

Hyde Park Source

Empowering long-term volunteers to run their own projects to open up new volunteering opportunities

Context

Hyde Park Source is a community organisation in Leeds set up in 1998. It runs a range of projects including a Design-and-Build service, Outdoor Education and Community Garden groups. It aims to improve health and wellbeing by working with local communities 'to help them improve their surroundings, designing and creating attractive, exciting and safe places for people to live, work and play'.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it had seven paid staff and about 100 volunteers. During the national lockdowns, its projects were put on hold, with some paid employees furloughed and its volunteer workforce reduced by nearly half. Some staff were redeployed to a Covid response project and new volunteers were engaged.

Challenge

Co-production is very important to Hyde Park Source's vision and all projects are run with, and for the benefit of, volunteers. However, it has a long waiting list of volunteers seeking to work on its community projects as well as many existing volunteers wishing to continue participating on a long-term basis. This creates a challenge when space and project capacity is limited. Hyde Park Source wants to manage the needs of both existing and new volunteers so they can support both groups in benefiting from the experiences on offer.

“We haven't got loads of space because we've got a small building. It's not that efficient to work with large groups of volunteers on [some projects]. So, if people stay for a long time, then it means that other people can't join [us]. So, that's a challenge.

Community business representative

Action

To increase capacity to accommodate all the volunteers wishing to participate in its activities, Hyde Park Source launched a new scheme which enables long-term community garden volunteers, supported by the organisation's staff, to form a sub-group which can apply for funding and run its own projects autonomously. Over time, it is anticipated that the sub-group will need less support and operate as a separate community organisation.

“If you can get a core [group] of people who have been [at the community business] for a number of years, then actually it's not that big a leap. If you [are] committed as a group to turn up every week to the same place, then you can have a set of rules and constitutions where you can decide how you make decisions together. You can have a bank account, and you can apply for grants.

Community business representative

Result

This approach creates more projects in which willing volunteers can participate for the benefit of the community.

“It's just nice to have everyone chatting and laughing, just all contributing and wanting to get involved.

Volunteer

The sub-groups of volunteers leading these new groups develop new skills and the ability to run an organisation independently.

“They've become a full charity in their own right [and] they're running their own group now, and we don't go to support them. They [the volunteers] are just doing it themselves ... So, we [the community business] are trying to roll that model out.

Community business representative