

Community Places



Volunteer Information Pack

April 2014



1. An Introduction to Community Places

This information pack contains:

1. Introduction to Community Places
2. Volunteer Guidelines
3. Volunteer Case Studies

About us

Community Places is a voluntary organisation which provides advice on planning issues to disadvantaged communities and people who cannot afford to pay a private consultant. We provide support to community planning and facilitate community engagement.

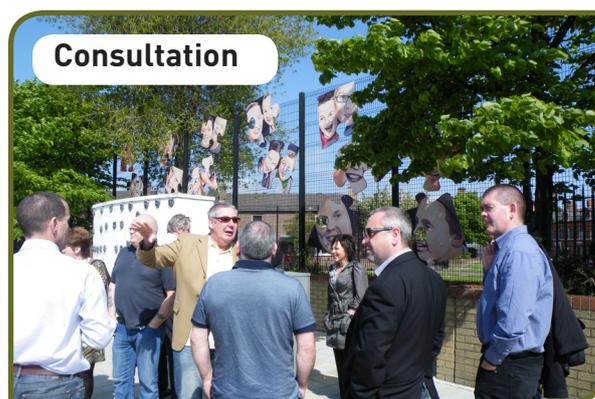
We were established in 1984 and we are managed by a voluntary Board of Directors who are elected annually from our membership. We currently have a membership of over 200 community and voluntary groups and networks from across the region. We currently employ seven staff including Planners and a Community Planner to provide our services to groups and people.



Training on Planning Issues

Who we work with

We work with urban and rural community and voluntary groups across the region in support of their work to influence and shape the planning and development of their communities. We also independently facilitate public and community consultation on planning and public services issues. All of our work is underpinned by our commitment to inclusion, targeting need, equality and equity.



Consultation



Planning Advice

Volunteering with Community Places

How can volunteers help?

- Volunteers can help with our planning advice service caseload, advising and supporting community groups and individuals on a wide range of planning issues.
- Volunteers can help assist in the preparation of publications, work on publicity and assist on planning and community planning projects.
- Carrying out research and consultation.

The Benefits of Volunteering with Community Places

- Counts towards Continuing Professional Development
- It gives an insight into a wide range of planning issues
- Widens professional networks
- Provides experience in community consultation
- Gives graduates and students the opportunity to broaden their experience
- Develops skills
- Rewarding and enjoyable

Volunteer Roles

- 1. Planners** - students, graduates and qualified Planners to assist in providing planning advice to community groups and individuals and assisting in research for planning projects.
- 2. Community Development** roles to assist with consultation for community plans and community planning work.
- 3. Research** roles to inform our current planning projects.

Community Places will ensure volunteers have support from employed members of staff when carrying out tasks.

2. Guidelines for Volunteers at Community Places

Community Places welcomes volunteers to assist in our work and will do its best to ensure volunteers' time spent with Community Places contributes to their personal development. Volunteers' work will complement the work of paid staff not substitute it.

Please consider the following points before you apply to become a volunteer:

Time Commitments

Before making any commitments you should be reasonably certain you can give the time that is required.

Tasks Involved

It is useful to be clear from the beginning why you are involved and what you will expect and what is expected from you. This will avoid any misunderstandings later.

Confidentiality

It is important that you do not repeat things you know or overhear as a result of your work in Community Places. If you are asked by the media for information on your work you should refer this to the Director.

Holidays

Please let a member of staff know if you are going to be on holiday so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Insurance

You will be covered by our professional indemnity insurance for any professional advice you provide on our behalf.

Dress Code

Volunteers should wear smart casual clothing that presents a professional image.

Expenses

Volunteers will not receive payment whilst working with Community Places. You will be entitled to receive out of pocket expenses as set out below;

1. Travel

We will discuss and agree your travel costs with you at the induction.

2. Subsistence

Volunteers are entitled to a lunch allowance at the rate of £5.00 and a dinner allowance of £10.00 if working outside office hours.

3. Claims

Volunteers will be required to complete an expenses claim form of all expenses incurred. Receipts must be attached to the expenses claim form. You will appreciate that expenses cannot be paid unless the procedure is followed.

Social Security Benefits

Volunteering should not affect social security benefits to which you are entitled, but to be certain you should contact your local DHSS office before committing yourself to voluntary work with Community Places.

References

Our Director is happy to offer references. We would request that you would ask us in advance.

Mobile Phones

Please ensure your mobile phone is on silent during office hours.

Finishing Voluntary Work

If you find a permanent job or for some other reason wish to stop volunteering you should inform Community Places as soon as possible. If you do not find the particular project in which you are involved satisfactory it may be possible to arrange alternatives. Please discuss this with a member of staff.

Upon finishing volunteering with Community Places we would ask that volunteers complete a volunteer feedback form.

3. Volunteer Case Studies

Below are some examples of our volunteers' experiences at Community Places



Claire Duffy - Planning Graduate

Claire volunteered with Community Places for two months from July 2013 - August 2013. Claire was eager to gain some practical work experience in planning. Claire assisted with the Casement Park planning advice days and she attended community consultation events.

Claire has now taken up a post in the environmental sector in a private consultancy in Mallusk, Belfast.

Claire encourages others to volunteer "I would encourage anyone looking for a career in the **environmental sector** or in **planning** generally to get involved at Community Places. They provided me with **excellent work experience** that proved vital in securing my place as a graduate environmental consultant. The team are very supportive and really do provide you with the practical experience you need to make you stand out among the rest to employers. Volunteering at Community Places was a **rewarding experience** for me; and a chance to give back to local communities I live in through working on various projects with the team."

Catherine McCormick - Urban Design Graduate

Catherine volunteered with Community Places for five months from January 2013 to May 2013. As a recent graduate Catherine was keen to gain experience in the field of planning and design. Catherine assisted with desk research to support planning projects and attended community consultations for village plan projects.

Catherine has now taken up a post as an Urban Design Graduate in a private consultancy in Manchester.

Catherine said:

"It's been great to be part of a hard working **enthusiastic** team who encourage you to get involved with current projects. Not only have I been able to **build upon my strengths** as a graduate planner, but I've also been able to build upon some of my weaker abilities too. Whether you are studying at university or have now finished, getting **voluntary experience is a great way to make you stand out from the crowd**, and having had such a great time working with the team, **I would strongly encourage more students to get involved!**"

John McGarry – Planning Graduate

John volunteered with Community Places from March 2011 until June 2011. John graduated from Queen's University Belfast with MSc in Environmental Planning. Whilst volunteering at Community Places John provided assistance in the research of village plans, provided support at community consultations and contributed to ongoing planning projects.

John moved to England and took up a post as a Planner in planning consultancy specialising in renewable energy developments.

John described his experience at Community Places as “a real investment, **Community Places helped me gain some valuable ‘real life’ experience** which gave me some focus at my job interview. The people were very friendly, and **volunteering is highly recommended!**”

James Weir - Planning Graduate

James volunteered with Community Places for three months from March 2011. James was had recently graduated from Queen's University with a Master's Degree in Spatial Regeneration. Whilst volunteering at Community Places James provided assistance to the community consultation for three village plans in County Antrim. Since then James got a permanent job as a development control officer in Renfrewshire Council in Scotland.

James said “through the voluntary work experience with Community Places I gained experience of working with local communities. Working with Community Places has helped **improve my communication skills** and made me appreciate the importance of constructive engagement with local communities and using different communication methods to provide advice or explanation. Overall I found my work experience with Community Places to be **extremely enjoyable**, while it also helped me **develop skills which are necessary for a career in the planning profession.**”

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