

## TITLE:

## Increasing Student Volunteering at Bridgwater College

## DATE:

July 2008



## INSTITUTION PROFILE

FE/HE

3800 Full Time students

800 staff

Rural

30 buildings on 6 sites

## SUMMARY

Bridgwater College has a history of encouraging volunteering and has worked with Volunteering England since 2006 which has helped increase student numbers, but also made easier the process of matching students with volunteering projects. Each year around 200 students volunteer, both within the college and on local projects.

## EAUC COMMENT

This case study provides a useful illustration of how a college can, through partnerships with other organisations, take an existing idea and develop it into a beacon and provide inspiration for others.

## PROJECT PARTNERS

Bridgwater College, Volunteering England, Somerset Youth Service

## THE PROBLEM

Bridgwater College has in excess of 200 student volunteers assigned to projects within the college. There are opportunities in the Students Union, for second-year students who mentor first years – known as Angels – and as Advocates – students with learning difficulties who developed a recycling scheme as well as other initiatives.

The problem was that although there were existing volunteer groups in the college lead by different staff members, there was no infrastructure to support volunteering within the college. Bridgwater wanted to raise the profile of volunteering by coordinating all the existing groups and to create more opportunities for students to volunteer.

## THE APPROACH

The college was approached by Volunteering England to take part in their 'Going Further' project, which was specifically designed to increase volunteering opportunities for students in the FE sector.

As Volunteering England already had projects in place, the college thought this would be beneficial in their quest to engage more young people to volunteer. Staff members leading the existing volunteering projects attended training events with Volunteering England and meetings with the other members of the pilot project to share good practice and reflect on what had gone well and less well.

A member of staff was nominated to co-ordinate the volunteering but it became apparent that the role would require a full time member of staff.

Volunteering was integrated into the entry programmes for land-based studies so students carry out some volunteering projects, such as garden clean-ups at National Trust properties.

## GOALS

- To increase student volunteer numbers
- To further promote the Learner Voice and Every Child Matters
- To have a full time member of staff co-ordinating volunteering
- To open a volunteer 'bureau' within the college, the bureau will work with local established volunteering bureaux to enable students to access opportunities within their communities

## OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

### Obstacles

- Create a consistent and co-ordinated approach to volunteering across the college
- Funding of new staff member to manage the project
- Access to Risk Assessments and safety of students while volunteering
- Collecting information from students who have volunteered to help refine the process

### Solutions

- Work with Volunteering England to bring all the schemes together under one project
- Re-designation of a vacant post in Student Support allowed this to be possible
- Ongoing work with Volunteering England and other volunteering agencies allows sharing of legislation/good practice
- Somerset Youth Service are providing help to set up a database to record this information and maximise its usefulness. This information will be used to record the time students volunteer for, and to record the organisations they have worked with and which have been checked. This will enable the college to capture information that can be used to plan future activity as well as to reward the volunteers at a presentation event.

## PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

The college has had regular evaluations with Volunteering England and has recently been awarded a Flagship Award in Student Volunteering. This was collected by the Advocates in London at a gala event attended by all the members of the 'Going Further' pilot scheme, where the Bridgwater team presented their project and collected their award.

The number of students volunteering has increased from 80 in 2006 to 200 in 2008.

The college is in the process of collating data from existing students on their volunteering experiences and will be setting up a database with the help of the Somerset Youth Service. A new volunteer group has been developed called the Green Pioneers whose focuses are on sustainability and reducing the carbon footprint of the college. The Angels are being further developed to be trained in Peer Mentoring.

## LESSONS LEARNT

- Young people increasingly value volunteering as it enhances their personal development and career opportunities
- In a college of this size, a dedicated volunteer bureau is the most efficient way to deal with volunteering in a co-ordinated way
- External agencies such as Volunteering England and Somerset Youth Service provide invaluable advice and support, along with a network of similar institutions
- The co-ordinated approach has improved information and support for volunteers, which has motivated even more students to become involved
- Including volunteering in the curriculum has helped students gain a greater understanding of citizen roles and greatly assisted the embedding of volunteering in the college culture

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Bridgwater College [www.bridgwater.ac.uk](http://www.bridgwater.ac.uk)  
Volunteering England [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)  
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