers had been unreliable; either leaving after a few weeks or not turning up for agreed volunteering hours.

A decision was made to halt the volunteer programme, and to re-launch it after further consultation and planning.

Partners and funding

In 2011, Ealing was successful in its bid to be part of Love Libraries through Team London, giving library staff access to training and peer support to help shape the volunteer programme.

Ealing Libraries also benefitted greatly from support from Ealing Volunteer Centre, who provided good practice advice and recruitment support.

Development of the new volunteer programme

Ealing Libraries set out to:

- Consult potential library volunteers
- Work with library staff to develop new volunteer opportunities
- Re-launch the volunteer programme
- Recruit 100 new volunteers by the end of June 2012

Between October and December 2011 we held focus groups with prospective volunteers, and with library staff, to gain their input into the development of the new volunteering programme.

Following the focus groups, a survey was sent to all library staff in April 2012; the survey asked them about their previous experiences of working with volunteers, and their ideas for the future involvement of volunteers in the library service. As a result of this, final changes were made to the proposed new volunteer opportunities.

Prospective volunteers were matched to the new volunteer opportunities, and started volunteering in libraries from June 2012.

6 senior library staff attended volunteer management training organised through Love Libraries in February 2012. 38 library staff attended in-house training from October to December 2012. The in-house training included discussion of existing volunteer opportunities and volunteer management procedures, and gave staff an opportunity to discuss their concerns about volunteer involvement.

Staff survey results (April 2012)

- 36 frontline library staff responded to the survey, including staff from each “cluster” of libraries in Ealing
- Only 9 staff (25%) reported having a, “good”, or, “very good”, previous experience of working with volunteers
- 22 staff (62.8%) reported feeling negative about the new volunteering programme
- Only 12 staff (37.5%) felt positive about their own skills and abilities to support volunteers in their roles
- Staff said that they needed clarity on volunteer roles, and training in how to work with volunteers

Changing staff attitudes towards volunteering

Staff are beginning to respond more positively to the volunteer programme. This has included:

- Suggestions of additional opportunities for volunteer involvement, such as storytelling in community languages or helping emergent adult readers
- Requesting volunteer help for their libraries, e.g.: with Greenford Library’s Saturday Club for children
- Taking the lead on developing areas of volunteer activity, such as the IT Trainers project which is led by two Team Leaders
- Volunteer management training attended by all 7 Team Leaders, the Deputy Team Leader, 18 Library Officers, 5 Library Assistants and 5 specialist staff
- Positive experiences of volunteering reported by some staff, e.g.: the volunteer assistance with the Summer reading Challenge at Ealing Central Library in 2012.

Progress so far

- 3 draft volunteer opportunities “shelved” following staff focus groups; staff were uncomfortable with volunteers assisting with 2 opportunities (Cultural Events Assistant and Library Ambassador) and felt that the 3rd (Group Visits Coordinator) wasn’t suitable for volunteers
- 9 volunteer opportunities launched in May 2012

- 36 frontline library staff trained in volunteer management, including staff from every “cluster” of libraries in Ealing
- 53 active volunteers by December 2012
- 371.75 volunteer hours contributed between June and December 2012.

Key Learning Points

- Staff involvement is vital in creating volunteer roles which:
 - Are relevant and needed
 - Have staff buy-in
- Providing training to senior staff only and then asking them to cascade it was not successful; training needs to be provided to more junior staff directly, to allow them to ask questions directly and raise any concerns
- Staff training should also offer an opportunity to collect staff feedback about the volunteer programme, as this helps to encourage ownership
- Staff concerns about not having the time and capacity to support volunteers were allayed by having clear documents and processes to save staff time.

Future Plans

In 2013, we plan to:

- Carry out a follow up survey of staff, to assess any changes in views since April 2012
- Continue a programme of staff training, focusing on Library Officers and Library Assistants
- Carry out a survey of volunteers to find out their views on working with library staff
- Identify staff “Volunteer Champions” at each library
- Have volunteers active at every branch, giving all library staff a chance to work alongside library volunteers.

Further information:

For further information, please contact Amma Poku at apoku@ealing.gov.uk
www.ealing.gov.uk/info/100003/community/1332/volunteering

Love Libraries Love Volunteering

<http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/policylobbying/culturetourismand2012/lovelibraries/>

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