National Museum Wales partnered with the Volunteering Spirit Wales (VSW) project as part of their Food Festival at St Fagans National Museum of History in September 2016.

The free two-day festival first took place in 2011, showcasing a wide range of Welsh food producers. The 2016 event built on the success of the previous years, including beekeeping, fly fishing and flavours from the iron-age through to 1950s favourites amongst the attractions on offer. The VSW pilot was the first time that St Fagans had recruited new volunteers in the running of the festival. The previous year, a small number of the museum’s team of regular volunteers had helped out at the festival. At the 2016 festival a total of 20 volunteers were needed for each day of the two-day event. In total, 30 individuals volunteered for either one or both of these days in roles that included handing out maps/leaflets and directing visitors, carrying out visitor surveys and topping up the water in the cow milking activity.

The VSW pilot project aims were to develop methods of volunteer involvement that were informed by best practice particularly in terms of inclusion and equal opportunities. The food festival, focussed on three from a total of five VSW project themes.

These were:
- management of and communication with volunteers
- support and training
- Recognition

VSW aims to increase access to volunteering and to ensure that the quality of the experience, support and follow-up that volunteers receive at events is of a high standard. The project will pass this learning on to event organisers in order to help improve volunteer management at future events.

1 The other two project themes were recruitment and diversity, and referral and follow-up. These were explored by other project partners.
Visitors enjoy the festival atmosphere

**OVERVIEW: WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

- **Briefing sessions** before the event were useful for those who could attend, but are not always convenient for volunteers to make a separate trip out to a site (for example not all may have transport, and many of the volunteers at this event were young people under the age of 25).

- Volunteers were managed by the National Museum Wales Volunteering Team, and specifically by the Volunteer Coordinator (VC). Learning from this pilot included the reflection that the management of volunteers should be done by the event management team at future events in order to integrate volunteers better.

- The **volunteer hub** was well used. It consisted of a barn room kitted out with chairs and was a place to relax. It was a popular place to take breaks and eat lunch.

- The provision of **goodie bags** as part of volunteer recognition was well received by volunteers.

**WHAT WE DID AND HOW IT WORKED**

**Recruitment and diversity**

Recruitment for volunteers at the festival was done mostly through social media. In total, thirty volunteers were recruited, although some volunteered on both days, making a total of forty individual one-day shifts. Almost all of the volunteers were recruited from outside of the museum’s existing volunteer base, although some were members of the Museum’s Youth Forum. The majority of the volunteers were aged between 14 and 20. It had not been a specific aim of the recruitment campaign to recruit young people.

At the food festival the previous year, the museum had found that their ongoing volunteers did not want to volunteer at this event. When asked why, the response was that as it is a free event they would rather attend as a participant, and then volunteer at one of the pay-to-enter events (such as Christmas) instead.

VSW is funded by Spirit of 2012 and has been delivered in partnership, led by [Wales Council for Voluntary Action](https://www.wales.gov.uk) (WCVA) from 2015 to June 2017. The other five pilot events were carried out in partnership with [Partneriaeth Awyr Agored](https://www.awyr-agored.org) (The Outdoor Partnership), [Disability Sports Wales](https://www.disabilitysportswales.co.uk), [Run4Wales](https://www.run4wales.com), [Voluntary Arts Wales](https://www.voluntaryarts.org.uk) and [Yr Urdd](https://www.yrurdd.org.uk).
Management, communication and support

Communication with volunteers prior to the event was done via email.

Volunteers were also invited to attend a briefing session during the week before the festival, to find out more about the role they would be doing. At the session, the Volunteer Team talked through briefing material which had been emailed out beforehand. Approximately half of the volunteers attended the session. Volunteers said that the session had been useful, and several volunteers extended the length of shift they felt they would be able to do, based on a better understanding of what would be involved.

The overall management of volunteers on the day of the festival was done by the Volunteer Coordinator and another member of the Community Engagement team.

Volunteers were also supported by members of staff in supervisory roles during the food festival. These members of staff were working at the festival in roles other than their usual paid role at the museum. At future events, the museum plans to include all staff roles for the festival at the briefing too, as there was information covered that would have been useful to them, and also this would have been an opportunity for everyone to meet and develop more of a ‘one team’ feeling.

The National Museum Wales does not currently have an online database for the management of volunteer data, and is interested to introduce a suitable system in the future. One of the other VSW case studies, The Outdoor Partnership, has focussed on the development of a bilingual volunteer management system.

Recognition

All volunteers were issued with a ‘goodie bag’ on arrival. This was partly a way of saying thank you, but also included useful information, including a map and answers to frequently asked questions. It also contained chocolate. Those who came back to volunteer on the second day, received another bag.

Volunteers were given a 20% discount card, valid for use in any National Museum Wales shop and cafes for 12 months.

Follow-up and referral

All volunteers were sent a copy of the post-event questionnaire by email, but none chose to complete it. Feedback received in person and by email to the VC indicated that volunteers did not think that the questions seemed relevant to the event.

All of the volunteers have gone on to join the museum in an ongoing role, or to join the Youth Forum.

KEY TRANSFERABLE LEARNING/ SUMMARY POINTS

- The briefing sessions that were held the week before the event were found to be useful, according to verbal feedback from volunteers to the Volunteer Coordinator (VC). Reflection by the VC following the event was that these briefings may have had increased impact had they also been attended by staff who were going to be working at the event. Many of the staff were performing roles other than their...
usual paid role, and so would have benefited from the briefing. This fits with a more general theme around creating more of a ‘one team’ approach to the festival.

The provision of a ‘hub’ for volunteers to relax and eat lunch proved very successful at this event. Most of the volunteers spent their lunch break there, relaxing and socialising with other volunteers. This experience has prompted the Museum to begin the process of creating a permanent volunteer hub space at St Fagans for regular volunteers.

It is important to tailor information to make it appropriate to the age of the volunteers.

Volunteers were advised to either bring their own lunch or money to buy lunch at the festival. Some of the volunteers had underestimated how much the food at the festival might cost, and so in future this will be made clearer in the briefing, eg, ‘food is available on site, a pizza will cost approximately £8’. It is also likely that vouchers for discounts on some of the food stalls will be provided as part of the recognition package next time.

The experience at the food festival has contributed to a change of approach to the management of event volunteers at St Fagans. The Event Management Team staff role profiles have been changed to incorporate the management of volunteers. At future events, the Volunteer Management team will assist in the planning for and the recruitment of volunteers, but on the day management will be carried out by the events team. These staff members are going to undertake volunteer management training.

At the time of writing, St Fagans is in the process of planning a music festival. They plan to utilise the learning from the Food Festival in their involvement of volunteers at this new event.

**LINKS TO RELATED ARTICLES**

St Fagans thank their food festival event volunteers

My experience of a work placement