

Volunteering News

Winter 2025



Welcome to our latest newsletter! We hope you enjoy reading our features.

In this issue we welcome a new Regional Coordinator and new joint organisers of our Care Home Lay Assessors scheme. More on pages 2 and 3.

Amanda Naylor and Natasha John— visit to RSVP West

On a sunny (if breezy!) July day we welcomed Amanda Naylor OBE, the Chief Executive Officer of our parent organisation Volunteering Matters (VM), to Bristol.

Amanda's visit was part of her "getting to know you" tour of RSVPs around the country during her first year in the role. Amanda was accompanied by Natasha John, VM Head of Volunteering and Engagement.

Their visit was a great opportunity to showcase some of the RSVP West volunteering projects of which we are rightly proud. We started at the Create Centre, a vibrant environment centre that hosts a range of events and exhibitions, housed in an old warehouse near the Cumberland Basin, owned and managed by Bristol City Council, where RSVP West has based its office space for the last 30 years.

Amanda and Natasha first met our Regional Management Group (Judy Harris, School Volunteer Organiser; Jan Snook and Paula Johnson, Care Assessor Organisers; Hilary Roberts, Office Coordinator; and me, Surgery Volunteers Organiser). We were very pleased to welcome Amanda to Bristol and meet her face to face for the first time; and of course to see Natasha again, whom we already know well and whose support we have valued over the years.

Over refreshments, we shared information about RSVP West's 30 year history, and our ongoing projects; and heard about VM's current and future plans.

Amanda and Natasha then met some of our Surgery Volunteers in the Create Centre Café. A group of our Volunteer Drivers and Befrienders from different GP surgeries talked enthusiastically about the friendships they have made as volunteers, which have far exceeded the expectations of both beneficiaries and volunteers. Amanda and Natasha seemed moved by volunteers' stories, and the volunteers greatly appreciated the interest they showed.

Then it was time to move on to our next venue, and a long-anticipated visit to The Matthew at Bristol Harbourside, a modern reconstruction of the original ship that John Cabot sailed to Newfoundland in 1497.



Amanda and Natasha with volunteers on the Matthew

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The day was crammed and slightly exhausting, but Amanda and Natasha stayed interested and full of questions for all of the people they met. The volunteers who were able to join us learned more about RSVP West and its connection to Volunteering Matters. They remarked on the friendliness and ease of communication with our visitors.

**Sylvia Carpenter, Regional Surgery
Volunteers Organiser**



I am aware of the enormous contribution made by my predecessor Bob Maggs, whom I knew for many years. I don't expect to match Bob's 30 years of exceptional service to RSVP, but I absolutely agree with him on the importance of volunteers enjoying what they are doing and having fun. I'm looking forward to learning more in early 2025 about RSVP volunteering projects, meeting relevant external partners and funders, and considering with others how we can continue to make our contribution in the coming years and sustain a legacy of which Bob and all RSVP volunteers can be proud.



Please get in touch if you would like me to come and see the work you are doing, or want to talk to me about how we can all work together in the future to make sure RSVP continues to thrive.

I would like to thank Sylvia Carpenter and Judy Harris who have acted as Joint Interim Regional Coordinators over the past year, in

addition to their roles as Project Organisers, for all their hard work, and for their support to me since my arrival."

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Care Home Lay Assessor Scheme

We are delighted to report that the Care Home Lay Assessor (LA) scheme is restarting.

Set up in 2014 and led by Ken Dolbear & Jan Snook, the scheme involves volunteer Lay Assessors, visiting Bristol City Council's care homes to provide an independent assessment of residents' quality of life. These assessments contribute to BCC's own monitoring and inspection visits.

Sadly, visits to care homes had to stop during the pandemic and restarting the scheme has been difficult. However, intensive efforts by Jan, Ken, Paula Johnson (the Home Care LA scheme Organiser) and Ruth Hecht (a previous volunteer LA), in discussions with BCC, have successfully revived the scheme under the leadership of Ian Tennant & Pat Taylor who have been appointed as joint Organisers. Both Ian and Pat have a background in social work, between them clocking up an impressive ~ 80 years of experience in a wide range of roles including management, teaching and research in this area.

Some of the previous RSVP LAs have agreed to return to the scheme, and recruitment of more LAs to join the team is being planned. BCC remains committed to the scheme and RSVP is grateful for their continued funding.

Pat and Ian have been involved in a range of volunteering activities since their retirement. Pat represented community issues to a local hospital trust for 6 years and she chaired the governing body of a community run swimming pool. She joins RSVP West this year. Ian was an RSVP West Organiser from 2008-2012, leading the Reading in Schools and GP Surgery Schemes. He writes "I have always been convinced of the immense value of volunteers and I am glad to play a part in the revival of the RSVP Care Home Lay Assessor scheme."

Judy Harris and Jan Snook

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Ian Tennant and Pat Taylor



Meeting of Surgery staff and RSVP West volunteers

November 2024

Sylvia writes "After a gap of about 4 years, we were finally able to restart our annual meetings with staff from various GP surgeries as well as our RSVP Surgery Organisers and Lead Volunteers.

The idea of these 'get togethers' is to exchange valuable information on the different ways volunteers can be recruited and retained and the good work that they do for other patients in their surgeries, namely by driving or befriending elderly or lonely people.

The meeting was well attended although – sadly - some people were struck down by winter viruses and could not join us. Everyone felt that these exchanges of ideas are valuable and it was agreed to get together again on a yearly basis."

If you would like to know more about our Surgery Volunteer Schemes, please contact me at: sylvia.carpenter@rsvp-west.org.uk



Surgery staff and RSVP West volunteers



Some of our Health West Surgery Befrienders

Schools

Neurodiversity Workshop, Bristol – 19 September

In September, a group of approximately 30 RSVP Schools Volunteers from the Bristol and Bath area spent a very useful afternoon training together. We gained a far better understanding of the different types of neurodiversity we might come across in children whilst volunteering in our schools. In addition we were given helpful tips towards how we can adapt our reading and other teaching support styles to best suit these neurodiverse children.

The training was conducted in a friendly interactive workshop format. The first speaker Alison Knapman, a specialist dyslexia teacher at a local secondary school, started by giving us an invaluable on-the-ground insight into how overwhelming a mainstream class environment can be for a neurodiverse child. This involved subjecting us to a timed test with rapid and detailed multiple instructions, contradictory messages and an extreme time pressure – we certainly all felt very overwhelmed by the experience and most of us failed to complete it at all!



Alison then proceeded to explain how this type of experience can be especially negative and demotivating for a neurodiverse child and then gave us some really useful ideas to help ensure that our interactions are not like this but instead are a positive experience.

The second speaker, Alison Boulton, a neurodiversity expert with 40 years experience, complemented the first session by explaining more of the scientific background to neurodiversity, from the types of characteristics that might be observed, to gender variations and how they present. She also gave some very useful pointers for TV documentaries to watch and books to read to further our knowledge.

The overall afternoon was extremely informative and also gave us the opportunity in the tea break to meet and share volunteering experiences with other RSVP volunteers which is always very enjoyable.

Helen Adams, Schools Volunteer, Bath and North East Somerset

We also received this feedback below from another attendee.

"Thank you all so much for a very interesting afternoon yesterday - both speakers were clearly very well qualified in their fields and they both led lively and informative sessions. It was also nice meeting other, fellow reading volunteers".



Alison Knapman and Alison Boulton

3SG Recruitment Fair

Along with some local schools volunteers I recently attended a busy volunteer recruitment fair in Bath.

There were over 40 stalls and around 300 attendees so it was certainly worth having a presence. The Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, complete with all his regalia, opened the event.

Most of our red publicity leaflets, about 30, were taken and a few Newsletters, with a few people saying they might follow them up.

I made some useful contacts. One was with Golden Oldies who run singing sessions across BANES who advocate publicising in parish and church magazines with either an advert or article to recruit volunteers.

I really appreciated the support of our local volunteers that day.

Joan Whitehead, BANES Schools Organiser



Volunteers Tim Davies and Ursula Norris with Joan



An update from the Matthew

Ann May wrote in November:

"The Matthew of Bristol has just completed a successful 2024 Season and the ship will be going on the slip at the Underfall Yard on 19th November for it's Annual Survey and Inspection by The MCA. It will also have it's bottom cleaned and anti-fouling paint applied. Also any repairs to the woodwork will also be carried out. General maintenance will continue during December, January, February and March in readiness for the 2025 Season.

On the 30th November and 1st December the Underfall Yard are holding a Market and some of the Volunteers of the Matthew will have a stall and be selling our books and also running a Tombola. Some of us will be dressing up in Medieval Clothes. During this particular weekend we hope to attract new Volunteers as we do not, at this moment in time have the full quota. In December we will be having our Annual Christmas Dinner, which will be held at the Louisiana Public House in Prince Street.

It is a great opportunity to get to see and talk to all the Volunteers and Trustees.

The Matthew of Bristol wishes you all a Very Merry Christmas and a Healthy New Year."



The Matthew

And finally...



Christmas knitting session

Many thanks to all our contributors. Thank you also to all our volunteers for their continuing sterling efforts.

Volunteering News

The Editor, Pam Eastley pamela.eastley@rsvp-west.org.uk, is always looking for news articles, preferably with a photograph.

Please let Office Coordinator Hilary Roberts hilary.roberts@rsvp-west.org.uk have the names of people (with their email addresses) who will be happy to be added to the Newsletter External Contacts list. Please suggest a name (with email address) of any organization or person that you think might like to support us.



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