



ATLANTIC
RACQUET CENTRE
Exercise. Socialise. Learn Together.

The Benefits of a Volunteer Workforce

‘Volunteers have always played a vital part in the sport and physical activity sector. Without them, most activity simply wouldn’t happen.’

- *Sport England*

“Volunteers don’t get paid, not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.”

- *Sherry Anderson*



My Background - Tennis & Volunteering

- General Manager - Atlantic Racquet Centre, N.Devon
- LTA Level 4 Senior Club Coach
- Have worked & volunteered in Tennis for 20+ years
- Grew up in a culture of volunteering through Tennis
- Actively volunteer outside of Tennis as a Community First Responder with South Western Ambulance service committing 14 hours per week



Atlantic Racquet Centre (ARC)

- Community racquet & fitness centre where everyone can exercise, socialise and learn together.
- Formed in 2015, still not finished!
- Registered charity with the aim of making racquet sport & fitness affordable, accessible and welcoming to improve the health & wellbeing of local people.
- Facilities: 10 Tennis, 4 Badminton, 6 Table Tennis, 2 Squash, Large Functional Fitness Gym + Pickleball!
- Multi-Use hall, Community Café & Padel courts all in the pipeline.
- 1480 members
- Average footfall of 5768 per week



Workforce: 100 incredible people

(63% of them are paid nothing!)

- STAFF TEAM - 37 skilled paid staff across both employed & self-employed roles. 10.6 FTE.
- TRUSTEE TEAM - 12 highly committed unpaid individuals with various private, public and third sector backgrounds & experiences.
- VOLUNTEER TEAM - 51 members of our community who give up their time to make ARC a success.



The Journey & The Challenge

- Born from a private member's Tennis club with strong culture of volunteering.
- Becoming a much larger professional organisation posed several challenges:
 - How do we become a commercial entity that still fosters a culture of volunteering?
 - How do volunteers work alongside paid staff?
 - Can we rely on volunteers to deliver professional services?
 - How can we tackle 'the Tyranny of the Volunteer'?



The ‘Tyranny of the Volunteer’?

- When the relationship between a volunteer and their organisation gradually becomes a negative one
- The volunteer begins to resent the organisation they are associated with but feels trapped in it
- *“I’m not doing that, I’m just a volunteer”*
- *“Yeah, I should follow that process, but I’m only a volunteer, pfft, what are they going to do about it? Fire me!?”*
- Eventually the organisation becomes beholden to the will of their dissatisfied volunteers
- Not a sustainable model for any business!



Our solution?



THE ARC VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

AKA 'Team Purple'



Understanding The Challenge: Why are some people reluctant to volunteer?

- Busy lives & lack of time
- Diffusion of responsibility - “someone else will do that”
- Fear of getting trapped in a role they can’t escape
- Fear of the initial small commitment growing exponentially large
- Previous negative volunteering experiences
- Lack of hassle free, minimal commitment opportunities available.



Understanding the Challenge: Why are others willing to volunteer?

- To give something back
- To learn new skills
- To gain workplace experience
- To make new friends
- To improve mental or physical health
- To improve social confidence
- To form a sense of connection to others in the community
- To support the organisation to achieve its goals
- To fill empty time in their lives



Formal vs Informal

At ARC we believe there are broadly two types of volunteering:

1. Informal/Adhoc volunteering - General community style volunteering with no formal training/arrangements in place
2. Formal volunteering - Volunteering that mirrors many of the same practices found in employment - such as application process, safer recruitment, induction, training, on-going supervision, CPD opportunities etc

We believe there is a place for both types of volunteering.

Though our 51 strong volunteer team fit into the formal category, we have plenty of need for those willing to 'grab a Hoover & help!' on an adhoc basis.

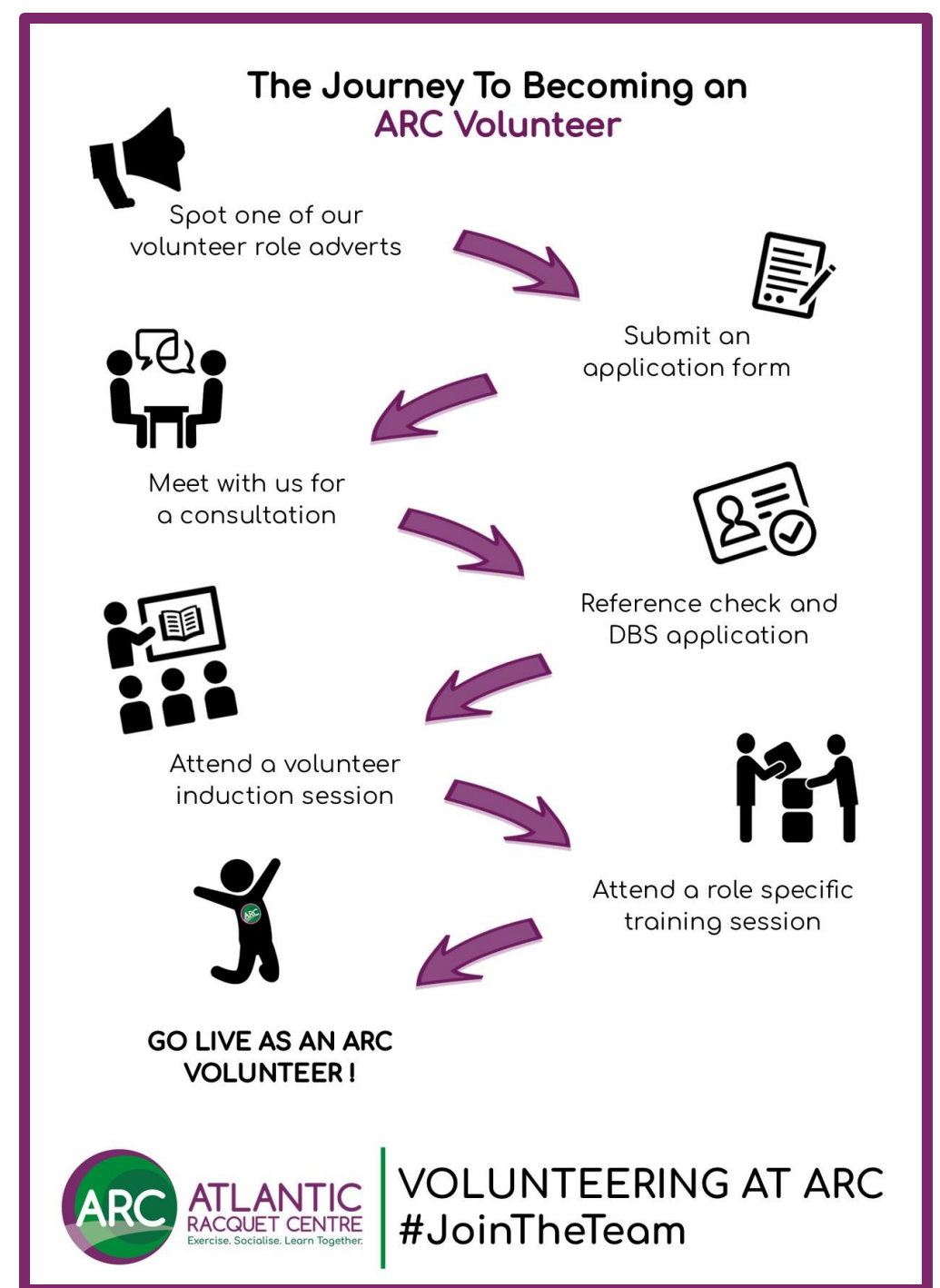


How does the programme work?

Our teams cover a variety of roles including:

- Grounds & Maintenance
- Welcome Team
- Session Activators
- Coaching Assistants
- Play-Makers

New volunteers complete a comprehensive selection & training process.



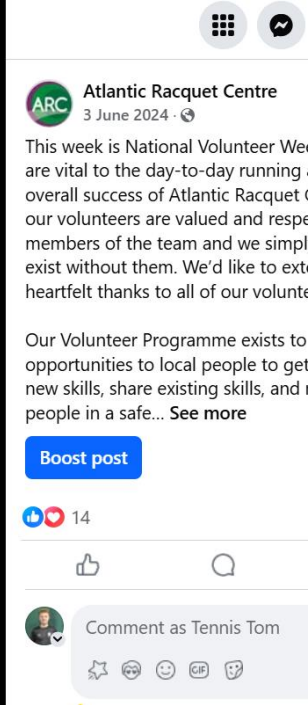
How does the programme work?

- Volunteers are supported during their volunteering experience by a team leader (volunteer) and a volunteer supervisor (paid staff).
- Live volunteers receive a uniform & name badge
- Expectations on time commitment are managed carefully through a 'volunteer agreement' renewed once annually.
- Recruited largely from our existing community of participants, parents etc.
- Open to anyone in the community, with no requirement to be involved in ARC as a member or user



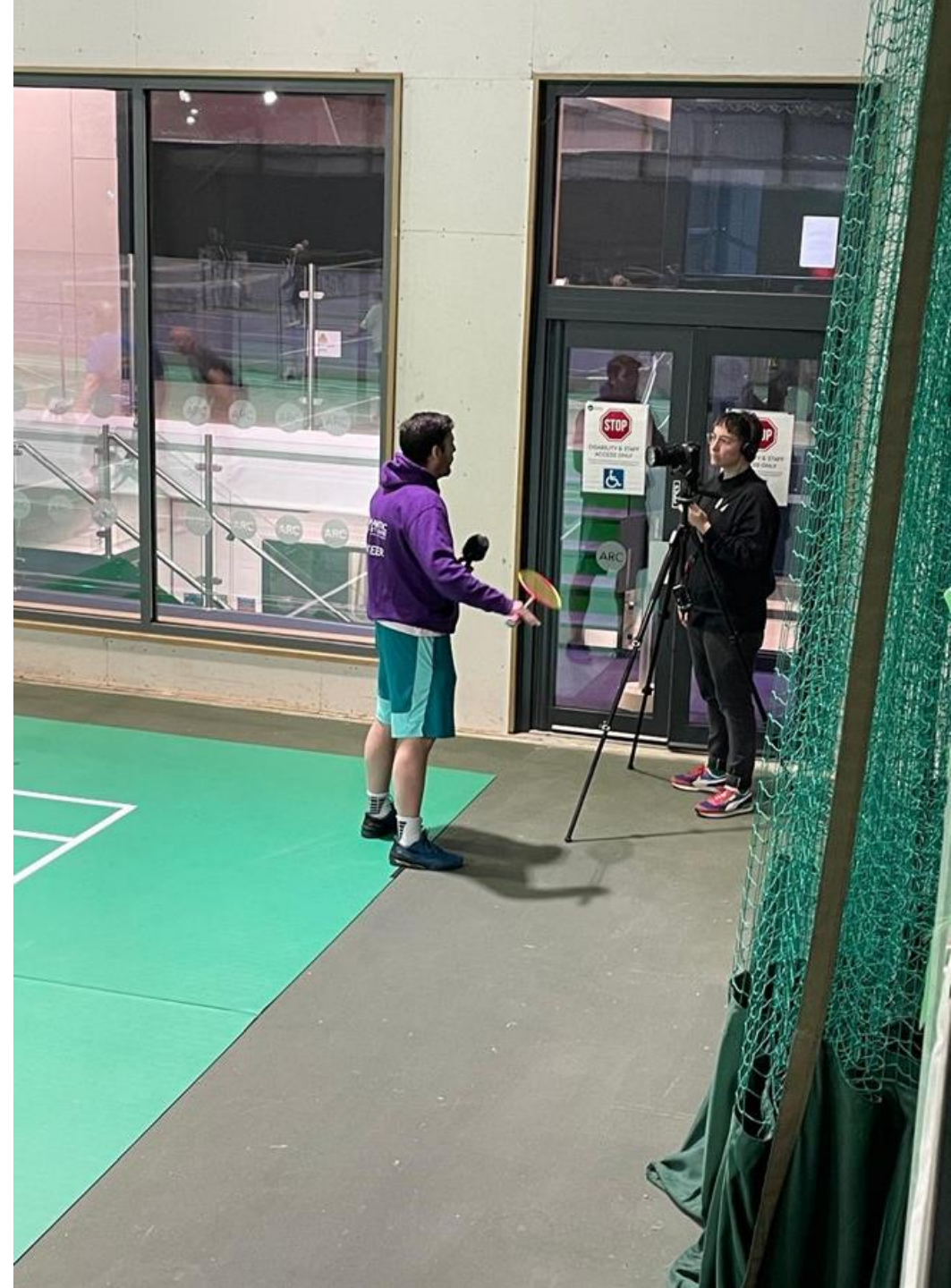
How does the programme work?

- Volunteer's commitment & achievements are celebrated regularly through 'celebration events' and social media mentions etc.



Inclusion in Volunteering

- The programme serves as a health & wellbeing programme for our local community with anyone able to apply
- Referrals are received from social prescribers at local NHS Primary Care Network with patients supported through application process by the NHS.
- New partnership with a local addiction recovery charity to begin the process of offering some of their service users the opportunity to apply for volunteering roles supervised by a support worker from the charity.
- Several of our volunteers had no previous interest in racquet sport or fitness and are now advocates.



Youth Volunteering

- Our formal programme is for ages 16+
- 27 young people aged 11 - 16 take part in our Youth Volunteering Scheme
- Assisting with coaching sessions, holiday camps or tournaments
- A simplified process which includes:
 - Initial training session
 - Uniform
 - Celebration Events
- After 1 year of volunteering, teens have the opportunity to apply for paid role as a coaching assistant and unlock funding from us to complete Level 1 Coaching qualification at age 16.



How does ARC benefit?

- Obvious financial benefit - in 2024 an estimated 5018 hours of volunteer time were given at ARC - that equates to 2.6 full time staff or £61,078 p/a if paid at NMW
- The ability to access skills & experience usually outside of our financial reach
- An inclusive health & wellbeing programme that supports the local community
- A tool for recruiting and developing potential future paid staff
- A sense of shared ownership & community
- A culture of volunteering that means everybody is willing to go above and beyond - paid staff included!



How do our volunteers benefit?

- A sense of purpose and belonging
- Improved social confidence
- Improved mental & physical health
- Skill development
- A positive and lasting volunteer experience
- So many more...



What are the challenges we've had to overcome?

- Difficulties in recruiting volunteers
- Difficulties in retaining volunteers
- Fluctuating commitment of volunteers
- Ensuring expectations match reality from both sides
- Lack of staff time to provide appropriate level of support
- Risk of legally perceived employment relationship



Support & Funding

Most grant funding organisations are highly supportive of the use of volunteers making funding for volunteer programmes relatively accessible.

Many organisations provide support for recruiting, managing and involving volunteers:

- NCVO - <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/>
- Local VCS organisations
- LTA & other NGBs - <https://www.lta.org.uk/roles-and-venues/volunteers/>
- Sport England - <https://www.sportengland.org/funding-and-campaigns/workforce?section=volunteering>
- Tennis Volunteering Community - https://www.facebook.com/groups/517145319449375/?locale=en_GB





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**Questions,
Answers, &
Discussion...**

