Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Item 10

Finance and Resources Committee

28 May 2024

Volunteer Resources Annual Report

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide information on Dales Volunteers (DV's): volunteers who are directly recruited, trained and supervised by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority during 2023/24.

Recommendation

2. That the report be noted.

Strategic Framework

3. The information and recommendation contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

    - Corporate Plan Objective 11
      Give people from all backgrounds an opportunity to enjoy and contribute to the National Park by providing at least 7,000 volunteer days per year, with 15% coming from under-represented groups.

Background

4. Every year YDNPA work with DV's across many areas of our work. In the majority of cases DV activities and roles contribute directly to management plan objectives.

Diversity of our applicants

5. The monitoring of applications for the purpose of equal opportunities is a practice recommended by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. This monitoring provides evidence as to whether current recruitment practices, and role offers, are reaching the full spectrum of possible candidates and helps us to avoid possible future problems of allegations of discriminatory practices. We have recently added the following statement in our role adverts, 'We aspire to have a diverse and inclusive programme and strongly encourage applicants from all backgrounds to apply and join us' to outline our commitment to improve the diversity of volunteers.

6. Completion of monitoring forms is not compulsory, and non-completion does not invalidate an application. Therefore, not all applicants complete the form fully, or at all. From the information we have concerning successful applications in 2023/24:

0% of applicants were under 18 years old (excepting 'Young Rangers')
24% in the age group 18-25, this is similar to the previous year (30%).
27% in the age group 26-35, this is similar to the previous year (30%).
0% in the age group 36-45, this is the same as the previous year.
0% in the age group 46-55, this is less than the previous year (7%).
30% in the age group 56-65, compared to 20% in the previous year.
19% over 65 years of age, compared to 10% in the previous year.

7. In relation to disability, 2% of applicants disclosed that they have a disability in 2023/24, this is the same as in 2022/23. With regard to ethnicity, 89% of applicants stated they were of 'White' ethnicity, ('White-British', 'White-English', 'White-Scottish', 'White-Welsh', 'White-Irish' or 'White - other'), 3% preferred not to say and 8% were from BAME groups, this is an increase from 0% in 2022/23.

Diversity of our volunteers

8. We use data provided by the current volunteers to understand the diversity within our teams and to progress towards our targets of having 15% of our volunteer days completed by those who are in under-represented groups. "Under-represented groups" means the following: young people (those aged 5 to 24 years inclusive), minority ethnic groups (all ethnic groups other than 'White – British') or people who consider themselves to have a limiting long-term illness or disability.
   The current profile across our 364 volunteers is:

   12% are under 18 years old (these are our Young Rangers)
   5% in the age group 18-25
   6% in the age group 26-35
   2% in the age group 36-45
   4% in the age group 46-55
   24% in the age group 56-65
   43% are over 65 years of age

   3% disclosed that they have a disability.

   95.1% stated they were of 'White' ethnicity, ('White-British', 'White-English', 'White-Scottish', 'White-Welsh', 'White-Irish' or 'White – other'), 0.86% preferred not to say and 4% of our volunteers are from BAME groups.

9. The Youth Volunteering Officer's role is directly focussed on activity which contributes to this URG target: through the Dales Action Days, Young Rangers and Up Skill Down Dale (USDD) programmes: Last year over 1/3 of USDD participants secured employment and we encourage as many as possible to remain with us as DV's if they so wish.

Recruitment activity

10. Each year recruitment decisions are based on need. We review volunteer numbers against Volunteer Supervisors future plans and our objectives, to determine if we need more to cover retirees who are leaving and/or expand the team.

11. For the period 2023/24, the Authority recruited 37 new volunteers, this compares to 31 in 2022/23. They were recruited in the following areas:

15	Up Skill Down Dale Programme	3	Historic Environment Team
7	Learning and Engagement Team	2	North Ranger Led Team
4	DCM	2	Wildlife Team
3	South Ranger Led Team	1	West Ranger Led Team

Training and development

12. Core Training for all volunteers: All new volunteers complete the Authority's 'National Park Awareness' training, this is typically provided through face-to-face sessions though we also offer a shorter online version of the course for those volunteers who will just be doing a small number of days volunteering with us (and for whom the full training would be disproportionate). All volunteers also attend online 'Admin Induction' sessions as early as possible so that they have all the basic information they need on things like using our Better Impact online system, basic health and safety, claiming expenses etc.

13. Additional Training: It is the Volunteer Supervisors' responsibility to determine the additional training needed for each role, beyond the core training all receive. The Volunteer Team work with the supervisors to deliver this via courses (both in house and with external providers), shadowing, briefings and information packs.

Volunteer turnover

14. Some degree of volunteer turnover is inevitable as people move away, find new interests or some will retire or the role becomes too physically challenging for them. Historically, we have seen a high degree of loyalty from our volunteers and that has continued: 9% of our current volunteers have been with us for over 20 years and a further 20% for between 10 and 20 years. This means a quarter of our current volunteers have been with us for over 10 years. This number has been relatively consistent year on year.

15. During the period 2023/24, 61 volunteers resigned, 4 passed away and 6 moved away from the area. This is a much higher number than in the previous year (18 in 2022/23). We highlighted that this was likely to be the case in our 2022/23 report (pt.18) as we had identified a number of volunteers who are registered with us but have done none or very little volunteering. This year we investigated and removed the records of all those who didn't respond to our check-ins. This means the data we now hold regarding volunteer numbers is more accurate and only actively engaged volunteers remain on our books.

16. The length of service of the 71 people who stopped volunteering in 2023/2024 is shown below:

Length of Service	Number of leavers	% of leavers
<1 year	2	3%
>1 year but < 2 years	14	20%
>2 years but < 3 years	19	27%
>3 years but < 4 years	3	4%
>4 years but < 5 years	2	3%
>5 years but < 10 years	20	28%
>10 years but < 20 years	8	11%
>20 years	3	4%

17. As stated in 2022/23 we believe we are beginning to see a reflection of the wider societal changes affecting volunteering. Despite taking on new volunteers to replace those who are retiring our volunteering day numbers are remaining relatively stable. This is likely to be attributed to the fact that many of our older volunteers have tended to contribute a high number and consistent level of volunteering days for many years and those who are replacing them don't view volunteering in the same way. Our new recruits are, mainly younger and our roles now more flexible, designed to fit the lifestyle of those who have other responsibilities e.g. work or family commitments. This means that whilst our volunteer numbers are generally expanding the number of days they do is not increasingly proportionally.

18. As is normal some of the volunteer roles we offer have changed this year: The Trees and Woodland Team have ceased their monitoring programme and the Historic Environment Team no longer monitor buildings at risk using volunteers due to the supervising staff member leaving. This year also saw the completion of the Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership Project. Additionally, although still a mainstay of volunteering, how some of the Ranger Teams work with volunteers has changed - with some now finding it more practical to go out with an individual rather than larger groups. We have introduced some new roles too; for example, in wildlife monitoring and built on the National Park Management Plan Partnership (NPMPP) Youth Representative role to develop new ones for the NPMPP Drafting Groups.

Feedback from leavers

19. We send an online survey to volunteers when they leave; it is not compulsory that they complete it. 7 leavers provided feedback this year, this was largely positive and stated their reasons for leaving were circumstantial.

Financial Implications

20. None. Continuation of the standard Volunteers Budget (F400) which covers expenses, training and materials associated with volunteering.

Legal Implications

21. No specific ones beyond those generally associated with working with volunteers.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

22. Please see paragraphs 5 to 9.

Climate Change Implications

23. In an attempt to reduce the carbon emissions associated with volunteering we have been encouraging more car share amongst volunteers and supervisors to be more targeted in their use of volunteers geographically.

Conclusion

24. The Authority actively manages its Volunteer service to ensure it is effective. It also ensures equality of opportunity, with volunteering roles covering a variety of work programmes and contributing directly to achieving management plan objectives.

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