

Case Study
London Borough of Havering
September 2012

LOVE
LIBRARIES

LOVE
VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering in Havering Libraries

Abstract

Havering Libraries have offered a range of volunteering opportunities for the local community since 2004. These include Summer Reading Challenge volunteers, Reading Buddies, Peer Support (computers), Housebound Service and Saturday Club helpers. This case study looks specifically at the work accomplished under the GLA Team London opportunity and the outcomes achieved.

The issue / background

Havering Libraries have worked well with volunteers and the local volunteering bureau, HAVCO (Havering Association for Voluntary and Community Organisations) for a number of years. We are successful at recruiting and retaining volunteers for a number of opportunities. However, we felt that we could join up on a more strategic level with HAVCO and also wanted the opportunity to introduce our Havering Library Ambassador programme.

Partners and funding

GLA (Greater London Authority) Team London Libraries Project
HAVCO (Havering Association of Voluntary and Community Organisations)

What we did

Our project had three strands to it:

1. **Work more strategically with HAVCO:** Havering Libraries and HAVCO started to set up shared processes to streamline the volunteer application process and ensure data was shared between both organisations. It was noted that volunteers often volunteer for more than one organisation at any one time so we wanted to ensure that we maximised the potential of each volunteer. Following from this, HAVCO started holding volunteer drop-in sessions twice a week at the Central Library at Romford. During these sessions, they recruited volunteers and steered them towards additional volunteering opportunities. Building on the success of the drop-in sessions, we have now set up a permanent Volunteering Information Shop in Romford Library. In this way, all the frontline interaction for recruiting volunteers now happens in the Romford Library. This has been a positive outcome for both Havering Libraries and HAVCO – for Libraries, we have seen a small rise in footfall and have been able to liaise more closely with HAVCO to set up new initiatives; HAVCO have been able to attract more people to volunteering across the borough generally.



Our Ambassadors came from all walks of life – all ages! We even have a horse, a lizard and a couple of cats with badges! They seem to be catching on!

2. **Introduce Havering Library Ambassadors Programme:** Havering Library Ambassadors are volunteers who are specifically tasked with spreading the news about Havering Libraries. These specialist volunteers are given a bright green badge (to catch the eye and prompt questions) and lots of information about how our libraries work, rules and regulations and information about upcoming events, activities or changes to service. Their role is to go out and talk about Havering Libraries in their everyday lives. So, for instance, one of our Havering Library Ambassadors attends a Perky Pensioners group, so she will talk about the library to her fellow Perky Pensioners as and when she gets the opportunity. The premise behind the Ambassadors is that the best publicity comes from “word of mouth advocacy”, so we wanted to create the opportunity for our volunteers to do this in an informed way. Our Ambassadors are also offered the opportunity to participate in special training sessions – for instance, we are rolling out a new virtual library and volunteers have been offered two-hour taster sessions so that they can talk confidently about what is available.
3. **Encourage more people to volunteer in Havering Libraries:** Through closer interaction with HAVCO, we hoped to ensure more of our opportunities were more widely available and also open up new opportunities for volunteers. We have done this by promoting more widely via the DO IT website, but also by HAVCO promoting our opportunities at community events and via their volunteer brokers. This has seen a rise in the number of volunteers approaching us and, ultimately, becoming volunteers with us. We are now entering a new stage to consider new opportunities for volunteers.

Data

Havering has seen a large rise in the number of volunteers recruited, especially for the Ambassadors project. We had over 4,000 children participate in the Summer Reading Challenge, with a 67% completion rate. Unlike many library authorities, who suffer from lack of staff to interact with participants, Havering still ensures that each child will chat about each book with either a member of staff or a volunteer. We believe that this maintains the Summer Reading Challenge as a quality initiative, as opposed to one that simply ticks off the number of books read without encouraging any interaction about the books. We simply couldn't maintain this level of interaction without our wonderful volunteers!

Key Learning Points

- Ensure that communication is maintained and staff across partnerships are kept informed. If issues arise, it is then much simpler to resolve them
- Have a willingness to seek mutually beneficial outcomes. Most times, a suggestion can be tweaked to suit all partners to have positive outcomes.
- Sometimes an idea that has been “brewing” for a while just needs a little shove to get it running – we found that with our Library Ambassadors.
- A little planning can pay off more than additional resources!

Further information:

For further information, please contact Ruth Gedalovitch at ruth.gedalovitch@havering.gov.uk

Love Libraries Love Volunteering

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