

cultural volunteer ©

issue 8 – FEBRUARY 2004

WELCOME!

cultural volunteer (cv) is a free e-news and information service for arts management professionals. **cv** is published six times a year and comes to you from Lynn Blackadder, arts management consultant, www.lynnblackadder.com. You can choose to read **cv** in email or as a Word attachment. I hope you enjoy **cv**, but if you don't wish to receive future issues, please return this email typing 'unsubscribe' in the subject line.

IN THIS ISSUE ...

A belated Happy New Year! and a special welcome to all those new subscribers from museums and libraries in Australia. This month **cv** explores **how arts organisations can compete with humanitarian charities for volunteers**. We also hear about the volunteer programme at the **Cheshire Rural Touring Network**.

WHY YOU SHOULD READ **cv** ...

cv is for arts management professionals who currently involve volunteers in their organisations, and for those who don't, but would like to find out more about volunteers.

cv aims to raise awareness of the resource cultural volunteers represent, and how to utilise it effectively.

cv actively campaigns for the recognition and progression of volunteers working in arts organisations.

cv can help you to better understand the nature of volunteering and how it relates to your organisation.

cv will regularly bring to your attention useful information, resources and commentary on volunteering in the cultural sector. Experts on volunteer management will feature, and we will explore topics raised by you in future issues.

FEATURE: Lynn Blackadder on the importance of volunteering in the arts

Figures just issued by the Office for National Statistics suggest that volunteering is on the decline. Whether this is accurate is a matter of debate (see article below): the Institute for Volunteer Research says that its research shows fewer people are volunteering but for longer periods, resulting in an increase in volunteer time. However, if there are fewer people volunteering, this could mean that organisations will be finding it harder to attract volunteers. So cultural organisations need to find out who the competition is, and how their volunteering offer matches up.

Cultural volunteering

In my experience, the cultural sector has always had plenty of people offering to help out in a variety of ways. In the arts, for example, it's hard to imagine the stream of students looking for that first step onto the employment ladder drying up. And Friends groups – where members give their time as well as their money – are a constant source of support. But while many cultural institutions are run entirely by volunteers, or volunteers at least underpin their operations, to some, their charitable objectives might not always seem as deserving as the more humanitarian charities. And with the Government push on good citizenship and helping those worst off in society, cultural volunteering could be in danger of decline.

Arts as a good cause?

Volunteering for Cancer Research UK, The Samaritans or The Red Cross is extremely important. But the people who work and volunteer for these organisations are often the first to admit that culture in its widest sense contributes significantly to our lives (note for example the increase in arts and health projects). A mass transfer of human resource from the arts to humanitarian charities would be very good for many different groups in society, but it would be very bad for culture. As well as fewer events, productions, performances and exhibitions, there would be a decrease in access: reduced opening hours, less play and sports time, less interpretation, and fewer opportunities to learn and become enthused. So cultural organisations need to demonstrate how culture – in its widest sense – can enrich people's lives. Of course, many cultural institutions are increasingly focused on outreach and social inclusion, but they perhaps don't shout loudly enough about their important work in these areas. I fear we don't stress enough the therapeutic effects of exposure to sport, libraries, and dance – for us, and for many people from so-called excluded backgrounds where it's often a rare opportunity to expand their options.

Something to bear in mind

Volunteering is no longer just about the wealthy and time-rich helping out those less fortunate than themselves. Today, it's about giving people from all walks of life a chance to be involved. Personal development through volunteering gives people a chance to be auto-philanthropists, and to take control of their own futures. In this way individuals have a big part to play in their own social regeneration as well as that of their communities. So perhaps cultural organisations need to be thinking about what opportunities they have for society – in its broadest sense – to get involved; perhaps they should be working more closely with charities such as Shelter and Scope.

Living the good life

There are a great many people who spend their whole lives working for humanitarian ends, and who feel that, having 'done their bit', they want to explore the arts. I recently appointed a volunteer as Art Fund Representative in Cambridgeshire. Karina had just retired from the Red Cross, where she spent 25 years as a trainer. "I've done my bit for the Red Cross," said Karina. "I now want to pursue my own artistic interests." Cultural organisations should be trying to attract volunteers who aren't necessarily typical to the arts. They should be encouraging short-term volunteer projects that will entice people with a different perspective, and different skills and experiences. The arts can learn a lot about volunteering from sectors such as Health. And people from the professions can learn a lot by cultural volunteering. Ricardo is another recent Art Fund recruit. He's 29 and works full-time as a management consultant. He wants to improve his knowledge of art history and use his skills to help charities raise money, so he's helping find sponsors for arts events. Big businesses are also realising the benefits of cultural volunteering to their staff and local communities. Islington Arts Factory is shortly to be painted – free of charge – by a group of new recruits from Deutsche Bank (under the supervision of professional decorators, we hope).

Long and short term volunteering

Regardless of how many young bankers or homeless people cultural volunteering can attract in the short-term, there will always be a need for organisations to attract people for longer periods of voluntary work. If you have roles that require long-term commitment, look to sources of volunteers where you are guaranteed to find people whose passion is for your area of cultural focus. For example, target local

Societies or Friends Groups. These people will often wear a number of charity hats, but are also likely to be appreciative of the benefits of culture to humanity. As many of us know, it's often quite difficult to help volunteers in this group move on to other opportunities and give others a chance!

What can you do?

If you think your organisation is in danger of losing volunteers to humanitarian charities, use the following check-list to see if you're selling the benefits of cultural volunteering:

1. Are you communicating the humanitarian benefits of cultural volunteering, advocating how culture can enrich and change lives?
2. Are you communicating your own charitable objectives and the impact of your organisation – however tangible? Give examples of community and outreach work.
3. Do you demonstrate the need for, and importance of volunteering, and what would happen if volunteering was withdrawn?
4. Do you instil a genuine sense of purpose? Create real roles for volunteers – no tails wagging dogs.
5. Do you look after your volunteers? Give your volunteers treats: don't be blind to the wealth of what you have to offer.
6. Are you running a professional, though flexible, volunteer programme? Give people the opportunity to move on, and leave the door open for them to come back.
7. Do you have links with volunteering organisations such as hospitals? For example, why not explore an exchange programme with hospice volunteers?

RECOGNISING LOCAL HEROES

Here is an opportunity to celebrate the efforts made by volunteers in our sector. Details of the 2004 Nationwide Awards for Voluntary Endeavour have been announced, with awards being made in each of four categories: Individual (Adult), Individual (under 18), Group (Adult) and Group (Under 18), judged in 10 regions round the UK. There will be two regional winners in each category, as well as a national finalist in each category for each region, who will then be put forward for the National Award, with generous prizes for all the winners and their chosen causes. The closing date for nominations is 30 April 2004. For more information pick up a leaflet at a branch of Nationwide Building Society or your local library, or call Nationwide on 01793 655182.

FEATURE: Carolyn Murray, Rural Arts Officer for Cheshire County Council, talks about how volunteers help keep the arts thriving in villages across the county

Carolyn Murray's job gives her an excellent opportunity to put local villages in touch with artists and major cultural organisations. For example, recent projects have included an orchestral workshop with Manchester Camerata, a poetry night with the Cheshire Poet Laureate, and rural youth groups working with DJs and professional photographers.

Carolyn coordinates the Cheshire Rural Touring Network together with Claire Smith, her jobsharer partner. They are employed by Cheshire County Council to coordinate the network, which is one of 36 similar schemes nationally and forms part of the National Rural Touring Forum. The Cheshire network currently has a membership of 23 rural communities across the county who enjoy the challenge and excitement of choosing and staging high quality professional arts events. Twice a year in Spring and Autumn, the village halls and community centres present drama, dance and music from national and internationally renowned companies and artists. The programme provides audiences with opportunities to participate through workshops and residencies by the artists and performers touring the network, such as

dancing with the Jiving Lindy Hoppers. Arts projects are also developed in partnership with other agencies and organisations to offer the chance to experience other art forms.

An arts network across Cheshire

Carolyn explains that the Cheshire Rural Touring Network is “an arts network led by volunteers”. She explains: “Currently we have 23 village communities involved. Each village is different. Some have one main volunteer promoter, while others have up to four or five people who share the workload.”

“We work in partnership with funders to maintain and develop the network. They include Chester City Council, Congleton, Crewe and Nantwich, Macclesfield and Vale Royal Borough Councils and the Arts Council of England, North West.”

Recruiting volunteers

“Volunteers usually approach us, rather than us having to actively recruit people. Many have been to see shows in other network districts or heard about us from friends. For a new network membership to be successful, the community has to really support the idea of being in the network rather than it just being an individual effort.”

Supporting rural performances

“Volunteers are involved in many different roles. First, they select the shows they book for their village from a menu of choices prepared by the Rural Arts Officer, in consultation with parish councils, village hall committees or other volunteer groups. They carry out all associated promotion locally, put up posters, handle enquiries and sell tickets. On the day they host the company or artists visiting their community by welcoming them, preparing the performance space, and often provide hospitality afterwards.”

Benefits for volunteers

“Volunteer promoters definitely enjoy being involved. They get a unique experience, close contact with artists and performers, and the satisfaction of bringing their village community together. The skills they acquire include event management, marketing and promotion, and arts development. Volunteers can be proud of their contribution to a great night out, increasing their village’s vitality and vibrancy through accessing the arts. In addition, once a year we host a Promoters Day. This is an opportunity for volunteers to meet up and share experiences. We also provide training in areas such as marketing, cultural diversity and audience development.”

Advice for other arts organisations

“Volunteers take time to gain confidence and really enjoy their role. So you need to support them and provide opportunities to share views and ideas. Be clear what’s expected of them and the context they are working within. It’s also vital to acknowledge and celebrate achievements.”

What’s next

The Spring season of Cheshire Rural Touring Network events happens this March and April. Please call 01244 602835 if you’d like to join the mailing list and receive a seasonal brochure. For more on the National Rural Touring Network, please see: www.nrtf.org

Interview by Fiona Thompson, freelance arts writer. You can see Fiona’s work at www.wordspring.co.uk

UPDATE: Volunteering Trends

Earlier this month the Office for National Statistics reported that the value of voluntary work slumped by more than a quarter between 1995 and 2000. The figures show that the number of hours volunteered fell dramatically over the five-year period, from more than 2.3 billion to less than 1.6 billion. The ONS

suggested the decline could have been caused by an increase in employment, with fewer people having time to volunteer or using voluntary activities to help them get back into paid work. However, the Institute for Volunteering Research has said that their research shows an increase in volunteering activity, because while the total number of volunteers fell, those left were doing more. The Institute said that in 1991 there were about 23 million volunteers giving 62 million hours a week, while in 1997 there were around 22 million volunteers contributing 88 million hours a week. This means that if we put a monetary value on time volunteered it would show that the economic value has gone up because more volunteering had taken place. The Institute also said that the ONS may have been using a narrower definition of volunteering than that used by the Institute.

NEXT ISSUE

In April **cv** will be looking at **the ethics of volunteering as job substitution**, and we will have an update on the **Excellence in Volunteer Management programme** at the National Centre for Volunteering.

FEEDBACK

cv is keen to respond to your interests and needs. If you would like to forward your news and views, comment on content, or suggest a topic for discussion, please email lynn@lynnblackadder.com.

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Circulation 684