

What a fantastic year it's been, with staff from all areas working together to make a difference in the community.

Newsletter

Summer 2012

## Ongoing activities

A new opportunity introduced this year to act as sighted guides in conjunction with Action for Blind People and RNIB, has proved quite popular, and several staff have received training to commence buddy activities shortly. One member of staff has already aided a visually impaired individual with their shopping, which if unaided would have proved exceptionally difficult for them. Serving lunch at SIFA Fireside's drop-in centre for homeless and alcohol dependent clients continues to attract staff volunteers on an ad hoc basis throughout the year. Due to a lack of funding, SIFA was forced to reduce their provision to clients to only one meal sitting per day. However thankfully, usual business has been resumed and staff are again able to participate in this popular activity.



You can register as a volunteer at any time, and there are opportunities throughout the year which are posted on the website and in Aspects. I am always looking for new volunteering opportunities covering a range of activities and themes, so if you have any ideas, suggestions or particular interests, please contact me.

## Thank you!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each volunteer for their commitment and enthusiasm shown when undertaking activities this year, and for making the Scheme such as success. I look forward to welcoming you, and hopefully new volunteers, on exciting challenges in the forthcoming academic year.

## Entitlement

All staff are entitled to two working days (15 hours) paid time off each year (subject to line manager's approval), to undertake approved volunteering work. There is also an option to continue to volunteer beyond these two days, using your own annual leave or flexi-time. If you do this, the University will match this hour for hour, up to two more days.

## Why does Aston have a Staff Volunteering Scheme?



The Staff Volunteering Scheme was developed as part of Aston's commitment to community engagement.

### The benefits of a staff volunteering scheme are numerous.

#### For Aston:

1. It raises the profile of the university in the community – with students, local people and even potential employees.
2. Staff make excellent ambassadors.
3. Increases employees' commitment and motivation, promotes team building and loyalty.
4. Enhances employee's skills including communication, teamwork, leadership and decision-making.
5. Creates a positive culture which improves recruitment and retention levels.

#### For Staff:

1. Build new skills and meet new people from around the University and externally.
2. Make a difference to the community in which you work.
3. Add variety to your work.
4. Explore new challenges and situations.

## Ad-hoc challenges

Staff have participated in a number of volunteering activities since September 2011. In November, staff undertook their first decorating challenge at Newtown Community Centre. The facilities for local groups to learn new skills, hold community meetings and deliver recreational courses were tired and unwelcoming. With the challenge of sprucing up three workshops and the adjacent corridor, ten staff spent the day preparing and painting walls and woodwork to give the centre a fresh new look which the Centre Manager was delighted with. Users have since commented that the facilities are so much more inviting and usage has increased as a result.

Staff have also spent the day at a local stretch of canal renovating the area to encourage greater use. In partnership with The Waterways Trust, British Waterways and CSV Environment, staff cleared unwanted vegetation, re-defined pathways, planted climbers and shrubs, and removed litter. Staff had a great day in the sunshine and fresh air, and welcomed the opportunity to meet other staff from across the university.



If you are interested in becoming a volunteer or would like to find out more about the activities supported by the volunteer scheme, please contact:  
Sarah Hosten, [s.j.hosten@aston.ac.uk](mailto:s.j.hosten@aston.ac.uk),  
tel. 0121 204 4607, main building room 728.