

Volunteering in autumn

Volunteering is a fantastic way of meeting new people, helping to reduce social isolation and strengthen communities through creating connections and working together. One of the greatest ways to forge strong bonds is through food, which is why this Cook and Share we wanted to put a spotlight on ways to volunteer with your community, workplace or school.



How to start volunteering

Once you have decided to share your precious time through volunteering the next step is to decide what you want to spend your time doing:

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NVCO) have some great tips and steps to get started.

First steps to volunteering:

- 1 Focus on what makes you happy – is it cooking, gardening, listening, fixing things, or organising, everyone has something to give and a community in need of people like you.
- 2 Consider how much time you have to offer and what your skills are to help you find the right opportunity.
- 3 Research you local area – look out for noticeboards at your local library, supermarket, or community centre, as well as online through Facebook groups or parish / area websites and newsletters.
- 4 Search online for national charities with local events or volunteering schemes, for example the RVS are often looking for volunteers to help run lunch clubs. As well as organisations such as Foodcycle, Trussell Trust and Fareshare who all have regional volunteer opportunities.

At Food for Life we have an ever-growing online community which is a hive of ideas and resources for community projects, and is open to all.

Head over to our network space on the platform Circle to join the conversation.



Run a Cook and Share event:

There is also the option to connect with your community through running, or helping at, a Cook and Share event to bring people together to combat cost of living, loneliness, and isolation, or to simply have a celebration event as a community around food and sharing. Being able to connect with other people makes an enormous difference in a person's daily life.

Outdoor activities

For those who prefer the great outdoors, a good place to look for links to growing volunteer opportunities is the **Good to Grow network**. There are some amazing resources to connect people including the RHS and Farm Garden a UK wide charity supporting communities to farm, garden and grow together.

In addition to organised volunteering options, we have a whole host of resources available in our learning and skills hub, if you would like to bring your community or school together around growing or harvesting.

It is good to remember that whatever you dedicate your time towards and however your volunteering journey takes shape, just know your time and skills are valued by your community and even a small effort can make a significant difference.

Volunteers at the Hornbeam are a beacon of light for the residents of Waltham Forest

A couple of years ago Susie began to volunteer at the Hornbeam Cafe in Waltham Forest, a wonderful place and central hub for many in the community.

The Hornbeam relies on its regular volunteers, like Susie, who support a small core unit of staff to host community meals, run a community café, a living well programme and much, much more.

Susie's volunteering at the Hornbeam centres around the weekly People's Kitchen, where she is a buddy volunteer, so she helps guide the weekly volunteers with knife skills, preparing recipes and trickier tasks.

"The people who come to the People's Kitchen do so for a number of reasons, some use it as a place to meet people and get out of the house but for others it can be a form of therapy and there is a real desire to feel useful and contribute."

She continued: "Many people who are either retired and living alone or struggling with mental health issues want a sense of purpose and whilst they may appreciate the meal at the end of the session their reason for coming is often the feeling of community and being valued. By coming together for a Cook and Share event we have taken a moment to be grateful for the Hornbeam and the People's Kitchen."

"I am very much learning as I go" said Susie, "I am a mum of young children and with the volunteering at Hornbeam I want to settle into something that I am passionate about that can grow around me as my children grow up."

#CookAndShare throughout November

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