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Volunteering is in our DNA

So says Witton Lodge Community Association. With nearly 50 volunteers last year and current volunteers ranging from 19 years to 94 years old, they have a point. Read their celebration of community volunteering on pages 12-13.

Community Transport, now 50 years old, also relies on volunteers to help it provide accessible transport to thousands of isolated older people in the region – helping them gain access to vital services. See pages 10-11.

In a couple of months we’ll be celebrating Volunteers’ Week 2016 and you can find out how to get involved in this annual, national celebration of volunteering on page 4.

If you’ve been tempted to try crowd funding to attract resources for a project, take a look at our feature on free-to-use community-based crowd funding platform, CrowdPatch, on page 7.

On page 8 you can read the third in our series about digital transformation in the voluntary and community sector, taking a look at your digital footprint. Then skip to pages 14-15 for a look at the legal and policy issues concerning the privacy of workers’ email, social media and internet browsing.

Birmingham Community Development Scheme has been empowering individuals and communities for five years now and has had particular success using mentors. It’s an approach now employed by its offshoot youth organisation, Birmingham Youth Empowerment Project, which you can read about on page 9.

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Sewing seeds for the future with SeedPods

If one seed has the potential to grow a forest, then just think what a SeedPod filled with creativity can achieve!

The local SeedPod is made up of 26 emerging leaders and founders of 14 social enterprises. Each demonstrate passion and creativity in creating bold models of care specifically targeted to:

- Health and social care (reducing loneliness/isolation and promoting physical activity)
- Environment (horticulture)
- Lifelong learning (building resilience)
- The arts (making/creating).

From healthy eating to growing, upcycling furniture, learning musical instruments, adult colouring, mindfulness, befriending, and connecting with others – all of the ventures have demonstrated a real passion and commitment to improving local health and wellbeing.

Mariam and Michelle, Seedpod participants from Second Pedals CIC, remarked, “We enjoy being part of Seedpod and find the sessions inspiring [offering] a creative platform that enables us to focus, grow and develop to be the best version of ourselves and our vision.”

As a social enterprise, PoCZero is committed to improving health and wellbeing. The organisation says that evidence has demonstrated that helping people to help themselves strengthens community resilience. Such activity reduces the burden on the NHS and other statutory services, delivers better outcomes while increasing innovation and efficiency.

We aim to achieve this goal by connecting social ventures with skills and expertise to:

- Target defined cohorts
- Implement robust data capture
- Evidence impact and value for money
- Strengthen sustainability and
- Support the ventures to become ‘investment ready’.

PoCZero: sarah.huxley@poczero.com / www.poczero.com

Men surviving change in an ever changing world

As part of Men’s’ Health Week 2016, ManMade – The conference throws on the table an invitation to all to better understand the reasons why many men may think they would be better off dead.

The event will examine the impact of suicide by men, what solutions are already being developed and implemented – as best practice – as well as provide a forum where new possibilities can be considered and new partnerships developed.

This national conference is key in light of the fact that the most recent national data for suicide shows, yet again, that over three quarters of all suicides are by men and the solution cannot be left just to specialist health services – suicide prevention is a phenomenon that is everybody’s business.

Organised by Forward for Life and Common Unity and chaired by Birmingham councillor, Paulette Hamilton, ManMade – The Conference welcomes keynote speakers including mental health champion and vlogger, Jonny Benjamin, National Mind Ambassador Rohan Kallicharan and Chief Inspector Sean Russell. The conference also offers delegates a range of highly engaging and thought-provoking workshops that highlight just some of the forward thinking practices that support survival in modern day Britain. These include Cruse Bereavement Birmingham, the national charity Family Action, Hertfordshire-based Hector’s House and Birmingham based specialist counselling service, Citizen Coaching.

The event is supported by Birmingham City Council and Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council’s office of public health as well as West Midlands Police and the Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. It provides delegates with the opportunity to engage in the challenge of suicide, being the biggest killer of men under 50 in the UK.

The conference takes place in Dudley on 13 June.
**Work in Progress becomes good practice centre**

Despite challenging times for the arts sector, Birmingham-based arts organisation, Work in Progress (WiP), is going from strength to strength and has recently been awarded national Good Practice Centre status by the Arts Award team at Trinity College London.

This annual accolade is given to a handful of organisations across the country and is a way of acknowledging their good work supporting children and young people to achieve Arts Awards.

Delivering the Arts Award is a key strand of work for WiP and in 2015 alone they worked with over 130 children and young people aged from 7 to 25 (including a large number of children in care), helping them achieve awards from Discover to Gold. At the higher level this counts as points towards university.

Director Ruth Richardson said, “We are delighted to have received this accolade. It means a lot that we have been recognised in this way and by the national Arts Award team."

Regional Arts Award Manager, Arts Connect’s Helen Frost said, ”Work in Progress thoroughly deserves their status as an Arts Award Good Practice Centre. Their innovative way of working with young people to stimulate their creativity and build their leadership qualities is inspirational and a model others can benefit from.”

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**Volunteers’ Week 2016 is nearly here!**

1-12 June is Volunteers’ Week. This national celebration of all things volunteering is an annual event where we will be recognising the achievements and contribution made by volunteers across the city.

This year it has been extended by an additional five days so more people than ever can be involved, and the end of Volunteers week will be coinciding with The Patron’s Lunch on Sunday 12 June.

Once again we will be hosting the Volunteer Awards Ceremony on Tuesday 7 June, and this year’s venue will be Blakesley Hall. The Nomination Categories will be going Live from 4 April – so watch this space and make a note in your diary!

Tell us about your events so we can promote them via our website and in our Friday e-bulletin. Or why not use the opportunity to promote new volunteer opportunities with your organisation?

Volunteers’ Week events: volunteersweek@bvsc.org | Help with recruiting volunteers: volunteerbirmingham@bvsc.org

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**Practical mindfulness in the workplace**

If you could find a way to help you and your team become more resilient, better focused and confident, able to make good decisions and manage stress would you be interested?

Most of us have heard about mindfulness but few of us will have tried it for ourselves. BVSC’s new course offers the opportunity to get to understand what mindfulness is, practice using it and importantly explore ways in which it will help you at work.

The course will include some fun, practical exercises that will help participants fully understand the theory and how it will help in their own workplace. They’ll also receive a personalised mindfulness action plan.

National Careers Service at the Volunteer Centre

BVSC is now offering National Careers Service advice sessions every fortnight on Thursdays from 10am to 4pm. The advisor’s name is Michael Patrick and all appointments can be booked through the Volunteer Centre.

NCS can help and support clients in a number of ways, from producing a winning CV, providing a skills health check, preparing for interviews to helping with job search techniques.

National Careers Service session appointments: 0121 678 8839
Patients and staff are helping to raise awareness of the “brilliant” care at Birmingham’s John Taylor Hospice by starring in posters across the city.

Five people who the hospice cares for, their families and members of staff appear in a new advertising campaign which launched Birmingham-wide this spring.

Day hospice visitor, Cat Mackrill, is among the models and says she was delighted to be asked to take part in the project.

Cat said: “I could never say no to anything that helps to promote John Taylor Hospice – they’ve been brilliant to me from the word go and I’d shout it from the rooftops if I could get up there.

“I feel really proud to be able to give something back, it’s an honour really. John Taylor really gets it. They get me and that matters.”

Led by the hospice’s brand and media Team, the promotional campaign captures a typical day in John Taylor’s Heart of the Hospice, which Cat visits once a week.

Head of brand and media, Diane Parkes, said: “Working with the people we care for, their families and our staff on this campaign has been a great experience. We’re touched to know that Cat has enjoyed taking part in the campaign.

“There’s something really special about seeing the people we care for so directly involved in sharing our story because we can have no better ambassadors than the people who have experienced our care.”

Each of the posters feature photos of day hospice visitors, their families and staff taking part in activities at John Taylor along with the slogan ‘We believe end of life isn’t end of living’.

Diane said: “At John Taylor Hospice we feel very strongly that end of life isn’t end of living – we’re here to make every moment matter for everyone we care for. We hope these fun photos and the message they carry will help us to raise awareness of hospice care for people across the city.”

The campaign features posters in bus shelters and on local trains. It also includes the back of two buses (a number 11 and a number 966) and two taxis. People in Birmingham are being asked to let the John Taylor Hospice team know when they spot any of the adverts.<n
“Everyone can be part of the campaign by looking out for our posters, branded buses and taxis,” added Diane. “If you spot them, send us a picture via Facebook, Twitter or email and we’ll give a prize to the best photo.”

Spot the dots – share your images of the John Taylor Hospice advertising campaign from around the city and be in with the chance of winning a £20 M&S Gift Voucher.

The advertising campaign follows on from the recent Love Your Local Hospice initiative, a collaboration of 16 hospices across the region who divided the cost of a television advert to promote hospice care.

John Taylor Hospice: www.johntaylorhospice.org.uk / enquiries@johntaylorhospice.org.uk / @jthospice / @jthospice
Young families welcome Small Changes charity shop

Changes Charity, which supports people to lead healthy and productive lives as they maintain their recovery in the community, has opened a charity shop which specialises in children’s items.

Small Changes, located on Lyndon Road, Solihull (off Coventry Road), opened in February and sells a range of children’s clothes, babywear, school uniforms, sportswear, shoes, toys, books, nursery furniture and equipment.

Karen Davenport, Retail Shop Manager, said: “Parents think it’s a great idea. They are so impressed with the quality and range of items we have for babies, toddlers and older children. Every item donated to us is checked and cleaned on site and all the funds raised will support our work with local people and families affected by drug or alcohol addiction.”

Small Changes is the first shop to be launched by Changes Charity, which Karen is currently recruiting volunteers for, and the Changes Coffee shop will soon occupy the empty unit next door.

Karen adds: “Both shops will be connected so that mums can enjoy a coffee before they collect the kids from school, or pop in on their way home and catch up with friends while the children have fun in our play area. We want to create a family friendly environment where everyone is welcome. Somewhere people can meet, volunteer, access services and gain skills.”

Karen, Changes Charity: 0121 742 9616 / www.changes-uk.com / Small Changes Charity Shop / @SmallChangesB92

The Gap Arts Project wins cash for refugee arts initiative

City youth-led arts organisation The Gap Arts Project’s newest venture, Beyond Borders, is the latest winner of SOUP, a Birmingham-based community fundraising initiative.

Birmingham SOUP is a community-led fundraising event where people pay £5 on the door, in return for food and a vote. Four projects are then pitched to the crowd and a winner takes home all that is collected.

Beyond Borders, is a week-long project of events, talks, workshops and arts designed to bring people of all backgrounds together to share experiences, question their understanding of the named theme and learn from interactions. By doing this, they hope to strengthen the network of individuals and companies that work with refugees in Birmingham and to start collaborations between them.

Organisers from The Gap Arts Project explained: “We would like artists to critically and creatively respond to the theme of ‘borders’, in light of the project’s focus, but leave this open to interpretation. Contributions can be of any material or discipline, so long as they can be easily hung on a wall.”

The money raised from the sale of the artworks will go directly to supporting young refugees and asylum seekers living in and around Birmingham, by providing bikes and cycling equipment in order to combat isolation and dependency. The Gap Arts Project also aim to host cycling events with a special invitation for Beyond Borders Bikers.

You can find out more and get involved with both projects via The Gap Arts Project website.

Karen, Changes Charity: 0121 742 9616 / www.changes-uk.com / Small Changes Charity Shop / @SmallChangesB92

brap publishes report on the impact of austerity

Equalities and human rights charity, brap, has published the final report of its Making the Cut project. This follows two years of speaking to organisations working on a variety of issues – and with a range of people – about the impact of cuts to front-line services for vulnerable people in Birmingham.

Like many organisations in the sector, brap is apprehensive about the long-term impact of austerity measures on traditionally excluded groups. Although a number of studies have been conducted to consider the impact of public service spending cuts on individuals and services, brap was concerned that some of the equality implications of this were not being picked up sufficiently.

In a city like Birmingham that has historically faced systemic patterns of inequality in some key public services – and is also facing higher budgetary pressures than some other localities – issues of inequality associated with austerity measures are a central concern. Making the Cut has helped generate a better understanding of the impact of local public service re-design on front-line services over time.
Successful crowd funding with CrowdPatch

Fundraising

Crowd funding – a concept that has been around for a very long time – essentially involves a crowd of people, each giving a small amount of money to a project which when added up gives a large enough fund for the project to go ahead.

The reason crowd funding is becoming so effective nowadays is the impact of the internet, making it possible to reach so many people – a much larger crowd.

Some really good examples of success through crowd funding campaigns have come from schools. Traditionally, a school might hold a fête or fundraising event – those people that attended were the only ones who could give money. A school now can hold an online crowd funding campaign and reach a much larger pool of potential funders: parents, grandparents and other family members, former pupils and even the local business community. This gives the possibility of raising significantly more funds.

CrowdPatch: community-based crowd funding

CrowdPatch is a free to use community-based crowd funding platform that raises money for social causes and business ventures in the community. We also recognise that volunteering time can be every bit as valuable as giving money and offer project owners the ability to raise funds, attract volunteers and share their messages to people who may want to help. To find more about crowd funding and CrowdPatch, visit the Crowdpatch website. You can also contact the dedicated Birmingham Patch leader, Emily Allen. 

A 3D printer for Forest School

Forest School raised the funds for a 3D printer via CrowdPatch. For the first couple of months nothing really happened. The school then realised they needed to be proactive and ran an active campaign – sending out letters to the parents and asking them to give a small contribution. Forest School offered a great reward – a 3D printed selfie – which encouraged parents to give a little bit more in order to win the reward!

We found 90% of contributors gave £20 – the amount required to win the reward. Within two weeks the school not only reached their target of £805 but well exceeded it, enabling them to buy extra material and resources to make the most of their new 3D printer.

Forest School’s case shows the importance of being active in promoting your campaign to your audience and also how much a good reward can change your campaign.
How do you review your digital footprint?

This is the third article in our series about digital transformation in the voluntary and community sector.

Tweaking some practices: it’s not all or nothing

Having discussed wider and strategic issues in the previous articles we thought it necessary in this article to provide some practical guidance for organisations about how to incorporate such activities into their operational activities. This is a process of making modifications and not necessarily making wholesale changes within your organisations or practice.

All organisations use some form of IT and therefore have an existing digital footprint. Organisations use technology to monitor activity and therefore have access to specific and bespoke data.

Websites are commonplace for most organisations and provide an excellent shop window for services and activities but do we make the best use of them, including to meet and collaborate with others?

As a sector we are now hearing a great deal about digital transformation - there are individuals and organisations that would advise us as to how to maximise our digital presence and data footprint but, unless organisations understand and own their own journey, they will not get the full benefit of the activity. This article therefore provides some guidance as to how to review your activity.

We therefore pose a number of questions and observations for you/your organisation:

Do you know what data you keep?

Do you believe that you could improve how you manage your digital footprint? Have you:

- Discussed with your board how technology might help with your work?
- Identified staff processes and progress?
- Identified any time constraints?

Digital footprint

- Does your digital footprint tell your story. celebrate your successes, and promote the numbers (people, events, networks, outcomes) you achieve, the issues you address, the impact you make?
- How do you market or promote your organisation? Leaflets, networking, blog, social media – Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, website.

Digital by design

- What data do you keep about your activities, your users, your funding sources, other?
- How do you present your data? In annual reports, in funding applications, in other publications?

Exploring your digital presence

We have divided an organisational digital presence into two distinct categories: fixed and fluid. Fixed digital includes websites and other IT processes. While the organisation has input into such activity, such resources can be inflexible, often purchased and maintained externally, used to promote and record organisational activity.

Web presence (fixed): What does it say about you, what information do you share, who is/are your target audience(s)? Develop a digital presence that tells your story, using narrative and data to represent impact and outcomes that are being achieved, and not just the information that represents how you fulfil contract obligations. What does your website say about your organisation?

Social Media (fluid/flexible): Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp. What does your use of social media say about your organisation? With social media, often controlled and administered in-house, you have more flexibility over your digital presence and can use this media to portray more intimate insights into the organisation.

- Who manages your Facebook page, LinkedIn organisation page, Twitter account, website content? You, your staff and board can decide what stories get told using as many or as few of these platforms as make sense for your organisation – go where your users are.
- Do you measure the impact of your marketing? Blogpost reads, e-bulletin circulation, Facebook followers, leaflet distribution, LinkedIn connections, Twitter followers and re-tweets, website use – create a baseline using analytics and monitor changes so you can stay in the loop.
- You can interact with peers in this area. Peer to peer learning with other non-profits about using technology to achieve outcomes.

BarCamp Non Profits unconference brings together people from tech and digital with people from non-profits (charity, academic, government, arts and culture, etc) to exchange ideas and learning: www.barcampnonprofits.com
Net Squared Midlands is tech for good, with regular free events for people interested in using web or mobile technology for social good: www.meetup.com/NetSquared-Midlands

NFP tweetup – informal evenings of thought-provoking sessions, sharing and discussion focused on how not-for-profit organisations can make the best use of digital media and technology: www.facebook.com/NFPTweetup

VCSSCamp is an unconference for people from VCS local infrastructure organisations to meet and talk about the ways they use digital tools and technology in their work: www.vcsscamp.wordpress.com

Managing data
Data management tools (some are open source) allow you to have more control over data about your organisation, your area and your issues. Your organisation could make use of free online tools such as Open Street Map (maps and mapping tools), Tableau Public (data visualisation tools), Trello (project management tool), Wikimedia (graphics), Wikipedia (encyclopaedia).

This is a process of making modifications and not necessarily making wholesale changes within your organisations or practice.

Timeline and activity
Engaging in the above activity may look like a great deal of commitment; it isn’t. We would estimate a maximum commitment of 20-30 minutes per day. Make it a part of your weekly timetable and activities and develop like a great deal of commitment; it isn’t. We would estimate a maximum commitment of 20-30 minutes per day. Make it a part of your activities and not necessarily making wholesale changes within your organisations or practice.

Empowered people and communities
Birmingham Crime Diversion Scheme Ltd (BCDS) was founded in 2011 in Ladywood, Birmingham. Initially, the focus was on mentoring ex-offenders and those at risk of offending in a holistic fashion.

BCDS founder, Clifton Cameron, explained how it all began: “I started this company in my living room, with my job seekers allowance in my hand, thinking there must be something I could do to make the community a better place.”

One of BCDS’s key aims is to improve the wellbeing and quality of life of people in their local community and in Birmingham. They frequently run community clean ups and were featured in the Birmingham Mail in September 2014 when we found 700 needles, drug paraphernalia and methadone bottles in Highgate Park.

In 2015 the organisation changed its name to Birmingham Community Development Scheme Ltd to better reflect the wide range of services they offered for families experiencing difficulties, unemployed people, ex-offenders and others who are at risk of being marginalised and excluded from society. At BCDS they believe in the empowerment of the people and their community and want to bridge the gap between the communities and the neighbourhood.

Mentoring has always been at the heart of what BCDS does and in 2013 they started Birmingham Youth Empowerment Project CIC (BYEP), to work specifically with children and young people. BYEP and BCDS both hold the Approved Provider Standard from the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation, are registered with the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy, on the Skills Funding Register of training providers and are members of the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce. Twelve of their staff members are level 2 mentors and one has ILM level 5 coaching and mentoring accreditation. In addition, six are also ‘Money Mentors’, qualified to give financial capability advice.

Both organisations deliver employability training for those with extensive barriers to work, including low or no educational attainment, low literacy and numeracy skills, lack of English language skills, offending background, low confidence and lack of motivation. They currently deliver the Community Work Placement Programme through the Department of Work and Pensions and have been successful helping a number of clients back into sustainable employment.

BYEP offers after school and holiday clubs for children aged 5-15 through an education service, Turn The Page. For those at risk of exclusion or already excluded at school they are currently in the process of setting up an alternative education service, BYEP New Start. There are specialist programmes such as the I Can workshop, girls-only female empowerment and crime prevention seminars, as well as early intervention and prevention projects created specifically for students who are disruptive and disengaged.

BCDS and BYEP have grown from a small team of volunteers to having a strong workforce of paid staff and volunteers supporting. Over 900 clients benefitted directly from their help in 2015. They work closely with local universities to offer student placements and have developed strong partnerships with other community organisations as well as residents of the neighbourhoods in which they work. The organisations are passionate about empowering others and actively encourage ex-service users to volunteer with them, becoming peer mentors to help others in similar situations.

Data events coming up...
14-15 May Open Data Camp 3, Bristol: two-day, weekend event, entirely devoted to Open Data: www.odcamp.org.uk/
Imagine being in your home, alone, all the time. What difference would it make if you were able to spend even one day each week with others, perhaps just doing your shopping, visiting the health centre or at a social event?

For thousands of people across the Midlands facing isolation in their older years or who experience mobility issues which prevent them from travelling alone, this is made possible by Community Transport.

Community Transport was set up right here in Birmingham in 1964 using its first vehicle, an old army transporter, to help people access the services that they needed. It has grown to operate over three separate regions, from Newcastle in the northeast, Oldham and Salford in the North West and across five sites in its homeland, the Midlands.

**Fully accessible and user friendly vehicles**

Today our fleet of accessible minibuses are used to provide transport for a wide range of passengers; including assisting patients to access dialysis treatment, to ensure that young people get to school on time and to take people living remotely to shops, to health centres, to day centres and further afield.

The fleet includes fully accessible and user friendly vehicles offering between 11 and 16 passenger seats. The vehicles are also available to assist local community groups to support their service users by providing access to vehicles that they can use to take people on trips. It is often too costly for smaller groups and organisations to buy, insure and maintain their own vehicle, so Community Transport takes the strain. Our trainers work with local groups to ensure that they have the skills to secure wheelchairs and to drive the buses safely, making this a more affordable option for groups to use our vehicles in providing their own services, without the need to pay for a driver too.

**Professional and volunteer drivers**

Drivers are in uniform, with identification, are friendly and helpful and are all trained and DBS approved. Some are paid drivers, and Community Transport also works with a large number of volunteers who are keen to join a professional team in helping those with mobility issues. Enquiries from new volunteers are always welcome as a wide and diverse range of volunteers brings a wealth of experience and skills that only adds to the strength of the organisation in meeting the needs of local people.
Although Community Transport is entering its sixth decade, it has seen some challenges and changes over the years, and has met them head on. The many changes to transport legislation, cuts in local authority spending and increased need for services have all provided opportunities to learn and adapt.

Community Transport competes for work as a social enterprise, and operates as a social business ensuring that services are affordable and available for the communities in which we operate.

Community Transport also sells donated furniture and household items from salesrooms in Birmingham, Coventry, West Bromwich, Wednesfield and Bilston towards making transport services even more affordable.

Our drivers are very experienced, and, we all know, experience usually comes with age. The average age of our staff team is 54 and Road Transport legislation means that the process for younger drivers to become minibus drivers is more involved than it used to be, creating a challenge in attracting younger people to join Community Transport as either a volunteer or paid driver.

The Community Transport difference
So, what difference does accessible transport make?
Our passengers are the best people to tell you that.
"The service from Community Transport means that I don’t have to rely on family and friends all the time – I have my independence".
"This is a lifeline – I would be a prisoner in my own home if I could not access the transport that I need to just do my shopping and pay my bills. I meet up with people that I know on the bus, and the driver is so helpful and friendly".
"My driver helps me to the door when he drops me off, and always makes sure that I’ve locked up before he leaves – no public transport would provide that service"

Just last year, we provided over 69,000 passenger trips in the Midlands alone.

If you are interested in discussing accessible transport options for your service users, or want to help your community by volunteering as either a driver or to work in one of our furniture salesrooms, then please contact us.
You may have furniture that you no longer need and want to donate – all we ask is that it is clean and reusable, and that anything upholstered has fire retardant labels.

Community Transport: 0121 771 1520 / www.communitytransport.org / CommTransp / @CommunityTransp
WLCA has volunteering in its DNA

Rajae (age 19)
Rajae has volunteered for WLCA at many different events. With Rajae’s enthusiasm and social media skills, he was offered a position as communications assistant in February.

Since leaving college, I have been volunteering and it has really helped build my experience and allowed me to get this job. I started volunteering for Witton Lodge Community Association last year, and because I enjoy working with computers, I am really pleased to get a paid job with the organisation and gain all this new experience.”

Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA) was set up in 1994 as a result of the hard work and enthusiasm of volunteers in Perry Common, north Birmingham.

The foundation for the organisation was established by volunteers from the local community, as a response to the demolition of 908 defective ‘Boot Houses’ – homes that were constructed with concrete around a steel frame. These formed the majority of homes on the Perry Common estate.

When residents were told their homes would be compulsory purchased and demolished, back in 1989, they decided to take action. They did not want to be dispersed and moved to the four corners of the city and were determined to keep the Perry Common community alive.

Their efforts were rewarded and the tenacity of their campaigning lives on through Witton Lodge Community Association (WLCA), an organisation with volunteering in its DNA.

Since the association was set up all those years ago, it has become an integral part of the local community, helping steer the demolition of the old Perry Common and the rebuilding of the new – ensuring that local people were, and still are, at the heart of this improvement – something that is still taking place today.

With a wide range of community activities – everything from the annual Spring Into Spring festival, family fun afternoons and Christmas Lights Switch On, to a wide range of environmental, employment and health and wellbeing projects. WLCA has built on the success of the Velvet Community Orchard, a thriving community orchard in Witton Lakes, and plans to turn a former park-keepers cottage into an environment hub. With all this going on, there’s always something for everyone on offer.

Haleema Khathoon, volunteer co-ordinator at WLCA, commented: “All this work would not be possible without the help and support of our enthusiastic volunteers. Last year alone we had 47 volunteers, supporting our 18 strong staff team. It is really good to see many of our volunteers going on to paid employment and familiar faces are still helping us out, gaining experience and sharing their skills with the local community.”

Witton Lodge Community Association: 0121 382 1930 / www.wittonlodge.org.uk / @WittonLodgeCommunityAssociation /
**Will (age 22)**

Will started volunteering for WLCA early last year, so that he could gain practical workplace skills, whilst also studying at Wilson Stuart College. With his hard work and enthusiasm, Will has been a great help at the office and thanks to this he has been given a Work Placement, for three days a week, with the organisation.

> Volunteering gets me out of the house, I get to meet lots of new people and it keeps me young.”

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**Mary (age 94)**

At age 94, Mary is WLCA's oldest volunteer, but that certainly does not limit her energy or enthusiasm. Since starting volunteering with Witton Lodge in 2003, Mary is extremely active, helping the organisation daily, with everything from being a Resident Director on the Board to helping out at community events, being a welcoming face at the reception desk at the very busy Perry Common Community Hall – and not to mention her involvement in local projects such as Community Watch, Duckling Watch, helping at the Community Orchard and lots more.

> Walking is one of my passions and I have enjoyed walking round the parks in this area for years. We don’t realise what’s on our doorstep, so I decided to become walk leader for the Red Hot Chilli Steppers so that everyone in the community can enjoy and experience these beautiful open spaces and make new friends while getting fit and healthy.”

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**Linda (age 73)**

Linda leads the Red Hot Chilli Steppers walking group, volunteering every Monday to take local residents on a scenic and healthy walk around the local area and local parks: Witton Lakes and Brookvale Park. She also helps out at many of our community events – and makes a very good lemon drizzle cake!

> I am really enjoying working at Witton Lodge. All the staff in the office are really welcoming and friendly and I enjoy speaking to customers at reception and over the phone. This work is really good for my self-esteem and I am learning new skills – working on reception, computer skills, helping out with organising events – which I am hoping to use in my future career.”

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**Balal (age 22)**

Balal started volunteering after taking part in a Destination Work employment course, helping 18-24 year olds into employment. With a keen interest in computers, social media and graphic design, Balal put his skills to good use and went on to gain full time employment.

> After getting my degree in media and communications, I was at a standstill. I had no work experience to get a paid job. The experience I gained will forever be valuable to me. I will always be grateful to all the staff at Witton Lodge for welcoming me with open arms.”
Employment law: privacy in the workplace

When can an employer view an employee’s private email, social media and internet history?

A ruling this year by the European Court of Human Rights (Barbulescu v Romania) held that it is not a breach of an employee’s privacy for the employer to view his or her private email.

So when can and should an employer look at an employee’s private email, social media accounts and internet history, and what can they do if they don’t like what they see?

Employers need clear rules

First of all, the decision in Barbulescu depended on the existence of contractual rules which said that the employer could view the employee’s email. So there must be a clear statement in the contract or ICT and Social Media Policy which entitles the employer to view all emails sent on the employer’s email account and to view an employee’s internet history. Make sure that employees know about these rules by circulating the policy and providing training.

Why would an employer be interested in an employee’s emails, social media or internet history?

For lots of reasons, in particular, to investigate allegations of:

- Harassment of colleagues or service users
- Spending too much time sending private emails or browsing the internet for personal use
- Downloading unlawful material from the internet;
- Sending discriminatory emails
- Breaching the organisation’s ICT rules, eg accessing dating websites in work time, forwarding joke emails, online gambling, and forwarding viruses.

Most of my employees communicate by social media not by email — can employers view this?

Obviously you can only view employees’ social media accounts if their privacy settings allow it. But even if they do not, you might be sent copies of extracts by other employees complaining about harassment, or informing you that the employee is criticising the organisation. Employees should be aware that this can be used as evidence against them in disciplinary proceedings.

In a 2012 case, Teggart v TeleTech UK Limited, Mr Teggart was dismissed for posting vulgar comments on Facebook about a female colleague and a tribunal said Mr Teggart’s privacy rights had not been infringed and that he had effectively given up his privacy rights in any case since the comments could be copied by others and forwarded on.
Is it OK to check a candidate’s social media profile before recruiting them?
No. It is best to recruit on the basis of objective, verifiable and comparable information. If you do not you will be open to criticism of personal prejudice and legal claims of discrimination and you may also miss out on excellent candidates.

However tempting, try to avoid delving into a candidate’s personal life online, just as you would not ask them about this at interview. Professional sites such as Linked In aimed at professional development and employment opportunities are exempt from this.

Employers must act reasonably
Even given the rights described above, employers must still act reasonably. So in deciding whether to discipline or dismiss they must consider, for example:

- Was an employee remorseful and apologised to anyone offended by their actions?
- Did the employee remove offending comments quickly?
- Was there any evidence that an employer’s reputation was seriously damaged?
- Could the employee be expected to have known the impact of their actions?

Guidelines for good employers
- Have a good ICT Policy. This should set out clear rules and consequences in relation to using the internet, email, social media, and texting etc, including references to colleagues and the employer.
- Have a good Equality Policy which makes clear that harassment will not be tolerated, including online harassment.
- Circulate policies regularly, provide training and keep policies reviewed and up to date.
- Take prompt disciplinary action were necessary and do not be put off by employees citing privacy rights.
- Investigate any allegations properly and obtain evidence where possible.
- Follow correct disciplinary procedures.
- While dismissal may be appropriate for posting obscene comments about a colleague, or seriously criticising an employer, always consider the circumstances of an individual case before deciding on an appropriate sanction.

Elizabeth Scholes is an independent employment law and HR consultant who specialises in the third sector. A former employment solicitor, Elizabeth has worked extensively with charities and voluntary organisations, and has also been a trustee at two large Birmingham charities.

Elizabeth advises on a wide range of employment matters including contracts, dispute resolution, dismissals, redundancies, and charity restructuring. She also provides HR and employment law training. Get in touch for further advice and details of her competitive charity rates. You can also sign up via her website for regular e-bulletins on employment law.

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