

Recruiting Volunteers – How We Did It!

Mike Truelove – Herefordshire Voluntary Action

Madness:- “Endlessly repeating the same process hoping for a different result.” *Albert Einstein*

In the voluntary sector, it is often the case that we follow Einstein’s recipe for madness. This occurs for a variety of reasons, including a perceived lack of time and resources, and new projects being started without proper research into what has gone before.

The project’s two major outputs were: an increase of 20% in volunteer driver numbers, and a 5% increase in usage of the schemes.

Since the Volunteer Driver Development Project started in November 2003, we have tried out many innovative initiatives with the aim of increasing the number of volunteer drivers and increasing usage of community transport. Amazingly, as a result, we have seen the number of volunteer drivers in the county increase by 69% (56% nett), and the number of client trips rise by 28%, in just 26 months.

Leaflets

We designed our own leaflet and as well as placing them in all the usual places, we asked the questions: “What do we need? Drivers. How can we reach all drivers? Garages.” We placed leaflets in dispensers in virtually every garage in the county, and had a terrific response.

Posters

Observing that many voluntary sector displays were too ‘busy’, and do not answer the basic question: “What does the display need to achieve?”, we decided that the most important objective for

a display was to generate a need to find out more. We designed a set of three eye-catching posters, each with a simple, clear message. After attracting people to our display, we give each one an informative leaflet together with another innovation – supermarket trolley keyrings – and a brief yet encouraging chat.

Film

We have produced a widely acclaimed film, ‘The Driving Force’, which won a national film award in November 2005. The film highlights three very different users of community transport: 3 years old Sam, wheelchair user Annie and 80 years old Nancy. It shows the need for community transport, and the pleasure the drivers get from their involvement. It has proved to be an extremely effective recruitment tool, and is in use in over 20 counties in the UK.

Newsletter

The project published a monthly newsletter for the county’s volunteer drivers and schemes.

The newsletter engenders a feeling of belonging for the volunteers, gives them a voice, and allows us to disseminate best practice advice and notify readers about upcoming events and initiatives.

Driver’s Handbook

The project has written and published a handbook for all community transport drivers. It contains guidance on all aspects of volunteering as a driver, with up to date best practice information and advice. Again this is in use by many UK schemes.

Windscreen stickers

We have produced ‘Community Transport – the driving force’ windscreen stickers, which are displayed by volunteer drivers throughout the county. This helps to raise awareness of the hundreds of trips carried out by volunteers every day.

Annual awards event

The project conceived and inaugurated the annual ‘Community Transport Awards’ in Herefordshire. The event this year had a prominent public figure to speak and present the awards, a film premiere, question time, voting and displays. This was extremely successful in raising the profile through publicity in the two main newspapers in the county (The Hereford Times; The Journal) and BBC Hereford and Worcester local radio

Many of these ideas can easily be applied to other areas of the voluntary sector. If you require further information help or advice, or if you wish to purchase copies of the film or Driver’s Handbooks, please contact us:

Mike Truelove, Volunteer Driver Development Project, Herefordshire Voluntary Action, Berrows Centre, Bath Street, Hereford, HR1 2HE. Tel: 01432 343932. Email: mike@herefordshireva.org

Film funders were Herefordshire RTP, Malvern Hills RTP, Shropshire RTP, and Innovative Actions (Herefordshire & Shropshire). The Volunteer Driver project is funded by Advantage West Midlands and EC Objective 2.