



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

VOLUNTEERING

York

Cities of Service

What is Cities of Service?

The Cities of Service impact volunteering model builds on the work of former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who pioneered the approach, designating New York as a service city and creating opportunities for thousands of citizens to serve their community.

When Mr Bloomberg became Mayor in 2002, he said the following:

“When I became Mayor, I had a million volunteers in NYC doing a million different things. Imagine the difference they would make if they were directed to one or two things. Imagine the biggest problems you have in your city and what you could do about them if you had the numbers needed to make the difference.”

When he ceased his office as Mayor in 2013, he had developed the idea of Cities of Service, a programme that harnesses the power of volunteers to address strategic city issues. It is a clear call to action for a new relationship between Councils and communities where problems are tackled together - residents find their own solutions to a place's biggest issues but are surrounded by support from the local authority.

Many other cities have replicated the approach. Today in the United States and the UK, the Cities of Service coalition includes more than 300 cities, successfully mobilising thousands of volunteers to improve their communities one task at a time. Volunteers give their time on high impact initiatives in the service of others and their local areas, with cities sharing successful strategies to ensure the most effective initiatives are copied by others.

York Community Health Champions

What did York do?

Community Health Champions are people who, with training and support, voluntarily offer their skills and passion and make use of their community links to transform Health and Wellbeing in their neighbourhood.

The Community Health Champions model is proving to be an effective way of reaching people and is making a real difference within communities. Champions are also influencing and shaping local

services, increasing public participation, initiating community development opportunities whilst gaining new skills and knowledge.

Within their families, communities and workplaces Community Health Champions empower and motivate people to get involved in healthy social activities; create new activities to meet local needs; and signpost people to relevant community activities, and support.

What about the numbers?

The model targeted individuals in communities whose health and wellbeing outcomes fall short of those enjoyed by others. So far:

- 76 Community Health Champions across the city
- 40 health promotion initiatives taking place
- 1,339 beneficiaries to date (and counting)

To sum up, this is the story of Gav

Gavin's story is a fantastic example of an empowered citizen who has overcome life's challenges and is now in control. After being introduced to a LAC, he has become one of York's 70 Community Health Champions, another one of the city's 'impact volunteer programmes'. In his own words:

"A few years ago, I was finding things very difficult. I was very inactive, overweight and not washing. There were times where I couldn't get out of bed. Ultimately, I was admitted to hospital with severe depression. Following my release, I started making a slow recovery, but medication was not working for me. I came to the realisation that I needed to look at things differently. I came into contact with Jennie, the Local Area Coordinator for my area who I met at a 'pay as you feel community café' which helped me to connect with others in my local area.

With time, exercise and positive social interactions I slowly and surely became mentally and physically strong. I feel fortunate to have my life back and to have turned things around. Because I know how important it's been to exercise, feel good and be healthy again, I want to inspire other people that it can be done.

In September 2018 I enrolled as a Community Health Champion after Jennie made me aware of the initiative. Following Champion training, I met our GoodGym Run Leader and Move the Masses Founder and have led on new opportunities to support people who are going through difficult times to help improve their health and connect with others. I'm also a volunteer with 'Invisible York' leading tourist walks through the city.

I look at my turnaround as a minor miracle. Being part of a programme like Community Health Champions allows me to grow as a person whilst having a positive impact on other peoples' lives and I am constantly seeking out other opportunities to get involved!"

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