



VOLUNTEERING WITH ALL ABOARD CHARITY SHOPS

With the present-day cost of living crisis and a significant shift into sustainable consumption, the importance of charity shops is something that cannot be undermined. They are so much more than what meets the eye, as well as selling second-hand goods, they are spaces for volunteers and customers from different cultures, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds to come together.

What did you do?

Initially volunteering at All Aboard for what was supposed to be a short three months became a year. Now four years later, I've returned to the very same branch to continue giving back. Having previously been trained, I was already familiar with my surroundings and the general procedures but still ensured I asked questions about any changes made, to stay up to date, linking to the practice of continued professional development. As a result, I've developed a deeper understanding of how much behind-the-scenes effort is needed to manage the shop's upkeep but also how incredibly rewarding it is to work alongside a dedicated team, with a purpose beyond personal gain, to make a difference to the community by raising money for various charitable causes.

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How have you found it?

Each volunteer's different skill set echoes the dynamics of a clinical multidisciplinary team. We work together to tackle a myriad of everyday tasks such as sorting through donations, pricing items and serving customers in an attempt to meet daily targets set by the organisation. Each day is completely different, you never know what unique challenges you may be presented with and what new skills you will develop along the way. From meticulously sorting through a pile of tangled jewellery, organising new displays or managing finances by cashing up the till at the end of the day - there is always something for everyone.

This fast-paced ever-changing environment has better enabled me to become more resilient, multi-task and retain information under time pressures thus generally becoming more adaptable in different situations. Over my many months of volunteering, I've predominantly worked behind the till to serve a variety of people from different walks of life thus developing my general cultural competence... I ensure they feel welcome by smiling or holding the door open. It's been insightful to listen to customers share life experiences, ask for my opinion about items they're buying or simply hear how their day is going. Through these encounters, I've been able to effectively broaden my manner of communication to best suit the various individuals I interact with which in turn has taught me to better manage customer expectations, deal with difficult customers and possible conflicts to provide solutions.

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How has your experience volunteering influenced other aspects of your life?

By observing more experienced members of staff operate the shop, I've had a multitude of positive role models. My manager, in particular, is someone I look up to, having worked at our specific branch for nearly two decades, she has become a pillar of the local community with many coming into the shop just to visit her. Her leadership style and kindness are admirable and have fostered a supportive working environment, making sure our opinions are not only heard but encouraged, tasks are delegated fairly according to everyone's unique abilities and our contributions are valued which in turn has brought about a sense of collaborative purpose within the team.

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Through this, I've grown more confident when sharing my suggestions, can rely on others if I feel unsure about a task, often give guidance to the younger volunteers, and have become a reliable team member who can be trusted to take on various responsibilities such as managing the shop floor alone.

From starting as a GCSE student to now being at university, there have been learning curves along the way but I've had the privilege of growing up volunteering in our ever-evolving shop. I'm grateful to have amassed valuable experiences and skills that I will be able to transfer to other aspects of my life.



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