

# York Museums Trust

## Report to CYC on volunteer training

### Background

The York Museums Trust (YMT) volunteer programme was launched in October 2006 with the appointment of a part time Volunteers Manager, funded by the Yorkshire Renaissance Hub as part of the 2006/09 Hub Business Plan.

Formerly, each site had worked with small numbers of volunteers, generally recruited through word of mouth and personal contacts with the curatorial and learning teams. These volunteers largely bypassed HR processes and there are few records available of who the volunteers were or what they worked on.

At the start of the current volunteer programme, there were 14 active volunteers across all sites; mainly consisting of YPS members who volunteered in the Yorkshire Museum Library and were managed by the then Curator of Geology.

Following an initial consultation period to research best practice and the potential demand, 2 new, dedicated volunteer projects were rolled out in 2007: York Observatory and Summer Geology Projects. York Observatory is volunteer-led, in as much as the volunteers open the Observatory to facilitate visitor access, without a YMT staff presence. It was the first project of this kind in YMT and continues today alongside 4 subsequent volunteer-led, public facing projects: Hands on Here! at the Castle, Hands on Here! at the Yorkshire, Raendale Mill, the Yorkshire Museum Library and a small number of behind the scenes projects.

As demand for volunteer roles and the capacity to accommodate new projects grew, the Volunteers Manager post became full time in July 2008 and a full time Volunteers Coordinator was recruited in May 2012 through ACE funding.

We have a strict policy to only recruit into an existing and vacant role. We do not recruit volunteers onto our books to await a suitable opportunity.

As at May 2013, YMT is working with in excess of 300 active volunteers across its sites, and has a record of over 700 inactive volunteers who have worked with us at some point over the past 6 years.

## **Vision**

Our vision for volunteering is for York Museums Trust to be an organisation where:

- Everyone values the contribution that volunteers make to the organisations well-being.
- All its volunteers have a meaningful and enjoyable volunteering experience.
- Visitors have an enhanced experience of our sites when they interact with our volunteers.
- The volunteers programme contributes to the local community by providing rewarding opportunities for local residents to enjoy and learn from the collections and benefit from the skills and expertise of staff and other volunteers.

This vision is underpinned by the following values:

- **Fairness and Equity:** Volunteering enhances social inclusion and good relations. Everyone is treated equally regardless of their age, gender, background, religious beliefs or position within the organisation.
- **The importance of free will/choice:** Volunteering is a matter of free choice and there should be no compulsion to take part.
- **Mutual Benefit:** Volunteering is a shared experience. It is rewarding and of benefit to the volunteer in building skills, confidence and extending social networks. Volunteering is of benefit to YMT in assisting in the delivery of organisational strategic objectives.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of the volunteers programme are:

- 1 – Supporting the work of YMT
- 2 – Develop and maintain a strong infrastructure for volunteering
- 3 – Create a diverse and inclusive volunteering programme
- 4 – Provide a Positive Experience of Volunteering within YMT

## **Training Programme**

Training helps new volunteers get to know the people, the organisation, and their role quickly and efficiently, and to feel safe and comfortable working with us. For some roles, it also establishes that there is a minimum competency

that all volunteers are expected to obtain. YMT is making a statement through its training programme that we operate on a professional level and our volunteers are capable of working to our standards.

Given that young people consistently make up more than 50% of our active volunteers, an important aspect for many is having the opportunity to acquire skills and experience that will improve their future employability, particularly in the heritage sector, within which a significant number of them are hoping to build a career. More recently, we are seeing increased numbers of volunteers who are looking to keep existing skills current and learn new skills whilst they are seeking work. Many of our volunteers therefore see training as a real benefit, providing them with skills that may be helpful to them elsewhere, and may even help them get a paying job.

Our training must provide our volunteers with four essential elements, regardless of the role they are undertaking:

***What they are supposed to do*** – what our expectations of them are in the role, what the expected outcome is and what will their responsibilities be

***How they are supposed to do it*** – how to manage the space they are working in and how to perform the individual tasks within their role

***What they should not do*** – for example if we tell a volunteer how to handle the collection correctly, they also need to know not to leave objects unattended at any time. This is also about reinforcing the expectations and responsibilities of the role

***What to do in an emergency*** – what to do if a visitor tells them they have lost their child in the museum, or the fire alarm sounds etc

There are three levels to our in-house training programme, to reflect the different range of volunteer roles across the organisation.

### **Level 1**

This is the very basic information which every person who works with us, volunteer or paid staff, should be given as soon as they join us. **It is compulsory for volunteers in any role and some elements of it are a legal requirement for YMT.**

The H&S site induction covers all aspects of how to safely access and exit our buildings, where the various facilities such as toilets, kitchens etc are. Who will supervise them on site. Whether or not they will be responsible for keys or will be given access codes to restricted areas. Fire evacuation and first aid

procedures, and also where or from whom to access further information, including access to all YMT policies and written procedures, including H&S, Safe Working Procedures, Risk Assessments and all other relevant documentation.

In addition, an information pack is provided about YMT and its various sites, along with any written notes or guidance which are relevant to the role. From summer 2013, all of this information will be provided in a Volunteers' Handbook, which will also contain a section where volunteers can record any future training they may have as well as useful notes and comments.

As part of their induction, volunteers are taken around the site where they will be working and shown all the facilities and fire escape routes. They are also introduced to as many staff as are available, this is a very important aspect of their induction as we recognise that our buildings are large and quirky behind the scenes, so we encourage them to explore the buildings when they are working with us and we want volunteers to feel part of the wider team from the start so that they feel comfortable asking questions of any staff they may come across at any time. It is also important that our staff also understand that volunteers are part of our team and have the opportunity to meet as many as possible, especially if they will not come across them on a regular basis as part of their own work.

H&S inductions are largely delivered by the Volunteers Team, but can be delivered by staff who are working 1-2-1 with volunteers if they have been trained to do so by the Volunteers Team. We work to a check-list of subjects to cover, so that every H&S induction is of the same standard. Volunteers are asked to sign off this checklist once they have received their induction; with a copy kept on their volunteer record, and one copy retained by them for information.

If a volunteer subsequently moves to another YMT site, the building tour element of the induction will be repeated for the new site and signed off again by the volunteer and Volunteers Team.

A typical role which would only attract an induction, would be a volunteer who supported us for a large one-off event, often as a result of their connection to a partner organisation with whom we were running it.

## **Level 2**

Volunteers who will be working closely with one member or only a small team of staff, in a non-visitor facing role, will generally get 1-2-1 training for whichever tasks they will be undertaking from their project supervisor. This group usually also includes any placements or work experience students we have, and a

typical role would be working behind the scenes with a member of the curatorial team to research, catalogue, condition check or repackage collection objects.

In order to support staff who are supervising volunteers, we will be providing a Supporting Volunteers Handbook for staff from summer 2013. The handbook will be rolled out with a training session for all staff, regardless of whether they are currently working with volunteers or not. In addition, the Volunteers Team will work closely with the HR department, who are tasked with developing a programme of staff training across the whole organisation, to ensure that ongoing training and support is provided for all staff who work with volunteers and that new employees are caught up in the training programme.

### **Level 3**

Volunteers in a visitor-facing role are required to attend our in-house customer care training. In addition, if the role involves working with collection objects, our in-house object handling training is also mandatory.

Because of budget constraints, both of these training programmes are devised and run in-house, but they are bespoke to our projects and cover all the essential elements required to ensure that volunteers can carry out their role in a safe and enjoyable manner. Object handling is delivered by the Curatorial Team; customer care by the Volunteers Team.

Training is done in a group setting as this makes the best use of staff time, and we also find this the most useful for volunteers, who benefit from the opportunity to share skills and experiences and enjoy networking within the group.

Projects which offer a number of different collections based activities for volunteers to run, are also supported by a team of Trainer Guides. These are museum guides who are experienced in delivering collections based activities to visitors. Activities are developed by the curatorial/learning teams, who then train the Trainer Guides in the content and delivery, including bespoke object handling instructions for the individual objects involved.

The Trainer Guides then train volunteers in the individual activities. These are run on a rolling timetable, so each activity will come up every 4 – 6 weeks. This is to ensure that we capture new volunteers as they join the project and we keep the training at the same level throughout the lifetime of the activity. Activity training includes a live session with visitors so that the Trainer Guides can quality check the volunteer interaction with visitors as well as their understanding of the subject and handling requirements.

Volunteers are then able to join the main project rota, if the Trainer Guides are happy that they are performing at the required level. Anyone needing further support can access this by taking the whole session again at a later date, or by 1-2-1 support from the Trainer Guides or Volunteers Team as appropriate.

When they are up and running with visitor sessions, volunteers are required to provide feedback from every session they undertake in a daily diary. This enables us to monitor the popularity of the activity, identify any gaps or issues and also to capture additional information which often comes from our visitors. Interesting information gathered from visitors can often be added to the activity notes to enhance the activity content, as long as it can be authenticated.

### **External Training**

Our volunteers are included in our external/staff training programme, and receive training alongside staff, if it is appropriate to the role they are undertaking.

This training largely includes:

Manual Handling

Ladder Training

Fire Training

Book Conservation

Food Hygiene Level 2 (for Kitchen Studio)

Security (for volunteers who open museum buildings to visitors without staff supervision, eg Raindale Mill)

There is a small budget for individual training needs and all requests from volunteers or project supervisors (on behalf of their volunteers) are considered on an individual basis focussing on the benefits to the project.

We regularly accept students onto volunteer projects to enable them to fulfil placement requirements from their course of study. Some students, particularly those with learning or communication modules in their course, can meet their placement needs by volunteering in a visitor facing role, and as long as they can meet all the mandatory training needs for the project, we will accept them onto the project for a short term role. Although we are not able to provide accredited training for students, in this way, we are able to contribute to an important element of their course.

We network extensively in the sector, both within the region and nationally, and are able to signpost volunteers to placements, internships and other volunteer opportunities as they arise in other organisations, increasing their learning experience and broadening their skills.

## **Future Plans**

Plans are underway to roll out a programme of training across all sectors of our paid staff with a particular emphasis on customer service and management skills. Discussions are currently taking place with ACAS in terms of management training and also with an authorised provider of the Welcome All and Welcome Host programmes, which will be targeted at our front of house teams and appropriate volunteers. With the development of a staff training programme for YMT, we would expect that volunteers would be included on any training which was of benefit to them in performing their volunteer role with us.

We expect to be heavily involved in training staff to support volunteers to achieve their full potential and maximise their experience with us.

In addition, we would hope to accommodate as many volunteers as possible on any other training, even though it may not necessarily be vital to the role, but if it would be of benefit to them and providing that no additional costs would be incurred to the YMT training budget.

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