

The Power of Volunteering

When I'm not travelling between schools and running events on campus with my day job, I enjoy spending my evenings, weekends, annual leave and generally any spare moment that I can find volunteering with a variety of inspiring local and national organisations. It is not unusual to find me travelling up and down the country rocking face paint and donning fancy dress all in the aid of volunteering. During lockdown, many of the volunteering activities that I have grown to love and take for granted in my day-to-day life, were paused and adapted as we move towards a 'new normal'. Over the last few weeks my volunteering hours have gradually increased, continued to inspire me and put a smile on my face as networks have reunited to continue making a difference.

I just wanted to share a glimpse into a couple of the projects that I have been volunteering with during lockdown:

Over the Wall (<https://www.otw.org.uk/>)

I have volunteered with Over the Wall since 2016 and to date have supported 17 residential camps across the country. The charity support young people affected by serious health challenges, their siblings and families 'to reach beyond the boundaries of their health challenges to discover a world of mischief, magic and new possibilities through residential activity camps'. As usual, I had signed up to support a variety of camps and was looking forward to supporting a milestone 20th camp. Understandably residential camps were unable to go ahead this year but 'Camp in the Cloud' (<https://www.otw.org.uk/talking-all-things-camp-in-the-cloud/>) was created to continue offering vital support to families.



Still keen to be involved, I signed up to support with evening 'cabin chat', a fun and reflective time bringing campers and volunteers together through a virtual platform. My role has been to support with facilitating discussion with campers and take part in the fun challenges, such as facepaint and crazy hair (ensuring that I've had my yearly fix of facepaint!) It has

amazed me that despite being away from the close-knit safe space offered at camp, young people continued to be reflective, have fun and support each other.



After training and two weeks of volunteering, I am excited for the further weeks I will be supporting this activity throughout the summer. Despite initially feeling a bit outside of my comfort zone (or stretch zone as known as camp), it has allowed me to feel more confident with virtual activity delivery, which I am hoping to put to good use as we enter a virtual world of outreach. Over the years that I have volunteered with the charity, I have worked with inspiring young people, volunteers and staff and it has supported me in building skills, such as leadership, teamwork and problem-solving, all key skills that have supported my career to date. Most importantly, the magic at camp creates memories that last a lifetime, always ready to put a smile on my face on a rainy day.

GoodGym Coventry (<https://www.goodgym.org/>)

I have volunteered with GoodGym Coventry for just over a year, a charity that creates 'a community of runners that combines getting fit with doing good.' Prior to lockdown we donned our red GoodGym t-shirts, met in



Coventry city centre, ran to a local volunteering task nearby, completed the task and ran back completing a fitness session en route. As someone that loves both running and volunteering, this was the perfect combination and motivated me to get moving despite the weather! I am also a member of the local taskforce, a group of experienced volunteers supporting with leading and locating tasks. Volunteering tasks that we have completed have ranged from painting community centres to litter picking and sorting donations to gardening all within our local community. As coronavirus hit, the charity responded dynamically to understand where volunteers could support safely and in Coventry the team have continued to support local community projects to maintain vital local services.

As restrictions have lifted, small groups of GoodGym-ers have been able to reunite and community missions have resumed. Over the last few weeks, I have enjoyed supporting tasks such as litter picking Coventry canal on behalf of the Canal and River Trust, litter picking in the Sowe Valley to improve the environment for local people so they can enjoy spending time outside with their loved ones and gardening at Emmaus to improve their outdoor spaces.



Volunteering with GoodGym Coventry over the last year has allowed me to learn more about our fantastic city of Coventry, meet lots of incredible people and allowed me to continue developing many skills. Teamwork and communication are absolutely key to ensure we complete tasks in the available time. We are always on the lookout for community tasks, so please do look online if you are a community group, school or local organisation that may need some extra hands!

Volunteering over the years with a variety of organisations has allowed me to meet some incredible people, gain some fantastic new experiences, build my confidence and most importantly truly made me feel at home when I moved away from my hometown to work at the University of Warwick.

I know lots of people have been volunteering and would love to hear what you have been up to and what you feel that you've gained from it!