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"A great networking opportunity and a fantastic knowledge sharing experience"

Annual celebration attendee, 2014

Welcome to City Action – what we do

City Action is the free volunteering brokerage service linking City businesses with local community organisations and social enterprises in the City and neighbouring boroughs.

As skills sharing experts we work closely with our members on a two year basis to understand their volunteering objectives and accurately match business skills to the needs of local community organisations. This helps us facilitate high impact, mutually beneficial, one off and longer term volunteering opportunities and partnerships.

But we're not just a brokerage. We focus on providing bespoke consultancy advice to businesses that do not have a dedicated resource to develop volunteering programmes to set up the building blocks of volunteering, including setting a strategy, staff engagement and measuring impact. We also run employee volunteering knowledge sharing events and visits to local community organisations.

City Action is run by two project managers; Noa Burger and Linda Wickstrom.

City Action is part of the Corporate Responsibility team at the City of London Corporation and is one of a range of programmes which support businesses to engage with corporate responsibility and their local communities.

"City Action was absolutely fantastic in helping us establish a partnership. Noa helped us clearly define what our strategy and approach was and then put forward suitable partners. Noa was available throughout the whole process and acted as an adviser to us. Having told her of what we wanted from the process, she helped us connect the dots. We simply couldn't have done it without her".

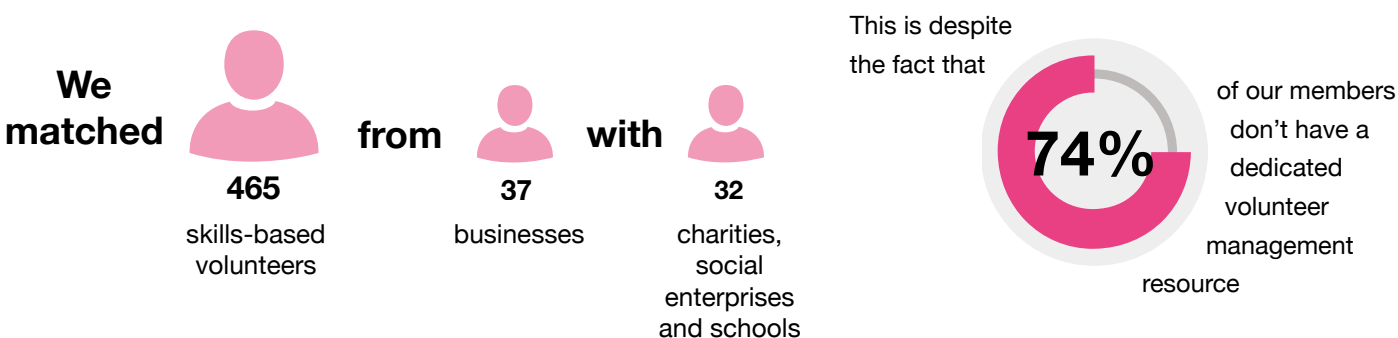
Daniel Evans, GCS Ltd.

City Action provides valuable knowledge and insight sharing opportunities through its annual events. The chance to network with other organisations and to meet with local charities and community organisations has been invaluable.

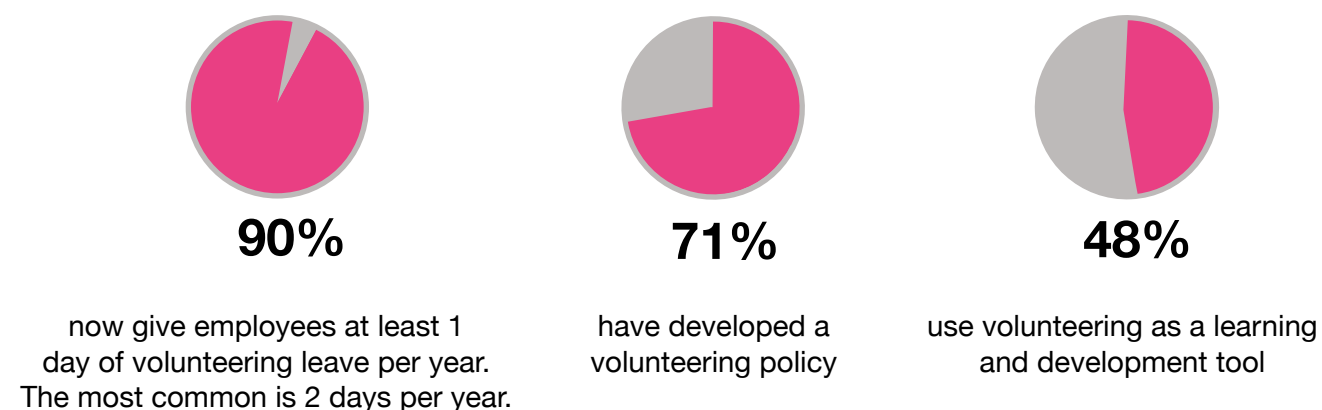
Hatty Whitworth, Buzzacott

Our year in numbers

Our impact on our business members

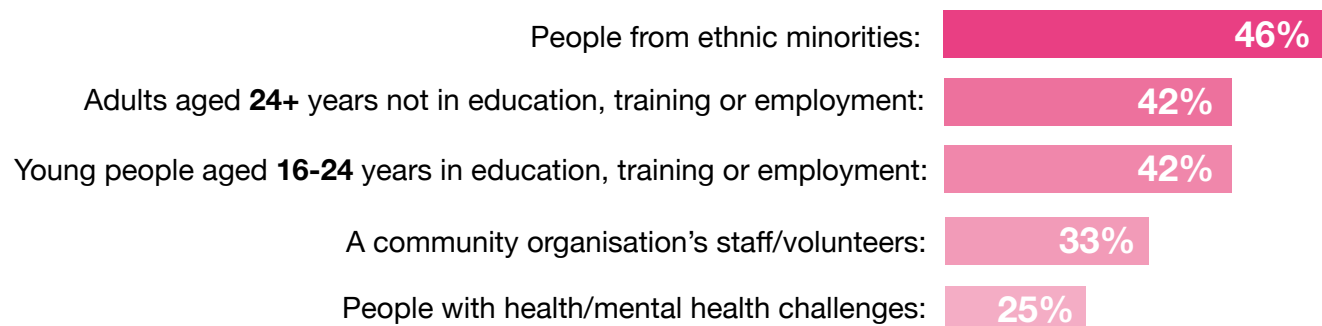


We supported our business members to set up the building blocks of their employee volunteering programmes:



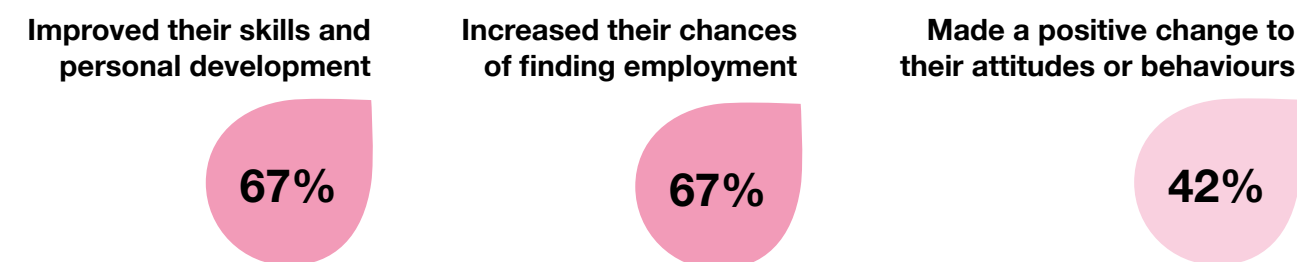
How did our business members support our community organisations?

The most common groups of beneficiaries supported were:

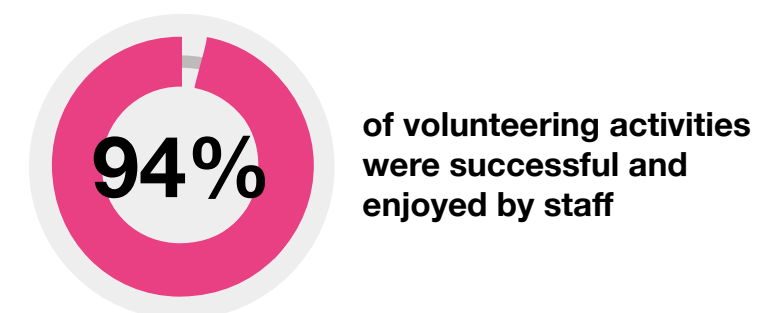


The percentages show the proportion of businesses supporting each beneficiary group.

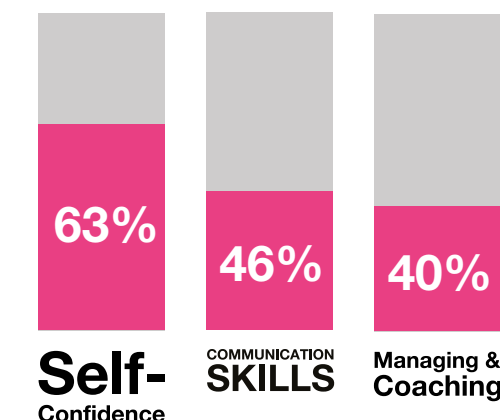
Volunteers supported beneficiaries in a wide range of ways including :



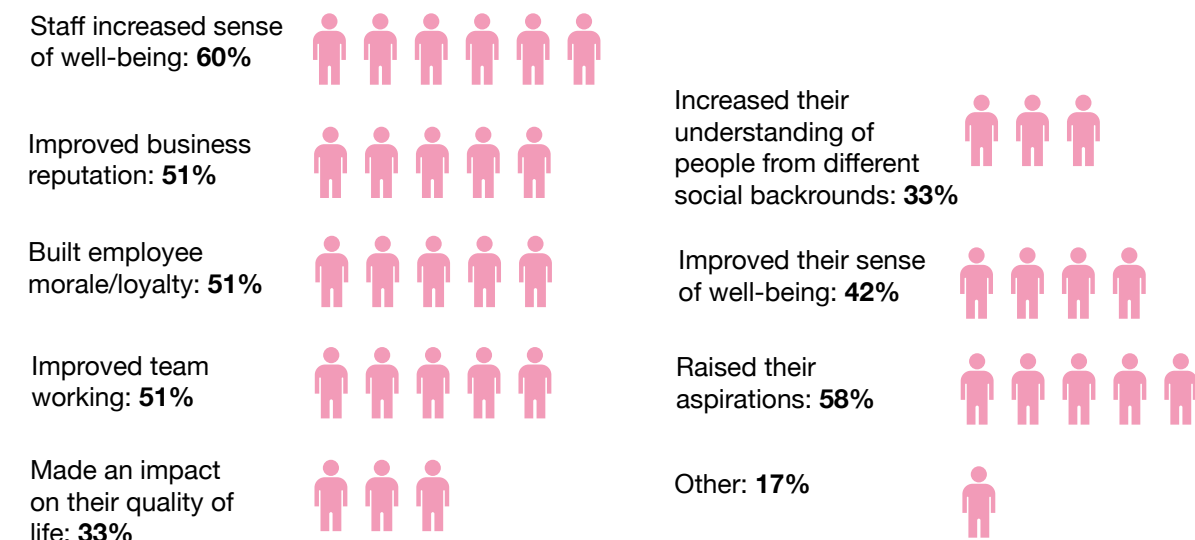
What impact did volunteering have on our business members and their staff?



Top 3 skills developed by staff through volunteering:



Benefits to the business:





Sharing employment knowledge to get people into work

GCS Recruitment Specialists had previously participated in one off volunteering opportunities through City Action, but at the end of 2012 GCS decided to form a partnership with a charity so they could provide longer term benefits. Daniel Evans, Marketing Manager at GCS, tells us about their partnership with St Mungo's Broadway and the impact their employability workshops had on St Mungo's Broadway's clients.

"As recruitment specialists, we feel we are expertly placed to provide an insight into what it takes to gain employment, so this was an area we were keen to get started in. Our project manager at City Action was brilliant, helping us to clearly define what our strategy and approach was and then putting forward suitable partners, including homelessness organisation St Mungo's Broadway.

Our relationship with St Mungo's Broadway started with us providing three employability workshops for their clients, developed and facilitated by our staff. The workshops covered areas such as how to compile a CV, interview preparation and approaches, and understanding the recruitment process.

After the initial series of workshops, we reviewed the sessions provided and expanded them to include more employability skills. Having now completed a second series of workshops, we have again reviewed our offering based on the feedback of St Mungo's Broadway's clients to ensure we continue to offer fresh, relevant and insightful sessions.

St Mungo's Broadway informed us that out of the 29 clients who attended the GCS workshops, 21 have adapted their CV, 16 have been invited to one or more interviews (7 of which were offered positions) and 1 client has moved into self-employment. Furthermore, St Mungo's Broadway's work and learning team have utilised the training programme we developed in other workshops which, to date, has supported another two clients to find jobs.

We were delighted to hear that clients were making changes to one or more aspects of their job application processes because of our sessions. The staff that were involved in preparing and delivering each session found working and interacting with St Mungo's Broadway's clients extremely empowering and rewarding. Being involved in charity work like this is great for staff engagement. But the truth is that we do it because we genuinely care about giving back to our local communities.

We are looking forward to building on the relationship with St Mungo's Broadway and hope to continue to support the fantastic work they do. I have also been lucky enough to work with the St Mungo's Broadway outreach team on shifts across the City to identify and support rough sleepers, and now look forward, along with one of our Directors, to working with St Mungo's clients more closely through their mentoring scheme.

"I have seen clients' self-esteem grow throughout the series of workshops where they have been equipped with not only the practical skills to find employment, but also the confidence to put these into practice through the enthusiasm and energy of the facilitators in each session."

Jodie Larsen, St Mungo's Broadway

"Very meaningful sessions. They helped me to understand how to improve my job search and prepare a better CV and cover letter. The training was excellent."

St Mungo's Broadway client

Supporting the staff and infrastructure of community organisations



“I did not want to provide a short intervention for the Winch; I wanted to provide support to an organisation to shape its staff and its infrastructure so that they can safeguard the sustainability of their organisation with their newly developed skills. For me this is the most effective long-term gain for an organisation.”

Jackie Alexander, Director, HR Without Fuss

Established in 1973, the Camden-based charity The Winch offers a range of services to children, young people and families to inspire and challenge them to fulfil their potential. The Winch's CEO, Paul Perkins, got in touch with City Action as he needed long-term support and mentoring around HR issues.

After an initial consultation with City Action, Jackie Alexander, owner of HR consultancy, HR Without Fuss, was looking to volunteer with a children's charity and was keen to use her professional skills for long-term benefit to the charity. City Action matched Jackie to The Winch.

Paul tells us more about how he worked with Jackie and what they achieved:

“Jackie and I initially mapped out the challenges we faced here at The Winch, such as staff wellbeing and staff retention, all of which, once resolved, would increase the impact we have on our beneficiaries. We explored different ways of building a positive culture for our staff in which they felt valued and supported. Through regular meetings, face to face, over the phone or via email, we developed and implemented the ‘our values’ framework in staff appraisals, probationary period reviews and team meetings. The objective was to build a positive culture, in which staff felt valued, supported and had a clearer sense of what they bring to the organisation.

The outcome has been an ability to more clearly articulate our expectations of staff and our appreciation of what they do. This has ultimately contributed to the long term stability of our team, a brilliant outcome for The Winch and proof that the best volunteering opportunities can be those where volunteers use their professional expertise to improve the infrastructure of an organisation.

Jackie's was one of those volunteering roles where very little was seen by anyone else, but the impact of having access to her support and expertise has proved invaluable to the long term sustainability of the Winch and its twenty-five members of staff.

In addition to all of this I think it's important to note the support from City Action, especially in helping us to shape the volunteer role and recruit such a great volunteer. In our case it made all the difference and without the expertise of City Action we would have been worse off.”

Setting up the building blocks of a successful volunteering programme



VTB Capital, an investment bank which had already organised one off events to raise money for well-known charities, came to City Action as they wanted to expand their efforts and help local, less publicised charities who needed their experience. Karen Horton, HR Business Partner, Nicola Holmes, Corporate Services Project Manager and Jo Blamey, HR Business Partner share with us their experience of setting up the building blocks of a successful volunteering programme in their first year of their City Action membership.

“We discovered through a staff survey that employees at VTB Capital were keen to give back to local communities. We presented a business case for volunteering to our senior management which was approved. We launched the volunteering programme at the beginning of 2014, but had no dedicated CSR team so relied solely on those with a passion and time to help drive the initiative forward.

We initially sent out emails asking for volunteers, but were struggling to get any uptake. After seeking advice from people who ran well-developed volunteering programmes, who we had met through attending the City Action annual celebration event, we got more creative. We began writing and distributing newsletters, putting up posters, sending out diary invites and presenting at various managers’ meetings, which started to spark an interest.

When developing relationships with charities we were particularly keen to work with ones that were struggling to find volunteers and where we could make a real difference. As an example, our project manager suggested we visited Blackfriars Settlement and we knew immediately that this was an organisation we wanted to support. As with most projects, it wasn’t all plain sailing but City Action supported us every step of the way. We initially experienced some communication barriers with Blackfriars Settlement, which our project manager quickly helped us break down.

We were then able to discuss different ideas and before we knew it we were launching our next big project, a befriending call service, where our volunteers speak to isolated elderly individuals within the local community on a weekly basis. Blackfriars Settlement are struggling to get enough volunteers to visit the individuals on a weekly basis so the telephone calls act as an intermediate service to make sure they have someone to talk to in the meantime – our aim is to make this a huge success.

The volunteering opportunities we’ve been involved in aren’t beneficial just to our partners: Blackfriars Settlement, Tower Hamlets EBP and Adab Trust, they also enable VTB Capital staff to collaborate, whilst developing skills they might not learn in the workplace. They are often pushed outside their comfort zone, which everyone needs to experience from time to time”.

“I presented a lecture to 80 University of East London students about real life work experience. The highlight for me was the enthusiasm demonstrated by the students. If just half a day of my time has an impact on others, it was all worthwhile. I too took a lot from the experience and got a huge sense of pride. I would certainly offer to do this again and would highly recommend the experience to others”.

***Volunteer Steve Evans,
Head of Global Project Office, VTB Capital***

Using volunteers to help local people into work



"Working at Withers gives me something to get up for in the morning. I am constantly learning new things, getting experience across a number of areas from legal, HR, general office and administration. I feel proud to have full time work, and my ambitions to become a legal secretary are now within reach".

Rikki-Jay, full time apprentice, Withers LLP



Sharon Tebb, Compensation and Benefits Manager at Withers LLP, tells us about how she worked closely with Islington Council's Business Employment Support Team (BEST) to explore ways in which Withers support staff could get involved with meaningful community engagement.

"CSR has always been very important within our organisation. It's too easy to walk into our office in a beautiful building and ignore the fact that 15,000 families in Islington are out of work. We wanted to implement a programme that made the best use of our staff's skills and helped add value to the community nearby.

Whilst we had the initial idea of wanting to provide an employability programme specifically targeting unemployed parents – a group that is often overlooked – City Action really helped consolidate that vision and drive the project forward. Our project manager matched us with Islington BEST who gave us an effective way to support local unemployed parents. Having buy-in from our senior management and full engagement from our staff volunteers has been absolutely essential in making the project a success.

Through working in partnership with Islington BEST, we were able to implement a two week programme for local residents, led by support staff within the firm. This programme helped four parents who were out of work. In addition to our staff sharing their skills and coaching the participants, we also worked on issues such as confidence building and etiquette as well as training in IT and basic office systems, led by the learning and development team and IT trainers. Having spent time in different departments, the participants were able to gain experience across different teams. Finally, Withers offered to finance an IT qualification for all participants to strengthen their skills and improve their chances of employment.

Through this programme, 23 year old mother, Rikki-Jay has dramatically improved her career outlook. Having been out of work for over a year, she successfully completed the placement here at Withers and secured a 12 month apprenticeship with us too. Having no GCSEs when she started her placement Rikki-Jay will have gained an equivalent of four GCSEs as well as a qualification in Business and Administration Level 2 upon completing her apprenticeship.

The whole experience has been very rewarding. Rikki-Jay has proved the scheme was worthwhile; she is now a valuable asset to our firm who we would not have discovered if it wasn't for the work experience programme.

Islington BEST have recognised this as a good model and now want to use this as a template for future employability support programmes".

Looking ahead

Our 2014-15 focus will be on building long term relationships between our businesses and community partners, and on encouraging businesses to volunteer in roles that strengthen the infrastructure of community organisations.

City Action will also be working on a new and improved website, which aims to be more user friendly for businesses to find volunteering opportunities and resources, and for community organisations to manage their volunteering support requests.

Thank you to all our business members and community organisations for a fantastic year of volunteering!

Thank you to GCS Ltd (www.gcsLtd.com), HR Without Fuss (www.hrwithoutfuss.co.uk), Islington BEST (www.islington.gov.uk/BEST), St Mungo's Broadway (www.mungosbroadway.org.uk), The Winch (www.thewinch.org), VTB Capital (www.vtbcapital.com) and Withers Worldwide (www.withersworldwide.com) for their input on this report and their views on volunteering and the positive impact volunteering has had on their organisations. Thank you to all our business and community partners old and new that we have worked with throughout the year, we look forward to working with you in the year ahead.

For more information talk to us on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/cityactionuk](https://twitter.com/cityactionuk)), by email (city.action@cityoflondon.gov.uk), on the phone 020 7332 1753/1762 and via our website (www.city-action.org).

Contact Us

Tel 020 7332 1762 / 1753

Email city.action@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Web www.city-action.org

Twitter twitter.com/cityactionuk

City Action

Economic Development Office

City of London Corporation

PO Box 270

London

EC2P 2EJ

