

volunteering

Supporting the voluntary sector in South Northamptonshire

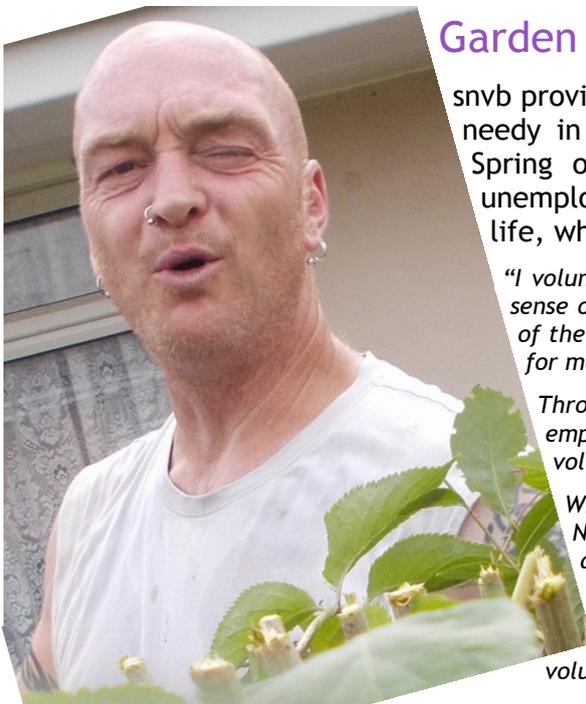
Volunteering can lead to lots of new experiences and opportunities

Rachel Nafzger volunteers for the Guide Dogs charity. Rachel is 25 years old and visually impaired and tells us her personal story about her volunteering journey.

"I first volunteered whilst at University in Plymouth as a way to make new friends. The Student Union recommended joining the Volunteer Society, helping with various community activities from building enclosures at a local monkey sanctuary to encouraging school children to get involved with sport and the arts. Over time I became Vice-president of this Society, helping to recruit new members and organise teams of people for voluntary activities. I won a national volunteering award for my efforts to help student volunteering become more accessible for disabled students. From this I was selected by Coca Cola to be an ambassador and torchbearer at the 2012 Olympics.

After University I moved back home and soon felt lonely again as I didn't know many people locally. I thought volunteering would help with this as it had before. As I had received so much help from Guide Dogs UK I decided to give something back and became a volunteer fundraiser for their Daventry group. The group meets monthly to discuss fundraising ideas and arrange events such as street collections, quiz nights and a Strictly Come Guide Dogs event. I also help at the training centre in Leamington Spa, providing representation for the charity and support to newly qualified guide dog owners.

I've learnt many new skills since I began volunteering including the ability to work in a team, organisation skills and public speaking skills. I carry all new skills forward with me all the time. For example, I learnt public speaking as part of my role talking to the media as an Olympic ambassador and still use those skills today when talking to companies and community groups about the invaluable work that Guide Dogs UK do. I would highly recommend any volunteering to anyone, as it is very rewarding and a great way to meet new people and get involved in the local community. I know it's difficult to take that first leap when you don't know what's out there for you, or if you are unsure about what to expect. But after that first step it gets easier and it could end up being the best thing you do this year! You also never know where it may lead, career changes or the potential to bring out skills that you weren't aware of. The best bit of all is there is no pressure. You can give as much or as little time as you like."



Garden Buddy volunteer blossoms

snvb provides a volunteer gardening service (Garden Buddies) for the most needy in the district and Kevin Wilson joined the team briefly in the Spring of 2014, returning two years later stating that he was still unemployed. Kevin tells us how Garden Buddies has transformed his life, which is now blossoming since he first started volunteering.

"I volunteered for Garden Buddies, as I wanted a to do something which gave me a sense of purpose and I knew would made a difference to local people; who because of their age and or a disability could no longer manage their own gardens. The buzz for me is seeing their faces when the work is done.

Through volunteering my self-esteem, confidence, social skills, work skills and employability levels have increased. I have completed 100 gardening jobs and volunteered for over 130 hours and I've loved every minute.

Whilst volunteering snvb staff told me about a bursary that I could apply to via Northamptonshire Community Foundation i.e. The Henry Martin Fund which awards grants of between £50-£500 for individuals needing financial support to help them get into training or employment. With the help of snvb and SNC's Job Club staff I successfully applied for this bursary and I'm utilising the monies to start a small garden maintenance business. What an amazing volunteering journey this has been."

'Guided' into learning new skills

Hannah Dooley volunteers for Brackley Girl Guides for the Rainbows group (for girls aged 5-7 years), as a result of snvb promoting this role on the national volunteering website (do-it.org). This is what Hannah told us.

"I am creative and wanted to make constructive use of my time in the evenings rather than always watching television and I love working with children. When I was small I didn't have the opportunity to attend Rainbows or Brownies and felt this was a good chance to be involved now.

I have so much fun working with the girls e.g. making bracelets, decorating cupcakes and crowns when Princess Charlotte was born. The latter activity was something I suggested and was readily accepted. The group meets for an hour and we do get a lot of things done during that time. I really enjoy helping and I like to see the girls having fun too.



I would highly recommend the role to anyone who is thinking of volunteering for the Guides, especially anyone seeking a career in working with children. I have also learnt adult social skills and I'm considering taking the Leaders course to further advance my skills.

Taking that first step into volunteering has increased my confidence and led me to an interest in other opportunities. One is as an independent visitor to children in care; providing support and friendship and participating in activities and interests that they enjoy. The time commitment is a few hours every fortnight and helps improve their lives. I'm also hoping to begin volunteering for Creative Activities for the Elderly (CAFE), where volunteers visit people in care homes and offer stimulating activities such as painting, crafts and baking."

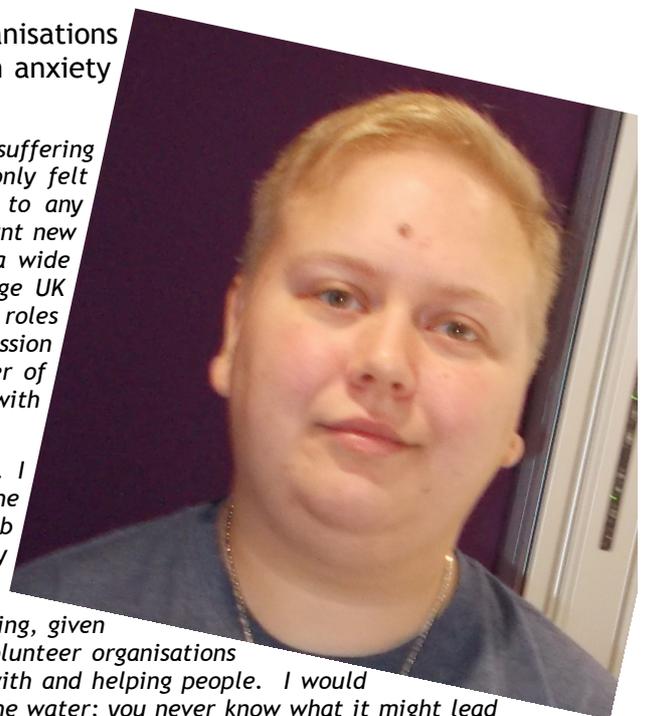
Volunteering can help improve your confidence and your employment chances too!

Nathaniel Dale, aged 27, has helped a range of local organisations and explains how volunteering has helped him overcome an anxiety disorder and secure employment too.

"I first volunteered at the Age UK charity shop in Towcester when I was suffering from an anxiety disorder and when I first started I was terrified. I only felt confident enough to sort donations and could not approach or talk to any customers. With the shop managers and fellow volunteers support I learnt new skills and my confidence and self-esteem increased. I now perform a wide range of duties in the shop, including handling enquiries regarding Age UK services. This role provided me with a launch pad to try other voluntary roles i.e. Towcester museum, where again I learnt new skills e.g. selling admission tickets and even conducting tours of the museum. During the summer of 2015 I volunteered at Towcester Library where I was heavily involved with the children's summer holidays reading challenge.

As my confidence grew I decided I needed to find paid employment. I utilised the various skills I had learnt whilst volunteering to complete the work experience section of the job application forms. I now have a job with the Ministry of Justice in Northampton, which I put down to my volunteering experiences.

Whilst I initially found it difficult to take that first step into volunteering, given my anxiety disorder, it has completely transformed my life. All the volunteer organisations were very supportive and I get so much satisfaction from interacting with and helping people. I would encourage anyone who is hesitant to give it a go and dip their foot in the water; you never know what it might lead to. I intend to keep on volunteering for as long as I can, because it makes me very happy and I get so much enjoyment from it."



snvb would like to thank Harriet Smith for undertaking the interviews and writing the text for this newsletter.