



Introduction

Volunteering in the UK, particularly in England, has experienced a significant decline since the COVID-19 pandemic. This trend is concerning as it affects the capacity of charities and community groups to support those in need.

Our Nourishing Norfolk Volunteer Coordinator Fund has taken bold action, aiming to reverse this trend locally. Thanks to local and national backers, we have invested a huge £150k across 17 food hubs to boost volunteer numbers, help retain volunteers, and provide volunteers with opportunities to learn, engage and unlock extra value.

From stacking shelves and working tills to providing a warm welcome and encouraging people to find additional support, friendly

volunteers are vital across the Nourishing Norfolk network. Drawn from local communities, these trusted individuals are what transform simple social supermarkets to true hubs at the heart of communities which transform local lives.

Each hub used funding differently to meet its specific needs, providing additional capacity to run its shop smoothly. The programme is still ongoing at this stage, but we estimate that during any given week, **300+ volunteers** provide **1,000+ volunteer hours** – worth in excess of a staggering **£0.5million+** each year in labour alone!



Nourishing Norfolk Volunteer Coordinator Fund

Interim Report | August 2024

£150k
distributed in total



17
food hubs supported

Our Insights

Enhancing Volunteer Management and Recruitment

The majority of the food hubs used the funding to hire a dedicated coordinator or extend the hours of existing coordinators. This greatly improved the organisation and management of volunteers, leading to increased reliability within the hubs. For example, The Feed Social Supermarket grew its volunteer base to 100 active members thanks to the efforts of its coordinator. This growth in volunteer numbers also allowed hubs such as ENYP Social Supermarket in Norwich and Steps Food Hub in Wymondham to extend their operating hours, making their services more accessible to the community.

The additional resources also eased the burden on existing staff, freeing them to focus on other crucial activities. The Food Pantry, Feltwell found that leading staff and volunteers had extra headspace and capacity to 'take a step back' to understand the unique strengths of their volunteers



Dereham Food Cabin

and to help them to apply these strengths in their roles. Similarly, several hubs discovered that the

funding allowed staff and experienced volunteers to spend more time engaging with

Feeling a part of something...

“Despite facing their own difficulties, one family was inspired by our work and chose to invest their time as volunteers. The father, unable to work due to health issues, found purpose in volunteering at our food hub and mental health support group. His involvement motivated the mother to assist Food Cabin members at our parent and toddler group. Their son, inspired by his parents, took on the development of our Green Space, teaching people how to grow their own fruits and vegetables, and even recruited two of his friends to help.”

Dereham Food Cabin

customers, helping them address other challenges or directing them to appropriate support.

Interestingly, food hubs attracted 'atypical' volunteers, including younger individuals, people from deprived areas, and those with disabilities, who stand out from the older, retired volunteers typically seen in the wider voluntary sector. The additional funding allowed hubs to offer more targeted support to these 'atypical' volunteers.

Investing in Volunteer Training

Eight hubs invested heavily in training to equip volunteers with crucial skills, covering topics from food safety and mental health first aid to trauma-informed care and diversity training. Magdalen Street Pantry in Norwich (St Giles Trust) supported seven volunteers in achieving NVQ-3 level training, thereby enhancing the expertise within their team while also benefitting individual volunteers. The SOUL Foundation Social Supermarket prioritised de-

escalation training to better prepare their team for dealing with challenging situations.

As a result of these training opportunities, several hubs successfully supported volunteers with mental health issues, fostered personal growth, and encouraged community integration. Lived experience has proven to be an asset for 'atypical' volunteers, who can offer peer support to hub members. For example, The Feed worked with a local referral agency to help a man with severe mental health challenges and homelessness become a volunteer.



"If my experience can help just one other person, it would be great. Being part of the Social Supermarket team enables me to find a fulfilling way to continue doing something positive for others."



The Feed Community Supermarket

Supporting Volunteers' Broader Life Goals

Volunteer coordinators have been able to support people to achieve their goals. A significant barrier to engaging in community life is confidence, and many hubs have cultivated a supportive and inclusive environment where volunteers feel valued and part of a community. This environment is crucial for building confidence, especially among 'atypical' volunteers, such as those from deprived areas, younger individuals, or people with disabilities. By offering tailored

support and fostering a welcoming atmosphere, these volunteers feel encouraged to participate and take on responsibilities.

Three hubs dedicated resources specifically to help volunteers move into employment, demonstrating a commitment to supporting their broader life goals. Magdalen Street Pantry in Norwich transitioned a former service user into a part-time Volunteer Coordinator role, and The Pantry, Kenninghall supported customers with job applications. Coastal Community Supermarket implemented a 'volunteer passport' scheme to help volunteers build skills in a structured way, aiding their journey towards employment.

Building confidence over time...

"We had a young shy lady approach us about becoming a volunteer at the recruitment day and was eager to support us but also build her confidence. She has now been volunteering with us for about 9 months and comes in pretty much every day. She now spends time helping and supporting our members too. Her confidence has grown so much; she is like a different person and we love having her as part of the team. Without this grant, we would not have found her."

The Food Pantry, Feltwell



Building skills to move on...

"A man was referred from Fakenham Job Centre as economically inactive with high anxiety after losing his mother, whom he had cared for over 10 years. We invited him to volunteer with our Maintenance team, and he now volunteers most days, undertaking all kinds of maintenance tasks. We worked on his CV together and supported him at a local job fair. He has now been selected for a second interview with a local council."

Coastal Community Supermarket



Conclusion: Learning and Challenges

The expanded volunteer pool and the investment in training created stronger, more motivated teams, which improved overall service delivery. Coordinators were able to better understand and apply their teams' strengths, fostering a more cohesive and effective volunteer force. For example, Caister Community Larder noted that when rotas are well-organised and volunteer time is structured consistently, volunteers are more productive and satisfied, reducing frustration and increasing volunteer retention.

Although funding reduced many barriers, recruiting and retaining volunteers still posed some challenges. Complexities in the onboarding process, such as delays caused by DBS checks and risk assessments, were common. Food hubs volunteers tended to be 'atypical', meaning their availability was sometimes limited due to poor mental health or specific local factors like seasonal employment, making it more challenging to maintain a consistent volunteer pool. The uniqueness of each hub has also presented challenges, with some hubs needing additional encouragement, support or time to embrace the offer.

Looking Ahead

We are excited to share additional updates as the fund continues to make a difference in our communities. The ongoing impact of this initiative promises to bring even more positive changes, and we look forward to celebrating further successes as they unfold.

Some hubs are close to the end of their funding period, leaving the future of this promising programme uncertain. We hope to be able to continue the momentum we have already achieved with help from funding partners.



Thank you

for partnering with us to celebrate and champion our local charities and organisations, helping to build stronger communities from the ground up.



Together, Norfolk shines brighter

Find out more or get in touch

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