

Volunteering News Spring 2024



Special edition: A tribute to Bob Maggs

Welcome to this special edition of Volunteering News, which is a tribute to Bob Maggs who died on 23 November last year.

Bob led RSVP West as its Regional Coordinator for nearly 30 years and built it into the thriving community of volunteers that exists today. Many of those volunteers, including some from the wider national RSVP community, have shared their personal memories of Bob as a friend, colleague or mentor in the pages that follow. There are also contributions from staff members at RSVP's parent charity, Volunteering Matters, and from other people with whom Bob interacted in the context of RSVP during the last 30 years.

We are grateful to everyone who has contributed in any way, especially to Bob's partner, Jan Snook, who has provided a very personal reflection on Bob.

Our thanks also go to Pam Eastley, the Editor of Volunteering News, who has edited and combined the many written contributions and photos into this beautifully presented edition of the Newsletter. If you do not have, but would like, a paper copy please let us know at office@rsvp-west.org.uk

- Judy Harris, Interim Joint Regional Coordinator and Schools Development Organiser, RSVP West
- Sylvia Carpenter, Interim Joint Regional Coordinator and Surgeries Development Organiser, RSVP West

A personal history of Bob's life by Jan Snook



Bob and Jan on their Civil Partnership Day

After Bob died, I received so many cards, telephone calls, texts and messages from friends, family, ex work colleagues and of course RSVP paying tribute to Bob.

The overwhelming message was that he was going to leave a massive hole in many people's lives, not least RSVP and also that he could on occasions be a bit difficult!

Outside of RSVP, a major part of Bob's life, he had many interests that we shared.

New Orleans jazz was a particular love even though he was a failed banjoist. We spent many years going to jazz festivals in New Orleans, to Bude, Keswick and Brecon, not forgetting the Old Duke in Bristol, making so many special friends.

Oysters were a special feature in New Orleans with Bob and friends eating them by the bucket full. Sadly I didn't share this love or his love of tripe and onions.

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Annual tripe festivals, 28 at least were held at our house. I have to admit this sorely tested our relationship. I can't abide the taste, smell or texture of tripe and had to cope with about 25 people gorging themselves by the bowlful.

Sport was another great love and we went to many rugby internationals over in Cardiff as well as supporting Bristol Bears at Ashton Gate, cricket at the County ground and his beloved Bristol City.

We also shared a love of travel. Fortunately we both loved each other's favourite place, New Orleans for Bob, his spiritual home, and Lanzarote for me where he felt most relaxed. He loved the island.

Other things that Bob packed into his life included:

Flying a glider; he was also an excellent rower and swimmer.

He went to Snuff competitions with a friend and came 23rd out of 24 at a competition in Windermere and never let me forget it each year on our way to Keswick.

He was an avid reader, constantly trying to improve his mind and understanding of our world.

He was political and an ardent conservationist - chairing a wind farm company.

He loved art, music, our garden and his Mini.

Bob suffered from chronic pain and fatigue for many years, with the last 7 years being particularly challenging. He never complained and never let on how bad he was feeling though I think it explained why sometimes he was a bit short with people.

Like for so many people, Covid had a dramatic effect on our lives. It put a stop to travelling, going to sport and Jazz events.

In 2023 we celebrated 30 years of being together (we met in Bude at the jazz festival) and the third anniversary of our Civil Partnership. No matter how bad he was feeling, every day, apart from weekends, he would spend a lot of his time on RSVP. He loved doing this and RSVP was very special to him. He was a great friend and colleague. I think he would be amazed at how much he was loved and respected by so many people and for the influence he had on so many people's lives. I will so miss him.

Jan Snook

Bob and RSVP (Written and collated by Volunteering Matters colleagues)

We celebrate the life of Bob Maggs, the leader of RSVP West, one of RSVP's most successful and established volunteer programmes.

Bob was an extraordinary volunteer organiser, colleague, and friend to many. Coming from a hugely successful career before dipping his toe into the world of RSVP, he slowly built a volunteer army with the aim of creating real change in his local area, leading a team of dedicated older volunteers in Bristol and surrounding areas for 30 years. He was unique in RSVP. He took his organiser role to a level beyond anyone's expectations, setting up a charity (Friends of RSVP West) to support RSVP West as the strong independent entity it is today,

financially independent of Volunteering Matters (previously CSV).

It all started when Bob first heard about RSVP when he worked for IBM as a branch manager in Cardiff back in 1990. He was invited to an RSVP gathering and was so impressed with the organisation that he (IBM) gave the organisation a donation.

After leaving IBM when he was 50, he changed career and joined the Energy Centre in Bristol, managing that for 2 years before deciding that he wanted to make a change and 'give back to society'.



At that point, he received a call from Janet Atfield, the inspirational Director of RSVP at the time. Janet was responsible for bringing RSVP to this country from the States. After enquiring about what Bob was doing, and in the knowledge that he was about to retire, Janet stayed in touch and soon appointed him as Regional Coordinator for Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, and Bath and Northeast Somerset in 1994. Janet became a great friend to Bob, and she continued to inspire him during her time as CEO.

In the early days, Bob's mentor was a Regional Coordinator from London. She would travel to Bristol and accompany Bob in meetings to set up surgery groups and volunteering in schools. His first visit was to a school in St Pauls. The Head, Hyacinth, was another inspirational woman and she welcomed Bob with open arms.

The first organiser Bob recruited was Victor Rawlings, whom many RSVP West volunteers will know. He was a driver in Nailsea and took on the role of organising drivers to take those in need to hospital appointments. And after that, the rest is history, as they say.

As a volunteer, Bob grew RSVP West to what it is today, (which is mighty impressive) with approximately 50 organisers and 550 volunteers. During his time, Bob worked with 5 RSVP Directors, including Denise Murphy and Barbara Locke, who was the last Head of RSVP for Volunteering Matters.



Bob with Sylvia Carpenter, Joan Whitehead, Jan Snook and Yvonne Ogden, formerly of Volunteering Matters

In the words of those closest to him, Bob's secret as a manager was to always get the best people to work with him, which was particularly true of RSVP West, with him leaving a legacy of a truly amazing and talented group of volunteers. He led by example, truly inspiring those around him and set up all the fantastic projects that are still happening today. (Of

course, he is also known for his powers of persuasion!) Amongst his many achievements, Bob's biggest was to have grown and developed RSVP West, using his vast network of contacts, including The Bristol Initiative which Bob helped to set up to encourage every sector in Bristol to work together for the greater good of the area. He was also asked by one of the members to set up support for The Matthew...all lasting legacies that continue to make a positive impact in communities today.

Something Bob believed in is the concept behind RSVP West; a truly volunteer-led organisation run by 'volunteers only' – a model that Bob advocated for with a passion and sold very strongly to others across the region.

Bob was a 'Volunteering Matters' member, which meant the Executive Team and the trustees could call upon Bob for strategic guidance and support. Anne Heal, Volunteering Matters Chair, commented 'His drive to get us all moving was palpable and so very refreshing. And he certainly did make things happen! Bob has made a tremendous difference over very many years



Sue Silvey presenting Bob with a Volunteering Matters award



Bob having received the BBC Make A Difference Award

and I know I speak for both trustees and staff at Volunteering Matters when I say that he will be greatly missed.'

This time last year, Bob was recognised as one of Volunteering Matters' Diamond volunteers and was presented with a Diamond award in the RSVP West Christmas gathering. He was also the runner-up in the individual category of the BBC Make a Difference Awards for Radio Bristol in September 2023. Although he accepted these awards with grace, and despite all his many achievements, Bob continued to be modest and humble, and after all his years of service, he remained fully committed and passionate about his voluntary work until the end.

The word 'outstanding' often gets overused but there isn't a single person more deserving of that label than Bob Maggs. He will truly be missed by all at RSVP and Volunteering Matters.

We will forever be grateful to Bob for his outstanding contribution to the work of our beloved charity – thank you.

Personal Contributions from National RSVP and Volunteering Matters colleagues

Denise Murphy (now Denise Wilkinson) RSVP UK Director 2000-2009

The last time I saw Bob and Jan was at the Hay Festival in Hay-on-Wye over ten years ago. I had retired from CSV (Community Service Volunteers), but he was still going strong. Bob pre-and post-dated me and was an amazing RSVP Regional Coordinator. The range and inventiveness of the volunteering activities he started and supported was without an equal in the UK.

Colin Mason, FOCUS Newsletter Editor, 1997-2023

I'd known Bob and worked with him ever since I joined RSVP over 20 years ago, and what an amazing and charismatic leader he was. He represented everything that our organisation stands for and was everybody's ideal of what was meant by commitment and of all the possibilities of volunteering. For me to say he'll be sorely missed is true but so inadequate. The whole of RSVP will be diminished now that he's no longer with us.

Mandy James, Head of Policy and Impact, Volunteering Matters

I remember when I first visited Bob in Bristol, quite a few years ago. I was blown away by his passion and energy for RSVP West and his commitment to all the volunteers. He drove me back to the station and I was worried he'd got a parking ticket as we got in a bit of trouble when he dropped me off outside! I also worked with him when I did the deep dive review of RSVP, nationally. He gave me a slightly hard time, but not overly so. I enjoyed chatting with him and the output of the review was certainly better for his involvement. Over the years I always liked catching up with him. Very recently, I really was delighted when he appeared so happy with what I'd written about RSVP West for the 2023 Volunteering Matters' Impact Report. It felt like something of a badge of honour.

Emma Thomas-Hancock, Director of Delivery, Volunteering Matters

I can remember attending one of the early CSV (Community Service Volunteers) policy meetings and sitting next to Bob, and I've met him several times since then and had lots of exchanges with him. He was an incredible man. I know he had an amazing career before he even dipped his toe into the world of RSVP. He was unique in RSVP. He had taken his organiser role up to another level and set up RSVP West as a strong entity supported by a separate charity from Volunteering Matters (CSV as we were).

He remained committed to RSVP, and one of the things that I will never forget about Bob was his absolute commitment to volunteer-led volunteering and that being the thing that made the crucial difference for RSVP. There were several times when Volunteering Matters got some grants and Bob was firm that wasn't the way forward, that the thing that made RSVP special was the expertise and the people involved giving their gift of time and not money. I had a huge amount of respect for him around that.

I also had a huge amount of respect for him as a leader, because he was so clear in his communication style and his vision and his strategy for RSVP West, and he never faltered from that. I was always clear where he stood on everything and I'm sure all the people involved in RSVP West were equally as clear. The other thing was his charm - he was such a charming man, always such great company and such great humour as well. He's achieved so much through his lifetime - an unbelievable, incredible man.



Bob meeting the late Queen



Natasha John, Head of Volunteering and Engagement, Volunteering Matters

I've known Bob for over 20 years. When I first started in the organisation, I worked for RSVP for around 10 years. Bob was such a strong character back then and always very involved with lots of activities across RSVP. He was very strong in his belief that it's a volunteer-led programme and there shouldn't be too much staff intervention within that, and there should be lots of decision-making from volunteers.

The last five years I've been much more involved with RSVP West and all their wonderful volunteers. I've always been in awe of what's been built and achieved in the region and was grateful to have a small part in helping support that these last few years.

Bob probably didn't give his respect easily, but he was always so kind to me and respected me as somebody that he came to for advice here and there. I always held that so gratefully with somebody like Bob who was so strong willed and strong minded.

I was given the opportunity in 2022 to present Bob with the Volunteering Matters Diamond Award. I hate doing speeches normally, but it was for Bob. And I thought "I don't think he's going to like it much, but I'm gonna do it". But looking back, I'm so grateful to have had that opportunity. And I think, fingers crossed, that he did like it. I think he was touched by it. I was so pleased to have been part of that and I will hold on to it throughout my thoughts of Bob. It's been a real privilege to work with Bob. We've been blessed to know him, I think.

Peter Hay, member of national RSVP Steering Group

I knew Bob through the previous (RSVP) policy group and various steering groups that have existed over 20 years. He made an absolutely central contribution to RSVP both locally but also nationally. He's been a very important pillar within RSVP and the links previously to CSV.



Bob with a famous Bristol friend

Tony Bell, Co-Chair national RSVP Steering Group

Bob has left a deep impression and an extraordinary legacy.

Personal Contributions from current and former RSVP West Volunteers

Sylvia Carpenter, Interim Joint Regional Coordinator and Surgeries Development Organiser, RSVP West

I first met Bob as a fellow Board member of an NHS Trust for people with learning disabilities. This was 1996 (until 2000) and Bob passionately defended the rights of disadvantaged people and fought for improving their quality of life. Already then, I was in awe of his deeply held views on equality and justice for all.

Twelve years later, we bumped into each other and within minutes of hearing that I had retired, Bob offered me the role of Surgery Organiser, someone who encourages and supports surgeries to recruit volunteers who would help immobile and /or lonely patients - offering them transport, or support and companionship. As always, Bob explained this role with his characteristic enthusiasm and I was immediately hooked.

Throughout all these years, Bob and I met regularly to discuss RSVP issues, but much more enjoyable was to get to know Bob and snippets of his very interesting life. He lived in various countries, had a variety of jobs and many interests and hobbies. All this wisdom I had to extract from him as he never liked to talk about himself, always a modest man. Bob and his partner Jan and Alan, my husband and I became friends and enjoyed meeting – though not quite as often as we all would have liked. Bob's humour was infectious and his company always stimulating.

He was very proud of the calibre and professionalism of his RSVP 'top team' and always grateful to all the volunteers who gave their commitment to the RSVP West Community. In return, he was loved and respected by all of us volunteers, by the Statutory Organisations we were in partnership with, by our donors who he, as fundraiser, had good contact with and by the national RSVP colleagues and Volunteering Matters Staff. I miss his mentorship and his mischievous smile.

Paula Johnson, Organiser for Homecare Lay Assessor Project, RSVP West and national RSVP Steering Group Member

Bob leaves a unique shaped hole that I think will be incredibly difficult if not impossible to fill in quite the same way. Both as a person and in terms of all of the incredible things that he's done.

He was certainly a very strong leader in terms of his views, and he definitely knew what he thought about any topic that came up. But equally I think it's also fair to say that if you had a different view, he would always listen as well, and reflect on the situation, which I think is a very valuable asset for any leader to have.

Judy Harris, Interim Joint Regional Coordinator and Schools Development Organiser, RSVP West and national RSVP Steering Group Member

I met Bob about 6 years ago when I applied to be a school volunteer with RSVP West. I had also ticked the box on the application form for doing admin/organisation, which must have made Bob prick up his ears! He came round to our house shortly afterwards and, such were his charm and his powers of persuasion, I soon found myself agreeing to also become a School Organiser in due course. After that, Bob persuaded me to take on several other roles within RSVP - he was a very difficult person to turn down! He had an unwavering commitment to the aims and ethos of RSVP as well as a strong sense of social justice. Bob was always very supportive of RSVP volunteers and generous with his praise for their input.

I always enjoyed working with him although we had the occasional difference of opinion! I can remember one amicable, but spirited, conversation in which we both tried hard (but unsuccessfully) to convert the other to our point of view, at the end of which Bob said with a mischievous twinkle, "Ah well, rules are made to be broken!" I'm sure that one of the secrets of his success as the Regional Coordinator of RSVP West was his determination to cut through red tape and what he saw as unnecessary bureaucracy to achieve worthwhile outcomes 'at the front line'. I will miss his friendship, humour, commitment and drive.

Joan Whitehead, BANES Schools Organiser

My first impressions of Bob, whom I met more than twelve years ago, was of a person totally committed to RSVP. Moreover, he held a fervent belief that volunteering should be fun and enjoyable. Volunteering for him was not a sacrificial act but rather an intrinsically positive experience for both the volunteer and those they supported. It was a mantra that was to have an important influence on me in recruiting and supporting school volunteers and organisers.

Another of Bob's traits was his undoubted capacity of persuasion which I strove to emulate. Having initially applied to RSVP to become a school volunteer, Bob quickly persuaded me to take on the role of school organiser for BANES then, for a period, the regional role. His own belief in the RSVP West brand was infectious and induced loyalty in those who worked closely with him. He will be greatly missed.

**Mina Malpass, Bristol West Schools
Organiser**

I met Bob first in about 2010. I was on the 'glide path' to retirement and wanted to plan some activities that would give me pleasure and satisfaction in retirement. I was working in a very demanding job at the time and was looking for something which had no (or few) responsibilities. Helping children with reading in schools seemed like a good fit for me.

At that time Bob seemed to personally meet - and possibly vet - all new volunteers. Stepping into the RSVP office, little did I know, but Bob was like a stealth bomber. Before you knew what was happening you were gently being steered towards doing more than you had in mind. He was a master of persuasion. Always positive and encouraging and immensely flattering to the ego. I resisted initially but with Bob resistance was futile.

Before too long I had taken over the schools organiser role for the whole of Bristol as Vanessa Kitchen was back and forth to Surrey to help with her grandchildren and needed to step down. I don't know how Bob had persuaded Vanessa to do such a huge job, but it was really too much for me and we agreed to split it into three. I have been a school organiser since then, with a break during Covid. His persuasion was well founded as I have greatly enjoyed working with my school colleagues over the years, and Bob's influence and support cannot be underestimated.

This should have been enough, but Bob in his deceptively avuncular way found one or two other things for me to 'consider' doing over the years; maybe helping a colleague who was keen to set up something for adults with learning disabilities, because that's what I used to work in, or what about working with Shelter

to get volunteers to help in a homelessness refuge, or could I stand in for Bob occasionally for planning meetings with Age UK Bristol's Lottery funded project - Bristol Ageing Better? Some of these were good experiences, others frustratingly disappointing, but Bob felt we should always give things a go if we could, and his enthusiasm and belief in his team was very contagious.

I miss Bob's smiling welcome, whenever we met, his sometimes excruciating jokes in the Newsletter, and the way he always thanked me for everything I did. I thought I wanted an easy life in retirement but Bob knew better! Thank you Bob, you made me a better person.

**Ken Dolbear, Care Home Lay Assessor
Organiser**

I will never forget the first time I met Bob and explained my ideas for improving life for older people in care homes. His openness to new ideas, his positive encouragement for what I was suggesting and his offer of strong support for what I hoped to do, was truly inspiring. Before Bob came I just had vague ideas about a possible volunteer role in care homes. When Bob left I was left with the clarity about a possible scheme and the enthusiasm and energy to start planning what became the lay assessor service for care homes in Bristol. His consistent and positive support was unwavering throughout my time in RSVP West. An amazing, generous and lovely man. He will be missed by so many and a great loss to the volunteering world.

Shirley Stark, Former Knitting Group Organiser

Bob and I went back a long way. I was one of his first Organisers soon after he took up the position of Regional Coordinator. We met in my garden to discuss volunteering for the Matthew Project, but I went in other directions under Bob's guidance. He was great at delegating, which was part of his job, and I was often at the blunt end, but he always gave his full support.

We went through annual and international conferences, forming the West Waffle (our internal newsletter), arranging get togethers for volunteers, visiting housebound knitters, recruitment fairs and visiting companies etc. We always enjoyed working together and Bob was excellent at selling RSVP although he always said he hated giving speeches!

Kirsty Gibbs, Former Surgeries Organiser

As one of the surgeries organisers for several years, I knew Bob as someone who was passionate about the way in which RSVP benefits both the local community and the volunteers themselves. His enthusiasm and commitment were inspirational. He was very good at finding out the volunteers' strengths and talents and would always be looking to see if there were any other ways they could be of help to RSVP. However, he would absolutely take 'no' for an answer if a volunteer was asked to do something outside of their comfort zone! He will be very sorely missed by everyone whose lives have been touched by him through RSVP and beyond.

Sue I Hughes, Former RSVP West volunteer

When I first met Bob, after applying to join RSVP West, I was feeling a bit down having been made redundant, and having left a volunteer role that hadn't worked out as I expected. Bob suggested I might be able to help out in the office and as Bob usually did, he gradually suggested I take on more and more responsibility. I don't think I would have the confidence or courage to do what I'm doing now without having spent time working with Bob in the office at RSVP West. So, thank you Bob for giving me the confidence and courage to 'retire into action.'

One of the Musical Activity volunteers writes:

'I only met Bob a couple of times but I remember well my first conversation on the phone to the RSVP when I was making enquiries about the organisation and whether to join. His positive phone chat about his personal experience in RSVP was most encouraging and inspired me to apply. His loss to the organisation to all who knew him will be huge and he will not be forgotten.'

And finally, some tributes from the wider community and contacts

Debbie Cook, Former Practice Manager, Fallodon Way Medical Centre

I had very little direct contact with Bob but times that I did speak to him it was apparent that he was so passionate about RSVP and helping to support and serve the most vulnerable members of our community.

If I am correct Fallodon Way was the first Bristol surgery to have a volunteer drivers scheme and it has served our patients well over many many years. Of course this was all before my time but I am aware that Bob was pivotal in the creation and setting up of the scheme here. It has been a valuable service and one which many of the most elderly and less able members of our practice population have benefited from. For that we are extremely grateful and would like to express our thanks to him and all at RSVP on behalf of the surgery, staff and of course the patients.

Debbie Wills, St Monicas Trust

Bob was a real gentleman, whose passion for RSVP and the value of volunteering shone through. I'm sure his dedication and inspiration will be missed by everyone who knew him.

Phil Tomlinson, Create Centre Manager

Bob, as RSVP West, was my first 'New Tenant' to move into the Create Centre just after I started work there. I was quite involved in helping him to set up the office and I was struck by his enthusiasm and charm. Indeed, he very much helped form my early impression of Create being a great place to work; a feeling that I have kept for many years.

Bob was always very generous in his praise and thanks for the small things we did to help him make RSVP a success and I would enjoy our little chats at reception with his mischievous sense of humour. Sadly, Covid put a stop to all that and I miss the personal contact with many Create users but few more than Bob.

Kay Libby, Age UK Bristol | Chief Executive

I first met Bob back in the 1990s when I worked for Bristol City Council and he was leading RSVP. I remember being struck immediately by his passion for helping older people, for RSVP and for life generally. Bob's passion inspired others and he always looked positively and keenly for solutions even to the thorniest of problems. His strong sense of humour always made the difficult seem possible, with a bit of will and commitment. Bob's passion for social justice, his frankness and his knowledge of what works, meant that he was willing to challenge and that is extremely valuable. Who could refuse to at least try to make a difference, when Bob asked you to help - I certainly couldn't. It was always a pleasure to meet with Bob and I like to think that we moved from 'colleagues' to being 'friends'. I miss him very much and expect that I always will, because he was pretty unique and Bristol has lost a great advocate for older people.



If you would like to make a donation in memory of Bob, his two selected charities were the Bath Institute for Rheumatic Diseases (BIRD) and the Friends of RSVP West Region.

BIRD is the successor to The Mineral Hospital in Bath and further information, including how you can donate, is available at Bath Institute for Rheumatic Diseases (birdbath.org.uk).

The Friends of RSVP West Region (charity no: 1170838) provides financial support for the activities of RSVP West. Donations can be made via a cheque payable to Friends of RSVP West Region and posted to:

RSVP West, The CREATE Centre, Smeaton Road Bristol BS1 6XN

or via bank transfer to: **Friends of RSVP West Region**

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