

# Volunteering News

Summer 2026



Welcome to our newsletter — we hope you enjoy reading all the latest news.

## Included in this edition:

**Page 3/4 Schools Update** — Graham Purches shares his impressions of listening to children read in school.

**Page 5 Home Care Assessor Scheme Update** — Paula Johnson describes a shared training day involving all the key players in the scheme.

**Pages 5/6 Review of our Recruitment and Fundraising processes** — a group of local university students have been working with Mike Ashworth to help us improve our processes.

**Page 7 Can you help us to run RSVP West** — We have various interesting opportunities for volunteers to take on roles across our projects.

**Page 8 Knitting Group update** — meet some of our knitters and examples of their creations which are often donated to other charities.

**But first, Success in the National RSVP Awards** — meet the successful winners in two categories.



Karen Boutland with Heidi and Alys, both in Year 5

## Success in the National RSVP Awards

We are pleased to say that RSVP West Volunteers have been recognised in the first national RSVP Volunteering Awards, created by our parent charity Volunteering Matters in memory of two longstanding RSVP organisers, including RSVP West's former Regional Coordinator Bob Maggs. Karen Boutland an RSVP West Schools volunteer was the joint recipient of the Bob Maggs RSVP Volunteer Award, for an individual volunteer who has made a significant impact. The Award was made in recognition of Karen's invaluable contribution, dedication and positive influence supporting children's reading at St Saviour's Infant and Junior Schools in Bath since 2015.

### **Karen says:**

'How exciting and what an unexpected honour! When I retired, having been a social worker, I wanted to do something useful in my community. My grandson had just started school at St Saviours Infant school. I contacted RSVP following a friend's recommendation and soon began regularly visiting the school to listen to children read and help them in those early years of understanding phonics. I followed my grandson and then my granddaughter as they moved on to the Junior school. At this level the teachers suggest particular children who are struggling and need extra support with their reading. In addition to the reading role I have been helping with the Archie Project. This forms a link between the children at the school, and the residents at a Care home who have different forms of dementia.

My role is to escort a group of children, with a teacher, to the home, and support them in communicating and playing games like Connect 4 and dominoes with the residents.'



**The Surgery Project Organisers, left to right. Suzanne Powell, Sue Silvey, Sylvia Carpenter, Penny Lewis and Jose Tarnowski.**

The RSVP West GP Surgery Project, whose volunteers befriend patients and provide transport to medical appointments, received the Tony Bell RSVP Volunteering Project Award, for a RSVP Project that has achieved something exceptional in the community. Over its 25 years, patients and GPs have described the service as life-changing, with a lasting impact.

## Sylvia Carpenter, Surgery Schemes Regional Coordinator says:

'We are very honoured to receive this Award. A huge thank you to all our Volunteers who provide an invaluable service to their surgeries and their fellow patients in need. Supported by 4 RSVP West Organisers, so far 23 surgeries across Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset have successfully recruited some of their registered patients as volunteers. We know surgeries are grateful and proud to be able to offer the transport and befriending service to their patients. As we are forever expanding our volunteer schemes into more surgeries, we would encourage any of you interested in joining our little team of Organisers to please contact me under [surgeries@rsvp-west.org.uk](mailto:surgeries@rsvp-west.org.uk). We would love to hear from you.'

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## Schools Update From a recent volunteer



Photo of Graham with a young reader.

When, a few weeks before Christmas 2024, I applied to RSVP West to be a reading assistant in their schools programme, I didn't know quite what to expect. Would I, for instance read to the children, or would they read to me? I had no idea, but, as my whole working life as a broadcast journalist had revolved around words, their use and meaning, I had a reasonable expectation of having something useful to contribute.

Judy Harris (RSVP) organiser was very encouraging, and introduced me to the very friendly staff of Brentry Primary School, when a date was set for me to start there on a Monday afternoon, initially for an hour, helping 7/8 year olds with their reading skills. Little did those brilliant young people realise, but they would end up helping me too. But more of that in a moment.

*Continued on page 4*

The RSVP training session which would have answered many of my questions was not available before my first couple of sessions, so I decided to rely on common sense and a very useful handbook produced by RSVP for helping people like me through any challenges they might face.

It turns out that different schools have different ways of accommodating volunteers. At Brentry on my first day I was given a seat squashed against a wall at the bottom of a busy staircase, and introduced to my first student. As she began to read, I realised that the location was much too noisy and distracting, so I raised this with the class teacher, whose helpful assistant found us a much more suitable space in the library.

Listening to the children read is a reminder of how much I loved reading as a child, and how it helped me to learn to express myself, leading eventually to my career as a journalist, in Australia, Hong Kong, and here in Bristol at the BBC. It's a privilege to be trusted by some of this generation of children to act as a sounding board for their endeavours, and to make helpful comments and conversation where appropriate.

As my last student left after our session today, I said, 'thank you for reading for me' and he turned and said 'thank you for listening'. Wasn't that nice.

**Graham Purches, Reading Volunteer**



Some readers may recognise Graham from his younger days as a BBC presenter from 1972-87.

## Home Care Lay Assessor Scheme

After several months of just about keeping the scheme afloat, thanks to the continued commitment of two long standing Lay Assessors, we held a training day for our 4 new Lay Assessors at the Create Centre on 22 April. The event was led by the Bristol City Council Quality Assurance Manager for Adult Social Services and two members of her team. They provided a comprehensive overview of the complexities of how home care is commissioned, monitored and managed by Bristol City Council. We explored how the work of Lay Assessors provides a real contribution to achieving quality home care provision within the city. Only those care services where something has gone seriously wrong are reported in the press, so it was encouraging to hear that all home care services within Bristol's remit are rated as either Outstanding or Good by the Care Quality Commission.

We also heard from the Registered Manager and the CEO of Caafi, a Bristol based home care provider, about some of the challenges they face in delivering quality care to approximately 70 people being supported by Caafi carers to enable them to continue to live at home. All these sessions provided a useful background in setting the context for discussion about the Lay Assessor role and responsibilities. A lively and thought provoking debate ensued, with all attendees contributing and valuable insights being provided by the experienced members of the team.

**Paula Johnson**

**Lay Assessor Home Care Coordinator**

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## Review of our Recruitment and Fundraising processes

We recently had the pleasure of working with the bright young people from 180 Degrees Consulting, an organisation which provides free consultancy and advice by teams of university students to non-profit and social enterprises. In RSVP West's case, an enthusiastic and diverse project team of University of Bristol students from a range of academic disciplines took a look at our approach to volunteer recruitment and fundraising, which are two of our main priorities for the current year. Individual team members worked on different aspects of these topics, brought back their findings for discussion at online meetings with RSVP West Regional Coordinator Mike Ashworth, and subsequently provided us with a report containing some very helpful information and advice about what we might do. We will definitely be implementing some of their recommendations in coming months. Mike has been impressed by the quality of the work done by the students, and particularly by the way in which they have understood

*Continued on page 6*

Continued from page 5

and responded to our requirements, and tailored their advice to our circumstances as a small, local volunteering charity.

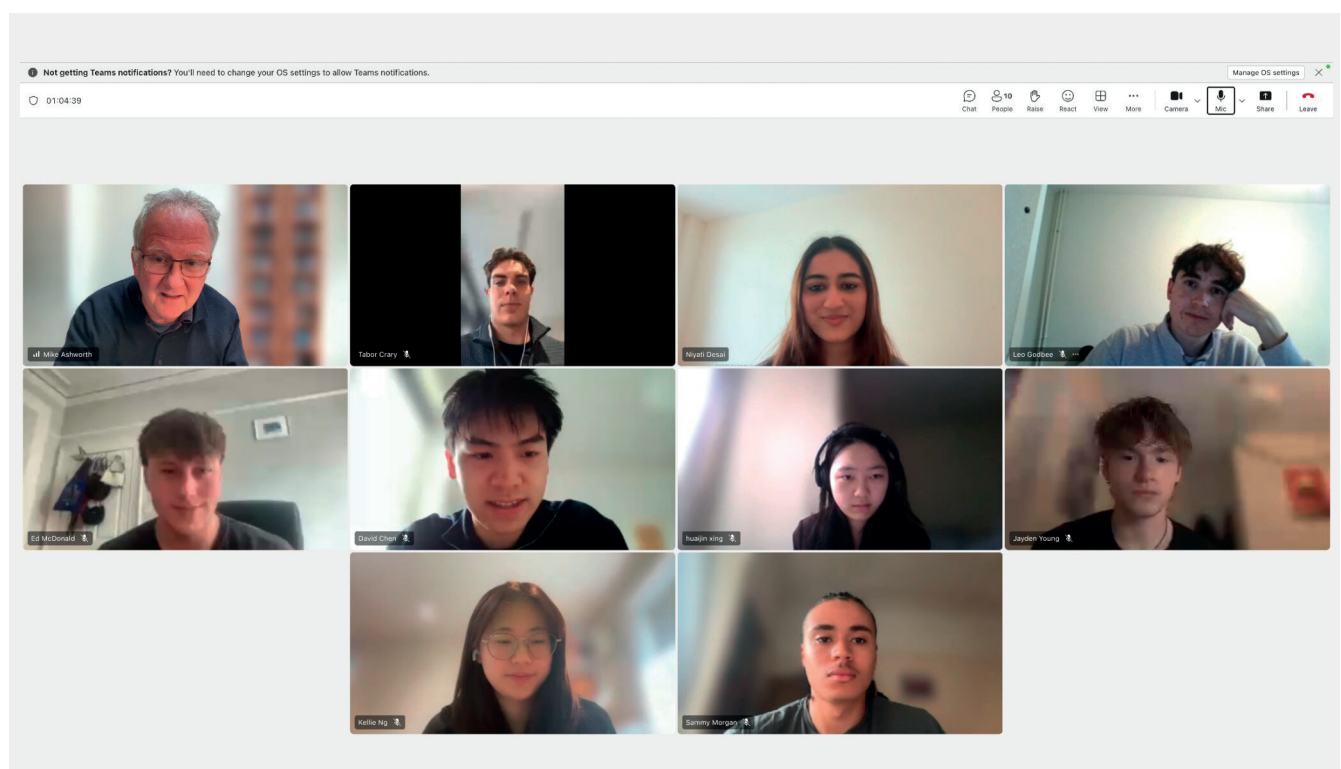
**Mike says:**

‘It has been a pleasure to work with the 180 Degrees Consulting team, and I have been struck by their diligence and the clarity of their analysis and advice. I look forward to taking forward the team’s recommendations, and hopefully seeing the benefits to our volunteer recruitment and fundraising activity as a result. As a volunteering organisation for older people, it’s been great to have this opportunity to bridge the age gap and work with such an able and positive group of young people. I wish them all well for their future — they are clearly off to a great start in their future careers by choosing to give their time and skills to support their local community in this way. I look forward to having the opportunity to work with 180 Degrees Consulting again in the future.’

**Niyati Desai, Team Leader at 180 Degrees Consulting Bristol, said:**

‘We really valued the opportunity to work with RSVP West and hope the recommendations provide useful insights to support future development.’

If any RSVP West Volunteers would like to work with Mike to take this forward, please see the article on the next page requesting help with a number of areas including Recruitment and Fundraising, with information about how to get in touch.



**Regional Coordinator Mike Ashworth (top left) meeting the 180 Degrees Consulting student project team online.**

## Can you help us to run RSVP West?

We are very pleased to report that in the last year we have seen more volunteers joining RSVP West all the time. We now have nearly 400 current volunteers throughout our area, which is the highest level since before Covid.

But this means we really need more help with the organisational and administrative work that goes into supporting the activity of so many volunteers, and our need is becoming more urgent. We have relied for some time on the continuing goodwill and effort of a small group of volunteers to provide this central organisation and support. We need to add to and refresh this group to ensure our sustainability as we continue to recruit, place and support volunteers in local communities.

### We need new volunteers in the following roles:

**Project Organisation:** local area organisers for our Schools and GP Surgery Projects, which support children's reading and befriend or give lifts to patients. Also for our Lay Care Assessors Projects in Bristol, which assess quality of life in care settings for older Bristol residents. You will work as part of a team with the project lead and other organisers, to help place and support our volunteers.

**Office Administration:** people with administrative skills who can offer a couple of hours a week to support our Organisers with office support tasks including arranging meetings, maintaining records, document storage/filing, printing and photocopying, and supporting communications. Some familiarity with IT packages such as Word and email would be useful.

**Website Organisation:** someone with relevant skills and experience to help us work with our website suppliers to update and maintain our website — this could be a short-term project or an ongoing role.

**Fundraising:** to work with the Regional Coordinator to help secure modest amounts of funding to support the work of RSVP West.

**Recruitment:** to work with the Regional Coordinator to help implement a volunteer recruitment strategy.

All these roles offer opportunities to be a part of the friendly and effective RSVP West team, exercising skills you've acquired along the way, and making a valuable contribution to our important voluntary work in the community.

**If you think you would be interested in helping with any of these roles, please email [regionalcoordinator@rsvp-west.org.uk](mailto:regionalcoordinator@rsvp-west.org.uk) saying what you might be interested in helping with, and we can arrange an initial conversation.**

## Knitting Group update

Our knitting group continues to meet up to produce some beautiful and very useful creations.



Above: Knitting group members left to right: Jacky Fuller, Jean Blackwell, Teresa Morgan and Judith Cains.

Left: The knitters' work contributed to the 'Shoe Box Appeal'.

News from our volunteers is always welcome. Please let your organiser know if you'd like to contribute to our next newsletter, due out at Christmas time.

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