

## Motor Neurone Disease Association: The Changing Face of Volunteer Recruitment

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### The Changing Face of Volunteer Recruitment

Many organisations that are dependent on volunteer support are experiencing a big change in the way they recruit and retain volunteers. Over the last decade volunteering has evolved into a more diverse and professional sector. Increased public awareness due to press coverage has raised the political profile of the industry which has experienced strong growth as a result. Now volunteering organisations may need to change their recruitment strategies and tools if they want to attract and retain volunteers in the future. The Motor Neurone Disease Association is one such organisation who rely on volunteers and was formed in 1979 by a group of volunteers who wanted to co-ordinate support, guidance and advice for people affected by Motor Neurone Disease. It currently has over 3,000 volunteers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.



Claire Ayling explains:

*“We have seen a change in the type of volunteering opportunities people are looking for and we have to adapt our roles accordingly. We need to make sure we are utilising volunteer support which is fundamental for the Association and offer the right role at the right time. Everyone has different motivations to volunteer and we need to create and promote roles that will attract all ages, offering a wide range of different skills.”*

## Future Investment

With one in five 16-24 year olds now unemployed (source: ONS Nov 2011), many are looking to volunteering to provide transferable and useful skills to secure paid employment. A recent survey by online Charity YouthNet, home of the UK's volunteering website do-it.org.uk, found that gaining work experience and improving skills are the most popular reasons for young people to volunteer. It is not only young people who are facing a difficult employment market and many individuals who find themselves unemployed are now using their time productively by volunteering to gain new skills that will ultimately help them increase their employability and get them back into the workplace. For an individual who is juggling work and home commitments and is experiencing having even less time, there is now a growth in "micro volunteering" with people volunteering for very short periods of time, usually on a non-committal basis and many not-for-profit organisations are seeing an increasing demand for short-term projects and one-off activities.

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## Finding and keeping the right talent

The voluntary sector, like any other sector, needs a skilled workforce in order to thrive and provide quality services. The MND Association's small team of in-house recruiters has a constant challenge, continuously recruiting for a wide variety of roles across a large geographical area.

Claire Ayling explains: *"We use a number of different recruitment tools to attract applicants. Word of mouth through existing volunteers is essential for us, as is regional marketing and utilising free online resources. It is a very competitive market place and the MND Association's focus for recruitment is personalised engagement and interaction. We therefore aim to ensure that every enquirer receives a quick and effective response. It is essential that they receive a good experience when contacting the Association, whether they choose to become a volunteer or not. We want them to recognize that we are totally committed to investing in our volunteer programme and if they choose to volunteer for our organisation that we will do all we can to ensure they will have a long and rewarding experience with us".*

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The MND Association has volunteering enquiries coming through a variety of channels and the small in-house team found themselves stretched to process the interested applicants quickly and efficiently. In the past, the team has only used the telephone, email and hard copy application forms as the main way of processing applications. This was a lengthy and costly exercise, resulting in a lack of communication and transparency, with little time available to invest in more personalised and timely methods of communication.

The Association adopted iCams, Hireserve's e-recruitment system, in 2011. Claire Ayling explains their decision; *"We have seen an increase in volunteers using the internet as their preferred channel to discover and research opportunities, especially students looking for work experience. Using iCams means we can give applicants a positive user experience from the moment they start the enquiry process, giving them the confidence that we want to provide an enjoyable and rewarding volunteering experience from the moment they apply. It of course also reduces the amount of manual administration our recruitment team are required to do, providing a quick and effective communication tool which assists with initial volunteer engagement as well as longer term relationship building."*

For the MND Association not only is iCams helping it attract, select and retain a loyal volunteering database, it has also enabled Claire and her team to build a talent pool of people with specialist skills that may not volunteer on a regular basis but might have the skills for a particular project or campaign in the future. Claire added:

*"Having the right technology in place to support the recruitment function will help us develop our recruiting strategy and ensure its success going forward. We rely heavily on our dedicated team of volunteers and finding, selecting and keeping them is a continuous cycle and crucial if we are to continue to offer the Association's vital services, support and aid."*

Charities, social enterprises and voluntary organisations are facing the same pressures as the commercial world with rising demands, whilst driving down costs and still delivering results. Online recruitment system technology is now an affordable option for organisations looking to manage and enhance both staff and volunteer recruitment. Volunteer recruitment teams can adapt their processes to provide greater efficiency, improved engagement and increased effectiveness to deliver a successful recruitment strategy and adopting recruitment technology can make a huge impact on achieving these goals. An in-house recruitment team with the right expertise and tools can help dramatically reduce costs, build and develop a committed and skilled volunteer base, positively promote its message and encourage commitment from potential volunteers whilst continuing to deliver an exemplary level of service, dedication and enthusiasm for its cause.

The results are part of YouthNet's annual 'Do-it Volunteer Satisfaction Survey' which collated feedback from a total of 2,615 registered users of Do-it, to investigate volunteers' experiences of, and motivation for volunteering.