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Volunteers Week 2020: Hundreds of organisations join forces to say 'thank you' to their fantastic volunteers

The Whitworth is delighted to be part of a collaborative action of organisations championing a united response for Volunteers' Week 1-7 June. This week Volunteer Managers across the UK are coming together to say a massive *thank you* to all volunteers.

Volunteers have played a vital role from the floods in the winter to helping the nation through the current pandemic. They will go on to play a role in helping the nation get back to the things that we love as we ease out of lockdown. By joining forces in Volunteers Week 2020, we are aiming to increase visibility of the vital efforts that all volunteers have made this year.

Throughout the week organisations across the UK will be showcasing the amazing contribution volunteers have made. As an Arts & Culture organisation we will be joining in with others to recognise the support given to our cause by our volunteers.

Starting on Monday 1 June the themes and focus for each day of volunteers' week are as follows:

- Monday - Listening & Support
- Tuesday - Health & Well-being
- Wednesday - Fundraising to support service delivery
- Thursday - COVID-19 response and informal community civic action
- Friday - Nature & the Outdoors
- Saturday - Arts & Culture
- Sunday - Sport & Leisure

Volunteers at the Whitworth have been sharing their experience so watch out for some fantastic stories throughout the week. One of our volunteers shared *her* story...

The Whitworth – a place where we belong and Grow.

I heard about Grow project when I attended the course for Mental health and well-being at Manchester Art Gallery back in April/May 2017. The course members were being shown around the Whitworth to choose a venue for a six week placement in a venue of your choice within Manchester and Salford city galleries and museums. I chose the Whitworth as I was keen to get involved in the different aspects that were on offer in a stunning setting in which I could see gardens and a park at 180 degrees on the lower ground floor corridor.

I have volunteered in many different roles over the years such as Gallery visitor guide in the Collection Centre: this was my initial role for my placement. I would familiarize myself with the current exhibition and talk with the visitors about their favourite pieces or what had brought them to the exhibition.

There was always an exchange of local history between myself and the visitors. My days in the collection centre would make me feel connected again to people in a meaningful way I thought I had lost. The visitors brought so many interesting stories without realizing their valuable contribution to the community space, inspired by what was on the walls or in the cabinets, beyond the conversation, I would encourage them to leave feedback on the comments boards and cards provided.

I have been lucky enough to exhibit in there too! The Art of Volunteering Exhibition in 2018. I am so proud of that !Working with the teams of volunteers and curators was such an amazing experience, there was such a brilliant team spirit, the dynamics and the depth of knowledge from everyone involved during the build-up to the opening of the exhibition kept me on a happy high for months! Witnessing the moment my little collection of Neolithic paintings were carefully placed within the glass cabinet by the conscientious curator was a very special moment for me, I cried with joy!

I was super impressed how beautiful the gardens looked too, and I was excited to try something new. Keeping plants alive has never been my strong point so it would be an achievement to actually learn good habits and methods from professional local gardeners with a wealth of knowledge I could dip into. The gardens are so peaceful, it has been a positive action and pleasure to be part of such a lovely project. I'm very proud to see bulbs I've planted pop up. Knowing I've contributed to such a cool place makes me feel very good. I also need to be outside in nature anyway, it calms me down.

I felt at first a little nervous I was going to kill things or tread on flowers (not intentionally!!) but apart from that, very excited and even giddy to be a volunteer in a team of gardeners ! I had a sense of belonging and a purpose to be there to assist.

We are given clear instructions which sometimes are misheard or misunderstood so mistakes happen. The head gardener is a nice guy, so he is patient with us and is always concerned for our welfare. I've really been moved by the level of compassion and patience that is shown to us as a group and individually by the Grow team and all the staff at any level at the Whitworth. It's a safe space, if I'm not feeling confident within myself. That level of attentiveness in turn, as behaviour, rubs off on you, so you go the extra mile to help others around you also; It's a very positive place.

Members of the group really listen and share. In a fast world of serious problems both personal and global it's a great opportunity to step off the wheel of misfortune and have a laugh with good people, learn a new skill and forget your woes in the fresh air on a regular basis. That brings stability which can echo back into the world where we are sometimes trying to escape from and allow a refreshed perspective to deal with life more objectively.

I have volunteered in other roles such as textile care with a wonderful skilled team opening seams, by unpicking stitches, rerolling and documenting beautiful fabrics and wallpapers, under careful supervision from the curators.

Librarian duties, having the privilege of seeing some of the most fascinating books within the Whitworth's vast collection which sparked many amazing conversations with my fellow volunteers and curators too! We have become good friends, connected through our passion for art and curiosity of so many diverse subjects!

I have volunteered for Family events, summer projects with children and adults, Christmas Frost Fair, evening opening nights for many new exhibitions, I have been lucky to hear stories from some of the most influential local and international contemporary artists which keeps me connected to a wealth of art I may of only gazed at lovingly in the past.

For me personally volunteering has had a profoundly positive effect on healing from trauma and connecting me to society again. Building my confidence back and feeling valued for what I bring to the community also. I have gained employment from a subsequent volunteering role within another institution along the way. All of this stemmed from the gentle encouragement of a dear friend who saw I needed support to step in the right direction.

I appeal to anyone who is feeling isolated to just come in and say hello.

The art of conversation or the conversation of art is a good starting point to a blossoming relationship within a beautiful building and such a welcoming community, there is room enough for all of us. A place where we belong and grow.

Julie knight

Fiona Cariss *Volunteer Manager* said: "our volunteers are amazing, and we value their support and contribution. Without their commitment and enthusiasm, we would not be able to deliver our service to the exceptional level we do. We know that many are volunteering to support the consequences of COVID-19. This might be through organised volunteering or by stepping up informally to support their community. For others, it's a challenging time as they are unable to volunteer in their much loved roles. Whether our volunteers are still active or currently taking a break we want to take this opportunity during Volunteers Week to send a **big shout out** and **say thank you!**"

#volunteersweek
#WaveForVolunteers
#NeverMoreNeeded

Notes for the Editor:

- Volunteers Week is a yearly national week taking place 1-7 June. It is a chance to celebrate and say thank you for the contribution millions of volunteers make across the UK.
- Volunteer Scotland, WCVA and Volunteer Now in NI coordinate Volunteers Week in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- In England, there is a strong movement of over 80 organisations, led by a group of volunteers, who are getting behind a collaborative effort to champion the importance of Volunteers Week in England.
- We believe in the current time it is even more important to recognise, reach out to and connect together volunteers to share their good news stories.
- It is a strange time for volunteering. There is a mixture of those who feel isolated as they can't do their usual roles due to the crisis, as well as volunteers who are doing many more hours in frontline roles. There are millions of people who have volunteered to help out, whether informally in their community or as part of organised initiatives, such as the NHS volunteer responders. We also want to thank and remember those volunteers who have lost their lives due to COVID-19.
- Volunteers will also be essential as we come out of the pandemic and people start to re-engage back into their lives, potentially with very different priorities.
- For these reasons (insert name of organisation) will be coming together with others, to recognise this collective moment in the time. We want to thank and connect volunteers, who are so crucial both now and for our ability to respond as we gradually recover.
- Volunteers Week 2020 will include organisations and individuals joining in thanking volunteers by using the Wave of Appreciation, begun in Volunteers Week Australia in May.
- The #WaveForVolunteers social media campaign will encourage as many as possible to take a photo of themselves saying thank you to volunteers
- Volunteers Week 2020 connects closely with the #NeverMoreNeeded campaign launched to help the public understand the importance of charities to the national effort to manage the coronavirus pandemic. The #NeverMoreNeeded campaign has been set up to make sure charities' voices are heard and raise awareness of the work they are doing to help the country come through the crisis and recover. The campaign is phase two of the #EveryDayCounts campaign, which called on the government to provide an emergency financial support package for charities
- **For more details on the volunteer-led collective effort for Volunteers Week in England, contact Tiger de Souza on 07920 246638 or tiger.desouza@nationaltrust.org.uk**