

Kent Sustainable Volunteering Project

Barbara Regnier and Maggie Piazza

February 2014



MAGGIE PIAZZA

LEADING AND DEVELOPING PEOPLE

1. Introduction

Building on the Sustainable Volunteering Project which was completed between October 2011 and March 2012 in the South East Region, Sarah Corn, Museum Development Officer for Kent, commissioned Barbara Regnier, Dare to Change and Maggie Piazza, to undertake a similar project for museums in Kent.

This report summarises the outcomes of the project and makes recommendations for future development to sustain volunteering across Kent and more widely.

2. Context

All Museums in Kent were invited to a workshop on 24 July 2013 to launch the project. Barbara and Maggie facilitated the workshop at Chatham Dockyard that aimed to:

- inform participants about the programme and inspire them to get involved
- find out about the issues they are dealing with and how the project could help the museums address them.

Five Museums were represented at the workshop. Following the workshop, Barbara and Maggie developed a project plan to work with a small group of museums between August and early 2014 to meet their objectives for sustainable volunteering.

The project plan is attached at Appendix 1.

4 Museums agreed to participate in the project:

- The Wye Rural Museum Trust – Brook
- Maidstone Museums and Bentlifart Gallery
- Powell Cotton Museum
- REM

Barbara and Maggie each worked with two Museums over the course of the project and facilitated one Action Learning Workshop each. As well as individual consultancy support, museum staff and volunteers were encouraged to use local resources to support them in meeting their objectives e.g. Volunteer Centres serving their geographical areas.

3. Project Management

The project management model worked well and delivered the desired results. Key factors in enabling success:

- Knowledge and experience of using a tried and tested consultancy model that works
- Regular communication with Sarah and between consultants using Skype

- Action Learning workshops which everyone found supportive and timely, enabling peer support and sharing of ideas
- Focussed one-to-one support, working to specific objectives
- Flexible use of consultancy days to meet needs of participating museums
- More time allocated to 1-to-1 support and cajoling, but only 1 consultant attending each of the action learning workshops.

Key challenges:

- Disproportionate amount of time chasing and pinning participants down for meetings
- The challenge of achieving objectives during periods of significant change and to a tight time-scale
- Small number of participants at the workshop in July, perhaps due to short notice of the event
- Those who did attend the workshop were not necessarily the people with the authority to deliver objectives

4. Outcomes and impact

Based on practical outcomes in the four museums, and on written and verbal feedback from participants, it is clear that the project has been successful in meeting its objectives.

Brook

The Museum is owned and run by The Wye Rural Museum Trust, a Registered Charity. The Trust believes in involving volunteers in all aspects of its work both for its own benefit and that of the volunteers themselves. At the present time the Trust employs no paid staff; everyone involved is a volunteer including the Curator. The Secretary is due to retire so the project was timely as they were in the process of reviewing the role and recruiting new volunteers. Tom Hill, Secretary, led the project with support from Graham Bradley, Trustee and Brian Wimsett, Curator.

Their objectives were:

- Follow Good Practice guidelines in the recruitment and induction of the new Secretary role/s
- Update Handbook, Policies and Procedures in line with Good Practice and as appropriate for the needs of a small Volunteer led Museum
- Trustees approve Policies and Procedures related to Volunteering and monitor implementation that will support sustainable volunteering.

They met their objectives and have successfully recruited for the Secretary's role, splitting the role into two new roles; they have developed a Volunteer Involvement Policy which will be approved by the Trustee Board in March; they have written up the curator's role and plan to create new roles aimed at increasing visitor numbers in the future.

Maidstone Museum and Bentlifart Gallery

The Museum is run by the local authority and is currently going through significant change and restructuring. The Local Authority is keen to see more volunteers involved although due to staff cuts at the Museum, there are fewer resources to manage more. A small group of staff, led by Samantha Harris, Collections Officer, got together as a result of the project to set shared objectives which included:

- Having a clear volunteering strategy that can demonstrate the value of involving volunteers to senior managers and the Council
- Get buy in and support from senior managers to manage culture change and recognise the resource implications of involving and managing an increasing number of volunteers across all departments – specifically in the Front of House service which is imminent and where staff have concerns about job substitution
- Raise awareness of good practice in volunteer management.

They made significant progress towards their objectives.

- Increased resources e.g. laptops so that more volunteers can be recruited in collections
- A timetable for recruitment of 'Meeters and Greeters' in the Front of House team
- Recruitment of volunteers into roles within the Education and Learning department
- Updating the Museum's Volunteer Handbook to make it more accessible and relevant at different stages in the volunteer journey
- The possibility of a Volunteer Co-ordinator is being discussed with senior management.

Powell Cotton

The Powell-Cotton Museum at Quex Park is a registered charity, managed by a Board of Trustees. It has recently undergone significant change and staff restructuring, to strengthen its ability to thrive in an increasingly commercial environment. Volunteers support staff in a wide range of roles. There is some very good practice in place, with a few standard procedures e.g. for recruiting and inducting staff, but there is variety between different departments. Fran Mileman, who has recently been appointed to the new volunteer liaison officer role, led the project.

Their objectives were:

- To increase the confidence and competence of the volunteer liaison officer
- To develop and write a volunteer handbook, involving volunteers and staff in its content and design
- In consultation with staff and volunteers, start to produce standardised role descriptions

Outcomes:

- Fran says she feels more confident about her role. She has improved her communication with colleagues, so that she has a fuller picture of current volunteer involvement and issues
- A draft volunteer handbook has been produced, with support from volunteers and staff
- A draft role description for a Gardening Volunteer has been produced
- Following a staff consultation, facilitated by Maggie, consensus was reached about the need for more sharing of good practice and standardisation of procedures
- The Director, Karen Botha, with the support of Fran, will work with staff and Trustees to develop a new volunteer policy / strategy, to ensure volunteering contributes to organisational objectives, whilst meeting the needs and aspirations of volunteers

REMLA

The Royal Engineers Museum, Library & Archive is a partnership between the Ministry of Defence, and the Royal Engineers Museum Charity. Volunteers contribute in a wide range of areas, with new roles continuing to be created. The project was led by the Curator and the Deputy Curator (Collections Management). The project offered an opportunity to review an already successful volunteering programme, to go back to basics and set a strategy for sustainable volunteering.

Objectives for the project:

- In conjunction with staff, volunteers & Trustees, develop and agree a new volunteer policy and agreement in line with Good Practice and REMLA's needs – this will include travel policy, problem-solving, reward and recognition / benefits.
- Agree a recruitment and induction process – this will include role descriptions, promotion, application process, collaboration with the local volunteer centre, development of a handbook
- Ensure management / trustee support for sustainable volunteering – so that there is knowledge, understanding & support for volunteering going forward, including any need for additional future funding

Outcomes:

- Through written and verbal consultations and discussion, a new volunteer strategy and policy framework have been developed, including a revised volunteer agreement. These build on existing good practice at REMLA, whilst addressing current and future needs. The strategy and policy are both ready to be formally adopted by the Trustees at their next meeting.
- The recruitment process has been streamlined. This includes the production of revised role descriptions to a standard format, wider advertising involving the local volunteer centre, and production of a registration form. Key

documents will be posted on the website – volunteer policy, volunteer agreements, registration form

- A contents list for the volunteer handbook has been identified, based on consultations with both volunteers and staff, and a user-friendly handbook will be written over the next few months
- Once all the paperwork has been finalised, a staff training day is planned to launch everything
- Throughout the process management and trustees have been kept informed, and consulted as appropriate

Volunteer Development Agencies

All four museums have increased understanding of how to tap into the resources of local VDAs, often called volunteer centres.

5. Conclusions

The model works! We asked participants for feedback and suggestions, at the Action Learning Workshop on 21 January. They felt the model worked very well, and there was a will to continue to meet as a group for Action Learning workshops. See Appendix 2

Conflicting priorities in the museums, caused a lot of administrative work for us e.g. chasing to get responses to emails, agree dates to meet and ensure colleagues necessary to decision making were also involved as appropriate. The 1:1 consultancy support was essential to maintain momentum and focus on objectives. It was helpful to build relationships and understand the context for the museums e.g. attending the Trustee Board meeting at Brook to talk about the project and engage members, appreciating the limitations on staff time & bringing together the staff team at Powell Cotton for a consultation.

Despite encouragement to involve Volunteer Centres and to use their expertise for support and resources, for several reasons, it was not always easy. For example, VC Maidstone did provide training on Volunteer Management that was helpful and timely. However, there is scope to develop the relationship as the Museum is under pressure to train up volunteers at the Volunteer Centre that is delivering a 'signposting' service to visitors to the town that was formerly run by the Museum staff. In Gillingham, a meeting was set up for REMLA with the local volunteer centre, to discuss needs and services. It is too early to say whether this has achieved any positive outcomes, as REMLA hasn't called on their services yet. It is likely that the relationship will need nurturing in order to flourish e.g. through support from the MDO.

The Museum Development Officer's expectations have been met and exceeded in some instances.

The role of the Museum Development Officer is critical to keep the momentum and focus on volunteering. Links to Accreditation have been helpful in developing good practice and our knowledge of resources available (through the previous project or from other sources) saves time and effort and avoids each museum 'reinventing the

wheel'. The body of knowledge and experience available to the South East Regional Museum Development Service grows with each project they fund.

It will be important to build on the outcomes and retain momentum. We know only too well the conflicting priorities that can de-rail the best-laid plans.

Feedback from Lucy Shipp, Learning Officer, Maidstone Museum:

I just wanted to thank you for all your help on this project, it's been most beneficial for me to have a chance across the Maidstone Museum, and wider Museum sector team to gain a good understanding of volunteer management. I felt a little clueless before I started on the project, and now I'm happy to say I've got my marketing volunteer, and have recruited several more volunteers to help out with the family activities over half term (all with DBS checks too!). I haven't posted any of our vacancies with the volunteer centre, as having them on our website & bumping into people seems to suffice! I'm slowly working through our volunteer applications in a slow & steady manner so that they can be properly inducted & therefore more likely to stay volunteering with us.

Feedback from Danielle Sellers, Deputy Curator (Collections Management) REMLA:

Personally I have found the Sustainable Volunteering project very rewarding, it came along at a time when I was fairly new to the post of Deputy Curator and the team of volunteers I was responsible for was growing quite quickly. I feel that it has helped increase my confidence in my current role in the Museum and help build relationships with the other museums involved in the project. It focused my attention on an area that I had been hoping to review and over the defined period was able to achieve the objectives set out at the start with input from staff and current volunteers. The support from Maggie and Barbara was excellent – the occasional nudge from them was greatly appreciated! I found the workshops and group meetings enjoyable and very helpful and something I would like to see continue in the future.

Feedback from Tom Hill, Secretary, Brook Museum:

The project helped us to focus on our own practices and documentation and has led to significant changes in the latter.

Feedback from Powell Cotton:

I found the Kent Sustainable Volunteering Programme to be a well-structured, delivered and enjoyable course which has given me a greater understanding of volunteer management. I very much enjoyed having the opportunity of sharing in the process with other similar heritage sites who have had many of the same issues as. I now feel better equipped and capable of helping to implement the volunteer strategy here at the Powell-Cotton Museum". **Fran Mileman, Volunteer Liaison**

Volunteering has become such a fundamental part of our business and we understand and appreciate the necessity to ensure that the package is right for both our Museum and for the volunteers who give us their time. With this in mind, Maggie

has given our Volunteer Liaison personnel some valuable training and access to the knowledge on how to focus on the Museum delivery of the opportunities offered here to potential volunteers in a more professional and equitable way". **Karen Botha, Director of Powell-Cotton Museum**

6. Recommendations for the future

1. Keep the momentum going - Sarah to meet with each of these four Museums (possibly include Canterbury) to discuss what they could do regarding sustainable volunteering with additional resources. This might include more action learning workshops.
2. Engage senior people in the Museums, ensure volunteering objectives are included in Strategic or Business Plans and those involved in the project are contributing to targets etc.
3. Continue to work with the same group to build up evidence of impact over a longer period, evaluate ROI and build case studies etc.
4. A countywide event – sharing what's going on, what's working and the resources available.

Barbara Regnier
Maggie Piazza
February 2014

Appendix 1

Outline programme for Sustainable Volunteering Programme in Kent - for discussion with Sarah on 12 August

Assumptions:

4 museums with up to 8 participants

Individual museums host Action Learning Workshops

Sarah covers participants' travel expenses and lunches (if necessary) at ALWs

| What | Consultant Days | Commitment from participants |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| Planning and admin | 4 | Respond to emails, schedule dates internally, encourage engagement etc. Take on the 'leadership' role for involvement in the programme. |
| Action Learning Workshops | 6 | Prepare for and attend 4 ALWs over the life of the project, one day for each – to include action learning and input from facilitator e.g. training identified by participants Provide a venue for an ALW - for up to 8 people |
| Individual Museums Consultancy | 6 | Each museum meets with consultant twice during the life of the project – to set objectives & and make an action plan at the beginning (Sept 13) and reflect on progress and next steps at the end (Jan 14) |
| Wrap up with participants Final report | 2 | ALW participants to meet with MP, BR and SC to present achievements, review outcomes and complete evaluation of the programme. (Jan 14) |
| | 18 days at a total fee of £8,000 | |

KENT SUSTAINABLE VOLUNTEERING PROJECT
Action Learning Workshop

21 January 2014

REVIEW OF SUPPORT MODEL

| Helps | Hindrances |
|--|---|
| Getting together and sharing ideas | Initial day – not clear enough what it was for – did the right people attend? |
| Getting out of the workplace – thinking time | Time and workload – more lead time would have helped |
| Someone to prod us, keep us focussed | External politics |
| Expertise | |
| Setting clear objectives | |
| Helped us to be more strategic | |
| Continuity of facilitators | |
| Initial day enthused us – would we have signed up without it?? | |
| Mix of 1-2-1 and group support | |

General discussion in plenary:

The model worked very well, and there is a will to continue meeting as a group for action learning workshops. Agreed to schedule a date in April, hosted by Powell Cotton.