

MILLENNIAL VOLUNTEERS



What does the new generation of volunteer look like?

Volunteering is enjoying a resurgence in the UK, with research suggesting that 1.3 million new volunteers stepped up in 2018. Just as the landscape itself is constantly shifting – new social issues and funding cuts transpire all of the time – the volunteers themselves are also changing. Millennials are bringing a different set of generational values, attitudes and skills to the challenges at hand.

We spoke to one of the nonprofits that we support in London, the Hackney Winter Night Shelter (HWNS), about the changing face of their volunteers. An organisation helping to tackle homelessness in one of the most deprived boroughs in London, HWNS is a local organisation and neighbour to Crowd's London HQ. We were keen to couple our millennial insights with their inside view to help organisations and charities better connect with this next generation of volunteers.



Q&A
LUKE WALTERS
Volunteer at HWNS

How do you volunteer your time?

I help prepare the shelter dorms in the mornings before I go to work, which mainly involves setting up camp beds with bedding and towels for the guests.

How did you get into volunteering in the first place?

To be honest, I was looking for something to make the most of the shorter days in winter. It sounds arbitrary, but I could no longer run in the mornings with it being so dark and, because I have a short commute, I didn't have an excuse to get up before 8am anymore, which felt very lazy! I was looking for something with a bit more purpose, so started searching for volunteering opportunities.

Sounds good to us! So what motivates you to get out of bed in those dark winter hours?

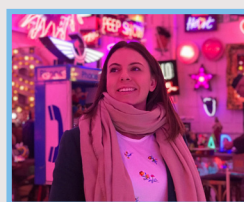
For me, volunteering is all about trying to understand something I have very little knowledge about. We pass people on the streets everyday and know nothing about their background, who they are, or how they got into that situation. Homeless individuals just become another statistic on the news, and I wanted to learn more about the reality of it. Volunteering has really opened up my eyes – that's why I keep doing it.

Why do you think other millennials choose to volunteer?

I think there's a huge feeling of social responsibility amongst young adults – you can see it in the way we vote. We want to help and get involved with the world around us. Also, we have more time and less responsibility – renting for longer, having kids later etc – so it's a perfect time to get involved in society.

How do you think volunteering benefits you?

I think it's a good way to meet like-minded people. The coordinators are amazing and give so much energy without asking for anything in return; it's inspiring to work with people like that. (I'll also definitely add 'volunteer' to my CV next time I update it!).



Q&A
COURTNEE ARCHER
Volunteer and charity events coordinator

What's your role at the shelter?

I arrange all fundraising events – from our annual comedy night, Belter For The Shelter, to our participation in the Hackney Half Marathon. When volunteering, I'm either whipping up breakfast or chatting with the shelter guests over dinner.

In a nutshell, why do you volunteer?

When I first moved to London, I realised how bad the homeless epidemic was and wanted to do something about it. My motto is 'be the change you want to see' and, when faced with homelessness on a daily basis, it's very hard to ignore. Everyday the guests inspire me with their stories and strength. You'd be surprised how many people face homelessness and how easy it is to end up on the streets – London is an expensive city! Volunteering helps me 'check in' and remind myself to be grateful for my own situation and support network.

Do you think others share your motivation for change?

I think millennials, in particular, are definitely more aware of the issues in their city and want to do something about it. They're the next generation of leaders and this is a way for them to shape their future. We actually have an abundance of young adults wanting to volunteer; I think they all want to be part of the change.

That's a good thing, right?

Sure – the good thing is that younger generations want to get involved. They're also able to bring a range of new skills to the charity. The bad thing is that they tend to only do it for a short amount of time, or as a one-off. Millennials are at a busy time in their lives and it's hard to find people who want to commit to volunteering long term.

What 'new skills' spring to mind? How are millennials shaking up volunteering?

We're in a world of portfolio careers where people constantly build on their experience, so millennial volunteers now offer a range of skills – everything from events management and marketing, to admin and medical knowledge (and that could all be one person!). Not only that, but millennials seem to be all about connections as well. Someone always knows someone who can get a venue to sponsor us, or a new restaurant to donate food. They're all about networking. And I'm not just talking about social media - volunteering is a great way of meeting like-minded people and I have made some great friends working at the HWNS.



Q&A
EMMA BANKS
Chief coordinator at HWNS

What motivates you most in your role?

I run one of the shelter nights – managing the rota, organising groceries, sorting the laundry – but, most importantly, I'm a point of contact should the volunteers need any support on the night. It's the energy of all the volunteers and the fact that we're making a difference together that I find most motivating.

How do you think volunteering has changed over the years?

For starters, issues like homelessness are more on people's minds now: there's more of it and it's more talked about. This means that more people want to help. The sheer amount of volunteers has increased – nowadays, it's a case of 'surprised face' if someone doesn't volunteer anywhere.

Tell us more...

Volunteering is just much more common these days – and issues like homelessness are very top of mind, so they attract more volunteers, and often younger people, too. Young adults, especially, are more likely to see their friends helping, so they want to help. I also think there's a lot of political and environmental pressure on millennials today, so they're keen to do their bit. Volunteering helps them feel that they're making a difference; it offers them validation and a chance to 'do good'.

How do you think millennials are changing volunteering?

For starters, they have more spare time and energy than other generations. But what's really exciting to watch is their huge collective mindset – there's a clear sense of 'together we can', which wasn't as powerful when I was growing up. These guys are more about working together than previous generations, and that togetherness can make a real difference.

If you're interested in volunteering at Hackney Winter Night Shelter, please visit www.hwns.org.uk for more information.

FOUR MILLENNIAL MOTIVATIONS

(and how to turn them into a force for good)

Conscious consumers

It's well documented that millennials care about doing good in the world, and they're also ready to hold brands and institutions to account when they miss the mark. They look for opportunities to make a difference, however small, and organisations have the power to get behind causes millennials care about.

**Passion projects**

Keen not to be defined by their 9-5, millennials use their spare time for the things that make their hearts sing, be it side hustles, hobbies or worthy causes. But they're not here to mess around - they want to ensure they maximise their time and keep things moving forward. Facilitating spaces in which millennials can share their skills and impart knowledge will help them to feel like they're having a genuine impact.

Lovers of local

Millennials want to feel like they're contributing to their immediate communities, despite often being seen as responsible for their gentrification. Tap into this and ease tensions by helping to forge connections between millennials and the communities they live in – as long as it's authentic and sensitively done.

Digital natives

Born into the advent of the internet, their interconnectedness has granted them a global outlook and acute awareness of world issues, while also making them tech-savvy. Charities can take advantage of this and use millennials to help better their online presence and streamline processes through technology.