

CHARITY MATTERS



*A **Volunteer** is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task” or “a person who works for an organisation without being paid”.*

Whichever of these definitions you prefer, the reality is that volunteers are gold dust and an invaluable source of energy and expertise for millions of organisations around the world.

My introduction to volunteering happened because we were taught civics in 6th class in national school in Ballygunner. I cannot recall the content of the classes but I do know that it sparked an interest in me to become involved in my community and to help others ever since. My first volunteering role came in St. John’s Church when I was 13 years old. I helped with the collections at Mass on Holy Days, during Lent and on Sunday mornings. I enjoyed the responsibility that came with it and made many friends along the way. Since then I have volunteered on numerous committees; served on the board of a notable local charitable organisation as well as developing a deep sense of community spirit.

So why do people volunteer and what is their motivation in doing so? I am old fashioned in some respects and believe that people volunteer because they want to and not for any ulterior or selfish motive. Be it the resident in a new estate that takes the first move to form a Residents Association; the retired successful athlete that wants to give back to the sport that served him / her so well over the years or the volunteer counsellors in many charitable organisations that support those in the deepest depths of despair.....they all have one thing in common.....they do it because they want to help others.

However, life is different now (a cliché but true) and people’s approach to the use of their time is different than it used to be in times gone by. Governance and regulation have “professionalised” the volunteer and with that comes a duty of care on the part of the community, voluntary and charitable organisations that they volunteer for. They must ensure that volunteers are suited to the roles in question; not exposed to unnecessary risk or potentially harmful situations and that they have the skills to perform the required tasks. Simple elements but of vital importance and concern to the volunteers. Volunteer Ireland, The National Volunteer Development Agency and a support body for over 20 Volunteer Centres in Ireland, is a great source of information, resources and support and can be found at www.volunteer.ie

To my mind, one of the key functions of a leadership position in a community, voluntary or charitable organisation is to acknowledge the contribution your volunteers make to the health and well-being of your organisation. This acknowledgment should not happen at an Annual Volunteer Appreciation Day (a great idea if you don’t already do it)..... this acknowledgment should happen each and every day! Imagine if the 560,000+ volunteers that give of their time freely to community, voluntary and charitable organisations every year in Ireland just stopped volunteering. Imagine the impact such a catastrophic event would have on society and the delivery of much needed services and supports. Nobody wants that to happen and therefore we must ensure that our volunteers are acknowledged and cherished; trained accordingly and supported to perform their roles.



John Warren, JE Warren Consulting, john@jewarrenconsulting.net www.jewarrenconsulting.net