

Battersea Volunteers

A needs assessment of community organisations working with volunteers in Battersea

Research Report 1

22Feb21



1. Summary

This report, by The Big Local SW11 Alliance, aims to understand how local community organisations, working to rebuild the social fabric of communities in Battersea, work with volunteers in their organisations, and makes recommendations to improve the volunteering experience in Battersea, by sharing good practice and building capacity.

The research found that there is a wide range of experience with volunteers. Some community organisations in Battersea are flush with volunteers and are managing them well. Others are really struggling, and there's everything in between. Until now, there has not been a local volunteer support service, nor has there been any local research into volunteers.

2. Volunteers in Battersea

Volunteers are the life blood of most local community organisations without whom they simply would not be able to provide the services they do. We rely on the enthusiasm, time and skills of our volunteers. They are core to the delivery of community services and the governance of our organisations. They tell us that they find the work very rewarding, and get back as much as they give. Volunteers add loads of value to community work, enabling groups to work with more local people, stretching their resources as far as they can, and enriching the quality of their services.

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen a significant increase in the numbers of people volunteering in their local community, including in Battersea. Nationally, more than 750,000 people volunteered for the NHS. More than 3,500 local people put themselves forward to volunteer, via Wandsworth Council, in the first few months of the pandemic (including 300 people responding within less than a day to a request for volunteers to help others during the coronavirus crisis).

The Big Local SW11 conducted a ['State of the Sector' report in 2018](#), and found that:

- There are approximately 1,339 volunteers in the BLSW11 area
- About 1,646 volunteer hours are worked each week
- Based on salaries alone the 'value' of the Community Voluntary Sector in SW11 is worth between £10-£12m per annum
- The 'value' of volunteering is estimated at £815,000 per annum
- Areas that appear to have 'good' coverage include: Youth, Religion, Education and Wellbeing
- Areas that appear to have 'poor' coverage include: Mental Health, Isolation, Environment and Poverty

3. About Battersea Volunteers

Battersea Volunteers is a new project of The Alliance (supported by Big Local SW11 and Winstanley & York Gardens Joint Venture), which aims to:

- Work with community organisations in Battersea to support and develop best practices in volunteering.
- Deliver training and one-to-one support in 'Recruiting Volunteers' and 'Managing Volunteers', so that community organisations in Battersea can take on more volunteers and be confident in how to support and manage them.
- Celebrate volunteering in Battersea. As well as, raise the profile of what we all do in Battersea. We need to say a massive 'Thank You' to the volunteers who support and add value to our much-needed community services.

- Support volunteer recruitment of local people to enhance the services that work with the local community.

Battersea Volunteers is a key component of The Alliance and Big Local SW11's three-year strategy, which aims to tackle Isolation, Loneliness and mental health (Depression and Anxiety) in SW11.

4. Purpose of this report

This report highlights how community organisation in Battersea recruit and support volunteers. It makes recommendations about how 'Battersea Volunteers' can offer support and resources to the sector to address the gaps in their volunteer programmes and raise the profile of volunteering.

5. Methodology and Sample

We asked 84 community organisations in Battersea to complete an online questionnaire about their volunteering practices (October-December 2020). Visit: <https://forms.gle/MKAHGD5VzeHqkXvv8>. 32% (n.27) responded, which is a good response rate (average response rates typically are 1-5%).

We plan to conduct this survey each year to build a picture over time of how local community organisations are changing their working practices with volunteers.

6. Findings and Recommendations

We found that most local community organisations in Battersea use volunteers to a greater or lesser extent. But they are on a spectrum.

At one end there are community organisations working systematically with their volunteers. For example, they

- have robust volunteer policies and procedures.
- have systems and process in place to support volunteers from recruitment, induction, training, supervision to when they leave.
- continuously review and refine their approach to volunteers.

For other organisations their work with volunteers has grown organically. They have created policies, procedures and ways of working with volunteers over time. But they may not have really examined what they do and why, or sought ways to improve the support they give to volunteers.

For others at the opposite end of the spectrum, they are still on the starting blocks and simply don't know how they can work with volunteers.

It has been helpful to understand the range of experiences that different organisations have, when it comes to volunteering, so Battersea Volunteers can plan and design its services accordingly. It means we can offer a range of bespoke services tailored to meet the different volunteering needs of local community organisations in Battersea.

i. Better recruitment of volunteers

Finding 1: Local community organisations in Battersea are mostly attracting volunteers through word of mouth and personal contacts. Organisations do not generally advertise externally (via online volunteer recruitment sites, to colleges and universities, or through social media). As a result, 56% are finding it challenging to recruit volunteers. We also found a lack of diversity in their volunteers that does not reflect their service users.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that a local 'Volunteer Brokerage Service' is developed to advertise volunteer roles externally, to raise the profile of volunteering in Battersea, and attract local volunteers from more diverse backgrounds, this includes supporting organisations in their role descriptions and

imagery, to make their opportunities to volunteer more attractive and inclusive to their target market that will reflect their service users and suggesting different ways and methods of recruitment.

Action 1: Battersea Volunteers is working in partnership with Wandsworth Care Alliance to build a volunteering platform and service to support the sector and those in the community wishing to volunteer. Visit: <https://volunteer.wandsworthcarealliance.org.uk/vk/volunteers/index.htm>

ii. More support to manage volunteers

Finding 2: Local community organisations need more support and training to better help and manage their volunteers. 74% asked for support around their volunteer policies; and 89% identified they needed more support with procedures, i.e. procedures that will help them in recruitment, selection and managing their volunteers including Templates for Application forms, reference requests, pro formas for exit questionnaires, volunteer agreements, supervision templates etc. Everything around working with volunteers to make them effective.

Support and training around ‘managing volunteers’ is more in demand (67%) than how to ‘recruit volunteers’ (58%). Due to Covid-19 restrictions organisations are struggling with supervision of their volunteers - 70% find it challenging, with 11% of those who responded either not doing it or finding it highly challenging.

Recommendation 2a: For Battersea Volunteers to produce a suite of template volunteer policies and procedures; and share these on local websites, including The Alliance and Big Local SW11, free to download.

Recommendation 2b: Battersea Volunteers to offer group training sessions and bespoke one-to-one consultancy support to enable local organisations to get to where they comfortably want to be.

Action 2: Battersea Volunteers is developing a local volunteer network and developing resources on The Alliance and Big Local SW11 websites. The network will be a forum to share ideas and learn from one another, especially important in a Covid-19 environment where some organisations are struggling to see how they can recruit, induct, support and manage volunteers remotely and others are succeeding in doing so. Within this arena bite-size training will be offered as and when needed to enhance the services around common themes.

iii. Raising the profile of volunteering

Finding 3: Community organisations in Battersea are recruiting their volunteers mainly through word of mouth or putting up simple recruitment posters in the area. They do little press or promotional work to raise the profile of volunteers. There is no local Awards ceremony or recognition programme for volunteers. Some thank their volunteers with a simple thank you from a member of staff, or at an event like an AGM. Only 7% of the organisations put volunteers forward for high profile Awards such as the Jack Petchey awards, The Mayor of London’s Volunteer Awards or The Wandsworth Civic Awards.

Recommendation 3a: Battersea Volunteers should develop a communications/PR plan to raise the profile of volunteering in Battersea. This would include raising the profile around recruitment e.g. using social media to help recruitment of volunteers by local community organisations. Or developing a suite of case studies and press releases that can be shared through the local press.

Recommendation 3b: Create a Battersea Volunteers Award programme. This will be a great way to celebrate and thank volunteers, as well as raise the profile of volunteering in Battersea. We could also encourage groups to nominate their volunteers for higher profile awards such as, Mayor of London Volunteering Awards, Jack Petchey Achievement Award Scheme, Wandsworth Civic Awards.

Action 3: Battersea Volunteers is developing the above.

7. Next steps

In a Covid-world, community organisations are having to adapt how they deliver their services. They will need support to look at new ways to engage with their client groups and recruit and support volunteers going forward. Some have adapted really well and show resilience. Some organisations are struggling and they lack funding, staff, capacity and the skills and expertise to work with volunteers more effectively to match the increasing demand on their services.

Battersea Volunteers aims to provide a range of services and support, including a Volunteer Brokerage Service, bespoke training and one-to-one support, and an Awards programme to celebrate, thank and raise the profile of volunteering in Battersea.

The Big Local SW11 Alliance and Big Local SW11's three-year strategy, which aims to tackle Isolation, loneliness and mental health (depression and anxiety) in SW11, will be supported by the Battersea Volunteers project to identify organisations who address these issues; and actively try to identify and support projects/initiatives that address the strategic themes, in relation to volunteering.

8. Thank You

We would like to extend our thanks to the organisations that took part in this research, with frank and open dialogue and completion of the survey. The survey is not merely to find out where the organisations are currently at. It is a tool for support. We will be following up with all organisations in Battersea to support them around the areas they have flagged as a need, bring them more closely together to promote partnerships and share knowledge and resources.

Thanks to the following who took part: Aspire2Inspire Dyslexia CIC. Battersea Befriending Network. Big Local SW11. Caius House. CAP UK. Carney's Community. Enable Leisure and Culture. FAST London. Free2B Alliance. Future Skills Training. Homestart Wandsworth. JAGS Foundation. Kambala Estate Residents Association / Kambala Cares. Katherine Low Settlement's ESOL, Love to Learn and Elders Programmes. Link UP London. Providence House. Sen Talk CIC. Share Community. Sound Minds. South West London Law Centre (SWLLC). Spear, Clapham Junction. St Peter's Battersea. Thrive.

9. Contact

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Appendix 1 – Research Findings (in more detail)

1. Why use volunteers?

Community organisations use volunteers to increase their capacity and extend their reach. In return they provide development opportunities for local people. Volunteers inject energy and passion into their community services. Volunteers are often used for frontline services and long-term rather than short-term, one-off roles.

“Our volunteers deliver our frontline services to families. The national home-start model considers volunteers vital to deliver unique, tailored impactful peer support.”

“We are made up almost entirely of volunteers, the only paid person a “professional advisor” is part time only, currently 6 hours a week.”

2. Who volunteers?

63% of Volunteers are made up of local residents

52% people from other parts of Wandsworth

44% the organisation’s service users

3. How many volunteers?

Over the course of a year organisations tend to work with 1 to 25 volunteers a year.

Some of the larger ones have capacity to take on more than this and will work with 26-101 upwards.

4. Length of Service.

Volunteers tend to stay, as they feel strongly about what they do, feel part of the organisation and that their input is appreciated by the service users.

“They always say how fulfilling it is.”

“Many wish they had the support we offer when they were a teen and want to give back to the LGBTQ+ community.”

5. Single days of service.

Organisations use volunteers for one-off, single days of service including: Fundraising events, corporate tasks or gardening, painting and decorating etc. Other areas included helping serve or deliver hot meals to vulnerable people in the community or homeless.

6. Recruitment.

Is mainly done through ‘word of mouth’ through partners, personal recommendations, online promotions using social media, putting up posters in the window or in shops, and people putting themselves forward.

Very few use websites. Those that do, use a range rather than just one. These include sites such as Charity Job, Indeed, Do-It.org, Team London, LGBT consortium. They also recruit from local colleges. Not all organisations have a page on their own website sites to invite volunteers to join them.

48% said their organisation is able to recruit and retain the volunteers necessary to meet our mission.

30% said our organisations has needs that could potentially be served by volunteers, but lacks the staff or leadership to effectively manage them or continues to have positions not filled.

“Our volunteer project plan is well organised, we also have a volunteer induction pack for volunteers that help out with daily duties that include all our policies such as health and safety and safeguarding. However, we do not have a specific volunteer policy.”

“We have recently had a strong interest in volunteering since lockdown started in March 2019 and at the moment we are not recruiting through our website.”

“We take on all volunteers that apply, however, we don’t have consistent work for them to volunteer at a set time weekly, we just send tasks via email when they need doing based on their skill set”.

“Even if we were able to recruit enough volunteers we would not have capacity to provide the full support needed – given that our service users are especially vulnerable and our volunteers need good supervision in view of the potential risks involved”

“We are sadly too small to bring on anyone as a volunteer, but we do our best to find something for those interested in helping us”

“Because of the nature of our work, safeguarding and confidentiality, we are sometimes limited in our ability to pick up new volunteers ad hoc for different tasks”

7. Volunteer Management.

93% of organisations thought that they had sufficient volunteer management procedures and rated themselves as Excellent, Good or Average. However, when asked about resources needed, 74% said they needed support around volunteer policies, and 89% need support with procedures.

“Processes are in place but could do with fine tuning in consideration of the current climate”

Volunteer management/co-ordination is one of many duties that staff have to do as part of their jobs. Teams generally recruit and manage their own volunteers within the organisation.

“We have a development manager, but elements of volunteer management are embedded in several staff roles”

“All members of staff are involved in the recruitment and management of volunteers”

8. Comms/Press.

56% of the groups do communications, press work involving volunteers to promote and strengthen their network of volunteers. They also use impact reporting, newsletters, photography, website, social media and fundraising to help promote volunteers.

“Volunteers have appeared in short videos we have produced about our work, which are shared with our supporters and social media channels”

“one of our Trustee volunteers is our marketing manager, we produce a monthly volunteer newsletter that goes to all centre volunteers, when there is time Tweets and Facebook posts, case studies and photo ops in the newsletters”

9. Celebrate and Thank.

Organisations celebrated and thanked volunteers in a number of ways: Verbally, with gifts and social events, mentions at AGMs, Promotion of them on websites and social media and using volunteers week to raise the profile of their volunteers and Christmas to say thank you. Only two organisations put their volunteers forward for national or regional awards.

“Volunteers are nominated by our service users for the Jack Petchey leader award. An annual special thank you during National Volunteers week and sharing members feedback with our volunteers so they can see the difference they make”

“Thank you messages in regular volunteer bulletins. Personal thank you messages and cards as appropriate. Social events twice a year. We regularly thank and highlight the work of our volunteers in public information about our charity such as our impact report and on our website”

10. Raising profile of Volunteering.

We asked how we can raise the profile of volunteering in Battersea. Suggestions included:

- Advertising opportunities on a webpage / platform
- Encouraging people to apply for roles by using social media
- Showcase examples of diverse volunteers and volunteering - to highlight that people of all backgrounds and abilities have something of value to offer
- Recruitment fairs / open days.

“Highlight that people of all backgrounds and abilities have something of value to offer. Real examples of diverse volunteers and volunteering”

“Advertise in Brightside and other local publications and websites. Putting leaflets in library’s etc. Under normal (i.e non-Covid) conditions, running an open day or evening featuring various local charities, somewhere like BAC or the Old Battersea Town Hall”

“Ensure that there is coverage of its value and make sure the opportunities exist in a way that people can find them and engage with them”

11. Challenges.

Community organisations were asked to indicate the degree of concern or challenge each of the following represented as it seeks to engage with volunteers.

Issue	Dealing with it effectively	Challenge	N/A
Staff buy-in about importance of volunteers	70%	-	-
Paying out of pocket expenses	48%	26%	26%
A role description for each volunteer	59%	41%	-
Advertise volunteer roles externally	37%	44%	19%
Page on our website to advertise roles	30%	48%	22%
Volunteer recruitment	44%	52%	4%
Volunteer Retention	45%	55%	-
Keeping records of volunteer’s attendance, hours, activities	37%	56%	7%
Rewarding volunteers	30%	66%	4%
Clear, consistent and effective volunteer policies and procedures	-	67%	-
Supervision of volunteers	30%	70%	-
Managing volunteers	30%	70%	-

12. Types of volunteers.

Organisations would like more of:

- 78% ongoing opportunities of **skilled roles** such as mentors, befrienders, tutors, counsellors, leadership and supervision duties.
- 56% ongoing opportunities related to **general organisation operations**, such as admin, office duties, building maintenance, room set up and transportation.
- 52% **highly skilled opportunities** related to funding development, marketing, technology, advocacy etc.
- 44% **short term**, episodic types of opportunities.

“Having one-off volunteers doesn’t work for us, we need volunteers who are going to be consistent and commit for a period of time”

“Our main offer is for service users, we have found that a majority of other volunteers struggle to commit”

“We have had a strong interest in volunteering recently and we have currently removed this information from our website, as the interest has outweighed current opportunities with client sessions. We are also restricted to the number of volunteers we can have per group due to current Covid-19 restrictions”.

“basically, we are a “get along” organisation that needs to step up”

13. Resources needed in terms of priority / need.

Volunteer policies	59% indicated a need.	41% not needed
Volunteer procedures	89% indicated a need.	37% not needed.
Online templates	89% indicated a need.	41% not needed.
Guide/mentor/consultant	74% indicated a need	41% not needed.

14. Training.

Training in recruiting volunteers	58% indicated a need.	41% not needed.
Training in Managing volunteers	67% indicated a need.	33% not needed.
Training using recruitment platforms	60% indicated a need.	37% not needed.
Training for your volunteers	63% indicated a need.	37% not needed.

“Our volunteer team is too small and would appreciate some external input in becoming better at managing volunteers. Extra resources such as online training etc. would be much welcomed.”

“We are pretty competent when it comes to recruiting volunteers from service users, it’s the external volunteers we struggle with. They usually have their own ideas of what they want to do and we then have to explain what they want to do, is not what we want”

15. A volunteer brokerage service.

Volunteer Brokerage Service	88% indicated a need.	11% not needed.
Face to face support	68% indicated a need.	32% not needed.
Support in person in a group workshop	13% indicated a need.	26% not needed.
Online: Zoom/ Skype/ Teams workshop	48% indicated a need.	52% not needed.
Policy and procedure templates	44% indicated a need.	56% not needed.

“I think for us getting the right systems and procedures in place wouldn’t take much work, it’s the recruitment of the right volunteers”

“with things like the brokerage service and the online platform, that still assumes that you have the time to invest in this process”

“We are a volunteer brokerage service for skilled- volunteering so have worked through most of this internally for ourselves. We provide support for organisations in doing these things if needed. It would be incredibly useful to have a brokerage that helps recruit other types of volunteers for voluntary orgs as well.”

“Some of my team would love extra training in regards to working with volunteers. A brokerage service would be the most useful thing.”

Appendix 2

About The Big Local SW11 Alliance

The BLSW11 Alliance has been formed by the Big Local SW11 (which is an independent, resident-led group that has been awarded £1m over 10 years to invest in projects that improve opportunities for local people and strengthen our community) to help deliver its own strategy of building a stronger, more self-reliant Battersea. Visit: www.biglocalsw11.co.uk

A partnership of five local long-standing, trusted and passionate organisations (Caius House, Carney’s Community, Katherine Low Settlement, Providence House, St Peter’s Church). We have deep community roots and social relations that span many generations. We are working together, alongside 30+ other local community delivery partners, to rebuild the social fabric of Battersea. Visit: www.bls11alliance.org

Appendix 3

About Battersea Volunteers

Volunteering has been widely evidenced to provide a wide range of benefits improving confidence, health, sense of purpose, community belonging, expanding social networks, gaining skills and moving towards employment. This new Alliance project, Battersea Volunteers, is about enabling, empowering and mobilising local residents to volunteer and get more involved with the local community here in Battersea. Visit: www.bls11alliance.org