

Volunteer Engagement

Just like our athletes miss meeting up, training and having fun at their club, volunteers miss meeting up, helping out and having a chat with other volunteers and athletes.

Volunteering with a Special Olympics Club is an important source of social interaction for volunteers. Keeping your volunteers informed about current and future plans for the clubs is especially important at this time.

Taking time to engage with your volunteers and keeping them updated about activities will help them remain connected to the club at a time when they may feel very isolated. Whether the club is hoping to get up and running again soon, if the club is meeting virtually or if you're just starting to think about how to get back to activity, consider your volunteers.

Many clubs have impressively risen to the challenge of keeping volunteers engaged during the lockdown and below we share what they've been doing and what you can do.

Share Information About the Club

Keep volunteers updated: Send an email, or design a club newsletter to send to club volunteers to keep them up to date with what is going on in the club. If you are not planning on returning to activity just yet, let volunteers know and tell them when you are hoping to re-assess the situation. It may be useful to nominate a member of the club management team to communicate with volunteers.

Use social media: Social media channels can be a useful way to communicate with volunteers and keep them connected and engaged with the club. If you don't already have one, set up a page for the club on a social media platform such as Facebook. It's a great way to update volunteers on any new information and to share photos and videos of any activities going on in the club.

Share resources: Direct volunteers towards resources that may be useful for them. This could include information on what is going on in the local area, any upcoming training opportunities and health and wellness resources.



Engage with Volunteers

Check-in: Keep communication channels open with volunteers. Give volunteers a phone-call or text to see how they are keeping, it doesn't have to be about the club or volunteering. Talking to volunteers by phone regularly can help people to feel valued and shows that you care. It can also help with retention as they are more likely to return after the lockdown.

Acknowledge special occasions: Send volunteers a Christmas card or a text for their birthday, show volunteers that you care about them outside of volunteering.

Bring The Club Together Virtually



Virtual Club: If you are already engaging with athletes over platforms such as Zoom, invite your club volunteers along. They could have some new ideas for activities that could be held over Zoom/Skype, or may be happy to take on a role as a moderator, or support another volunteer to use technology.

Volunteer social night

We all miss the social element of club life before lockdown. (Yes, even those evenings when we had to turn out on a cold, winter's night). Many clubs are busy setting up online training sessions and quiz nights for its members. But why not set up an online social just for volunteers to make sure they feel valued and to remind them of the club's social value?

Online Award Ceremonies



We all like to feel recognised for our contributions so why not set some time aside to virtually honour your volunteers. Categories could include lifetime achievement, new volunteer of the year, young volunteer of the year as well as a whole host of quirky titles so that everyone receives a mention. You could even email them a printable certificate.

Say Thank You



If an online award ceremony is tricky to organise, why not ask your members to come up with a fun thank you video and show them how much your volunteers are missed. Or why not highlight a volunteer every week on your Facebook page?

We are all missing the in person interaction, but we can still keep connected in other ways. If your club is struggling to get set up virtually, reach out to your volunteers. There may be volunteers in your club that would be happy to help out by organising and setting up virtual meetings, and may be able to teach other volunteers technology skills so they can also get involved.

Mental Health and Staying Connected



One method of achieving this balance is to consider the Five Ways to Wellbeing. Think about how to use these in your role as a volunteer as well as in your daily life.

Connect- maintain contact with the organisation you are volunteering with and debrief them about your experience. Stay in contact with friends, family and other volunteers through phone calls and Social media eg Facebook, Zoom.

Be Active- identify a physical activity that you enjoy and build in a goal you can maintain; even a short walk adhering to social distancing.

Keep Learning- taking up a new interest can be a great distraction while at the same time enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence. So in restricted conditions this can be trying out new recipes or trying an online course or tutorial.

Give- as a volunteer you are already giving and enhancing the wellbeing of an athlete and the community you are supporting. So now is the time to give something to yourself. Relax, read a book, listen to music or watch your favourite movie. Whatever works for you!

Take notice- take a few moments to check in on your feelings and emotions.

Learn more at www.mentalhealthireland.ie or www.makinglifebettertogether.com