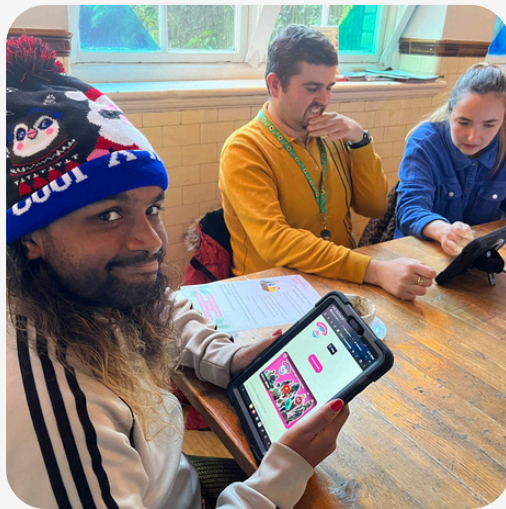


# Strategic Grant Volunteering Hub Project Retrospective



Skills & Wellbeing Team

Innovate  
Trust

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# 01 Introducing the Volunteering Hub Project

Innovate Trust were originally awarded funding through the Volunteering Wales Strategic Grant for our Insight Investigators project. This project ensured a thorough peer led evaluation of Insight.

Insight is Innovate Trust's free community app for adults with learning disabilities. Here, individuals can join activities, post updates and make friends. Insight aims to combat isolation through providing a person-centred app where individuals can be digitally included in a safe, supportive place.

Through this evaluation we found that individuals wanted to volunteer and to access suitable information about volunteering in a space where they already feel safe. Here, the idea of a Volunteering Hub was born.

Innovate Trust were awarded our second round of funding which supported us through the creation of the Volunteering Hub. Find out more [here](#). The Volunteering Hub is a co-produced online space where adults with learning disabilities can view tailored resources, share ideas and stories with their peers and discover suitable opportunities which are listed in an accessible way.

# 01 Introducing the Volunteering Hub Project



The volunteering Hub has been developed in partnership between the Skills and Wellbeing Team and the Digital Inclusion and Innovations Team. We have been led by the ideas and feedback of our Creator Volunteers. Our Creator Volunteers are groups of adults with learning disabilities who volunteer once a month on this project. They share their thoughts on the content that they want on the Volunteering Hub as well as what needs to be improved to increase the numbers of volunteers with learning disabilities in the community. Across our groups in Cardiff, The Vale, Rhondda Cynon Taf and online, 80 adults with learning disabilities have volunteered their time regularly, contributing 564 hours between them, to achieve this.

# 01 Introducing the Volunteering Hub Project



The Volunteering Hub has been trialled and tested by 145 volunteers, ensuring it meets the accessibility requirements of adults with learning disabilities. This has included groups of volunteers supported by the special educational needs school Ysgol Y Deri, the autism unit at Llanishen Highschool, the day centre Ty Draw and support provider Mirus. We have taken all their feedback on board.

Alongside the creation of the new Volunteering Hub, we have created resources on best practice supporting adults with learning disabilities through volunteering. View the resources [here](#). This is, again, a co-produced document which highlights the way individuals want to be supported. It is aimed at organisations and other professionals who want to find out more about the best ways to ensure adults with learning disabilities can volunteer successfully with them.

# 01 Introducing the Volunteering Hub project

Felicity Walls, WCVA's volunteering manager fed back:

‘Wow! Diolch Innovate Trust. As part of my work at WCVA towards more inclusive volunteering in Wales, we are grateful you are paving the way in the realm of providing guidance and support for organisations that would like to be more inclusive for volunteers with learning disabilities. At a time when there are some people finding it more difficult to volunteer, it's important that we all strive for inclusive practices, so that everyone who wants to volunteer can find an opportunity they can enjoy and contribute their time in ways that are meaningful. Your new co-produced resources and guidance show what is possible when you really listen to users and use this to drive change.’

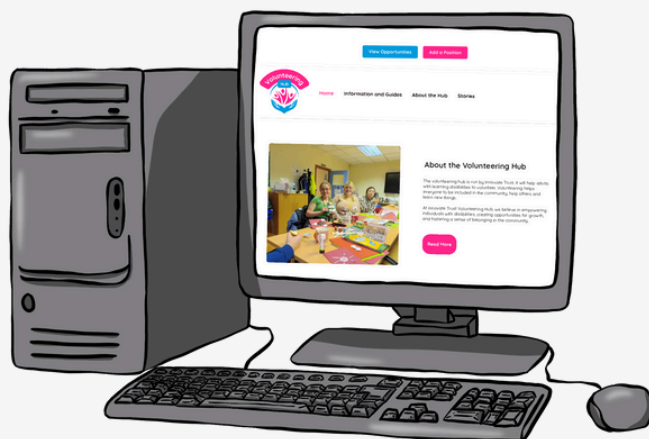
## 02 The Volunteering Hub

# Insight



The Volunteering Hub is a new part of the Insight app. Find out more [here](#). The Insight app can only be accessed by adults with learning disabilities and other relevant organisations.

# 02 The Volunteering Hub



The volunteering Hub can be accessed through the app by clicking on the heart icon. The Volunteering Hub is feature packed, compatible with screen readers, soon to be in Welsh and with Easy Reads and simple videos. Here, individuals can gain a wider understanding of what volunteering means, why it's beneficial and can even connect with each other by posting on the Volunteering Hub group themselves. There are sections with information and guides, stories of other volunteers with learning disabilities and information about why the Volunteering Hub was created.

There are also ten organisations with volunteering opportunities currently advertising on the Volunteering Hub. Each of these opportunities is suitable for adults with learning disabilities, is vetted, has an accessible role description and a simple application process where individuals can call or email the organisation to state their interest.

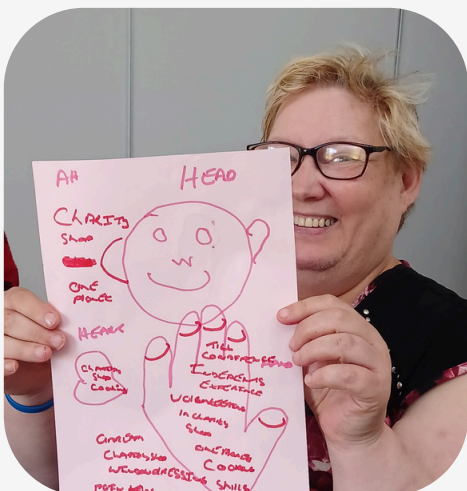
# 03 Key successes

We have learnt a lot from our Creator volunteers. They have helped shape the resources on best practice and have also helped to improve our own practices. For example, our volunteers told us that they preferred volunteering in groups alongside the rest of the community with a variety of other volunteers with and without support needs. Going forward, we are going to provide more of these types of sessions.

Our Creator volunteers have also helped to shape new processes with other organisations. For example, our volunteers had a discussion on references and making them more accessible. They have co-produced an Easy Read and some guidance for organisations on this. Oxfam requested our help with making their reference processes for new volunteers more accessible. We have worked together with Oxfam who have expressed an interest in seeing these resources and will be making changes to their volunteer recruitment procedures, particularly around references.

We have also hosted a joint session with Learning Disability Wales (LDW) to begin working on creating some Easy Video guidelines. LDW currently provide guidance on Easy Reads which support organisations to meet an accepted standard. Between us and LDW we identified a gap regarding publicly available guidance on Easy Videos. Our volunteers are working towards changing this and had some amazing ideas and feedback to share with LDW. Through consulting with our volunteers, we have found that many prefer to receive information relating to volunteering through videos. Therefore, it was essential that we created some accessible videos with our volunteers.

# 03 Key successes



Our Creator volunteers have felt a huge sense of achievement through their volunteering and have commented that they feel more valued and that they are having their ideas listened to. They are proud that they are helping to improve volunteering for peers with learning disabilities. The Creator volunteering role has been such an empowering part of the project.

The Volunteering Hub was launched in November 2024. Since then, the Volunteering Hub has been viewed over a thousand times! We have provided numerous demos to individuals and their support staff to ensure they know about the Volunteering Hub, how it can benefit them and how to use it.

## 03 Key successes



Our account process for organisations has had some excellent feedback. Green Squirrel commented **‘We have just signed up and I also wanted to pass on feedback on how excellent and clear the sign-up process was, so many volunteering platforms are not this user friendly.’** Similarly, Mirus told us they **‘have been checking the Volunteering Hub, it looks amazing, you’ve done an incredible job.’**

We have also been working hard on a marketing strategy with our Marketing and Communications Team. Regular social media posts and articles will be going out to highlight what we have learnt from this project with a particular focus on increasing organisation’s awareness of what volunteers with learning disabilities can achieve; we are aiming to remove the barriers to volunteering that many individuals with learning disabilities are experiencing. We have teamed up with WCVA and Volunteering Wales so we can really target the Third Sector, ensuring all learning through this project is shared.

The Volunteering Hub has enabled new individuals who we haven’t worked with before to engage in volunteering. One individual, Martin, viewed the Volunteering Hub with his support worker and has applied to volunteer as a gardener at the Secret Garden, has also attended tree planting with Coed Caerdydd and nature conservation volunteering with the Cardiff Rangers all through the Volunteering Hub.

# 04 Challenges we faced

The first challenge we faced is difference in opinion when it comes to accessibility. There are different views on accessibility across different areas of the third sector. We have noticed this when working across departments to create the Volunteering Hub. We have shown how different views can complement each other. Asking individuals what they need and then tailoring services to them is hugely beneficial. At the same time, following the WCAG guidelines to ensure our Volunteering Hub meets the global accessibility requirements is important. Working together across departments ensures different views and specialities are acknowledged which gives a more rounded view of accessibility and a more accessible service.

The second challenge we faced was that to effectively co-produce a new platform or resources takes time. Co-production takes lots of time and patience to be done well. Things change all the time when you gather individuals' views. For example, taking the time to acknowledge individuals' views and then changing the service based on those views can alter timescales and other plans you may have made. Increasing everyone's awareness of co-production and its benefits helps everyone to be more understanding. Flexibility is important when co-producing a new service. There have been times when we have asked the Digital Technology and Innovations team to create something and then once we have trialled it on our volunteers, we have needed to ask them to change it again.

# 04 Challenges we faced



Another challenge we faced was the stigma towards adults with learning disabilities. More awareness of adults with learning disabilities is needed. More emphasis needs to be placed on individuals and what they tell us they need, not just what third parties advise. There shouldn't be any shame in asking for more support to ensure volunteers with learning disabilities are included. We have found when meeting with some organisations that they question why our resources are needed and we have explained how they are co-produced, person centred and that they are aiming to educate people on barriers and help to remove them.

# 04 Challenges we faced



A lack of digital inclusion opportunities was a challenge we faced with getting adults with learning disabilities on the Volunteering Hub. There are still many barriers preventing adults with learning disabilities from accessing volunteering. One we have found is a lack of services dedicated to improving IT skills or services providing suitable devices. At Innovate Trust, we do have Digital Inclusion and Innovations projects. However, these often have eligibility criteria such as location, age range or needing a Social Worker. Training on how to send an email, how to make a phone call and how to use a screen reader would be particularly beneficial for adults with learning disabilities who would like to engage with online volunteering platforms like the Volunteering Hub. We have worked with individuals who would greatly benefit from this kind of service but are currently ineligible for them.

# 05 Future plans

We are excited to announce that we have received a third round of funding from the Volunteering Wales Strategic Grant! Within the next phase of the project, we are aiming to:

- Co-produce and launch an accessible catalogue of volunteer training sessions on the Volunteering Hub.
- Co-produce and launch an accessible volunteering application process on the Volunteering Hub.
- Continue to support people with learning disabilities to understand and engage with the Volunteering Hub.
- Continue to promote the Volunteering Hub within the third sector.

Looking five years ahead, we would like to further enhance the Volunteering Hub through adding a supported employment section. This would benefit individuals who would like to move closer to employment. Often, volunteering is a good way of improving work related skills so the two link in well with each other. There is applicability with the private sector. we would look to make connections in the private sector where there may be interest for this type of service.



# 06 How can concepts like the Volunteering Hub be applied to the wider third sector?



We believe there are many other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups who face similar barriers to volunteering. They may also benefit from a dedicated Hub that is more tailored to their support needs.

# 06 How can concepts like the Volunteering Hub be applied to the wider third sector?



## sight cymru

We spoke with Tosin Adeleke, who is an Awareness Campaign Officer from Sight Cymru. Sight Cymru are a charity who promote the welfare of people who are Seriously Sight Impaired (Blind or SSI) or Sight Impaired (Partially Sighted or SI) in Wales. Tosin agreed that a dedicated website for people who are supported by Sight Cymru would be beneficial. We discussed the following technical features which would be of benefit to individuals within an online volunteering platform:

- Screen reader compatibility including keyboards that allow you to double click to type
- High contrast colours
- Size 18 font
- Items in alphabetical order as this makes them easier to find
- Videos with audio description
- Descriptions of where your cursor is on the screen.
- Voice prompts to allow individuals to navigate the site more easily.

# 06 How can concepts like the Volunteering Hub be applied to the wider third sector?

Tosin identified several barriers individuals with sight loss face including inaccessible venues such as objects blocking walkways, signs and labels being too small, wet floors, needing special equipment such as heat sensors for café volunteering. Individuals' own anxiety, lack of confidence and thinking they will fail is another barrier. Finally, some employers and organisations offering volunteering opportunities can lack awareness of the challenges faced by people with sight loss. Stigma of people with sight loss is common. For example, organisations can think these individuals won't be able to perform their role or that the organisation will be held accountable if they have an accident. This leads to discriminatory practices. Tosin recognises that people with sight loss **'can do well and need to be included and need to be given a chance and they can perform very well'**.

Tosin also thought that publicly available resources on how to support individuals with sight loss through volunteering would help to change attitudes and spread awareness of sight loss.

Having a Hub that would be co-produced would be great as Tosin told us **'It would have a better result; better feedback and what individuals want will all be beneficial'**. He thought many would enjoy creating a website too.

# 06 How can concepts like the Volunteering Hub be applied to the wider third sector?

Sharon Phillips, Director of Inform Cwm Taf Morgannwg, had similar thoughts on how this project could be applied to her client group. Inform CTM is an individual led organisation that supports people with lived experience of mental health. They provide support to individuals, carers and groups to engage with various opportunities to help improve and influence services with mental health and the wider community.

Sharon agreed that a dedicated Hub for her client group would be beneficial but also made the point that one website that was accessible to all would be the best option.

Many of their clients only want to volunteer with Inform CTM as they see it as a safe space in a similar way to how adults with learning disabilities see Insight. Therefore, they would be a good organisation to lead in the creation of a new dedicated Hub through co-production.



# 06 How can concepts like the Volunteering Hub be applied to the wider third sector?

The website would have several user-friendly features for those with mental health conditions including:

- Filters that would help to narrow down long lists of opportunities to ones the individual wants to do.
- Appropriate opportunities that are vetted and accessible to adults with mental health conditions.
- Each opportunity would be described in a user-friendly way with a bio in the opportunity listing explaining how that organisation is committed to supporting and including adults with mental health conditions, for example, staff have undertaken mental health awareness training and they have the appropriate policies in place.

Sharon is aware of a great number of barriers individuals with mental health conditions face when accessing volunteering. These include their own anxiety, a lack of confidence and thinking they will fail. Another barrier is, again, stigma where employers and organisations with volunteering opportunities having a lack of awareness of mental health.

More awareness is needed which is something Inform are working really hard on. Inform CTM are starting to provide awareness training for other organisations. This links in well with what we have found through our co-produced resources on best practice supporting adults with learning disabilities through volunteering. Sharon agreed that having more resources and training on supporting adults with mental health conditions through volunteering was really needed. Inform value including everyone in the community and supporting individuals with this.

# David case study

David is a volunteer with a learning disability who has been attending our Volunteering Hub Creator sessions in Cardiff. As part of his volunteering, David has co-written an accessible article for the Volunteering Hub.



David really values having his opinions listened to in the Volunteering Hub Creator volunteering sessions. He has had exceptional attendance since the beginning of the project and always engages brilliantly.

David's article has also formed the basis for a case study which we've included in the resources on best practice supporting adults with learning disabilities through volunteering. David's article is a lovely example of a positive volunteering experience which illustrates the value of volunteering both for the individual and the organisation.

# David case study

Extracts from David's article:

"I'm David and I volunteer at the Marie Curie charity shop in Whitchurch. I found out about Marie Curie when my mum was at the Marie Curie hospice in Penarth.

Marie Curie is a charity that helps people who are at the end of their life. The money we raise in the shop goes towards this. This is very important to me and close to my heart.

I volunteer here four days a week. I usually do a few hours at a time. I am very flexible though. When they need me, I come and help.

I choose which jobs I do. My disability means I have bad knees so I don't sweep and mop the floor too often, only once a month. I find the till hard but I can still stand next to the till to greet customers.

Everyone helps me when I volunteer here. All the other volunteers and staff there support me. I work as a team with them. When we need to carry heavy boxes, we work together to do this. They always show me what to do too. I do some things here myself too. It is good to be independent as well as work as a team.



# David case study

I very much enjoy it here. I like meeting people. It's good for my mental health. I enjoy the social side to my volunteering. All the volunteers at the charity shop go to the Plough Inn twice a year for a drink and a chat. I really enjoy this. Volunteering here has helped me to feel more confident with meeting new people.

I have been volunteering here for over five years. I got a certificate presented to me at an event at the hospice in Penarth. This certificate was given to me as an award for volunteering for five years. I am very proud of this achievement. It's well earned.



**Marie  
Curie**

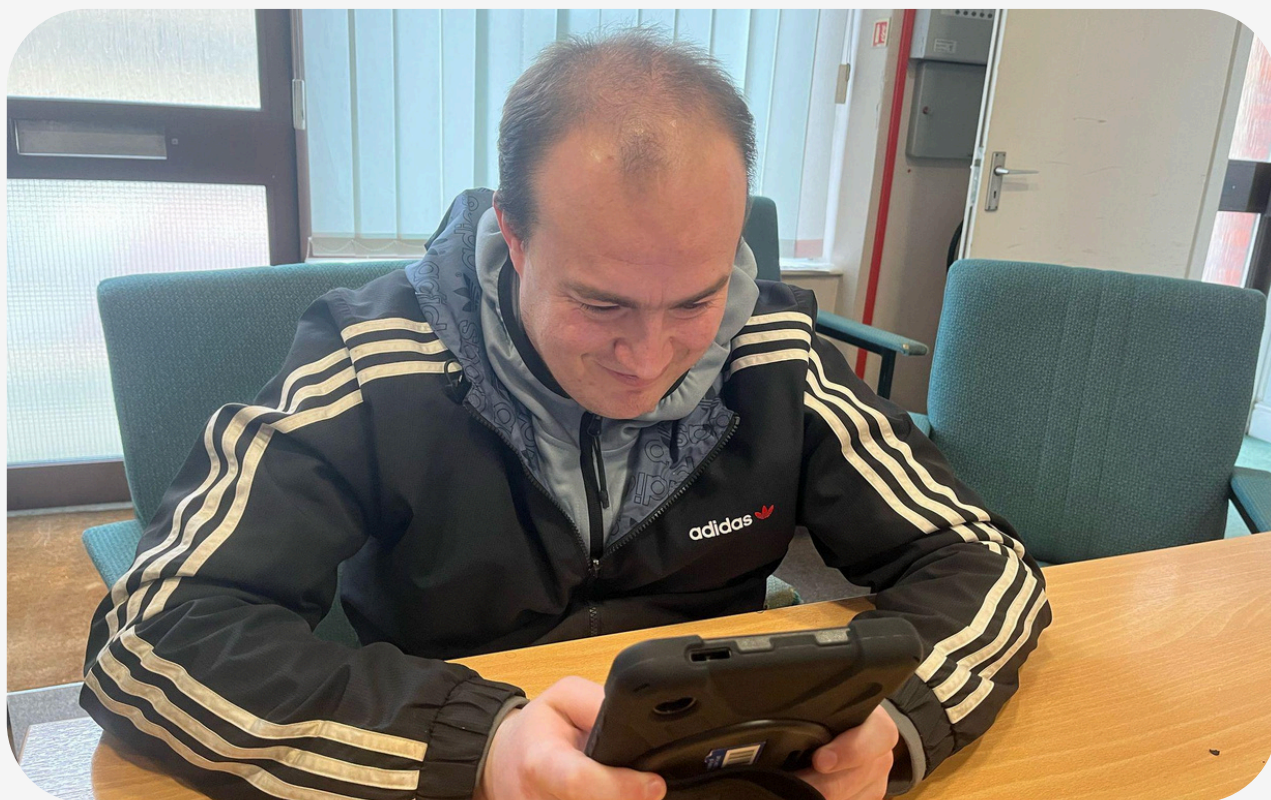
# David case study

My manager at the charity shop wanted to say a few words for this article:

‘Marie Curie provide hospice care. Our nearest hospice is in Penarth. They support anyone with an end of life illness. They also support their families and those closest to them. Marie curie share research too. They also campaign for better support for those at end of life. The Marie Curie shops raise vital funds that go towards this clinical and emotional care. They provide awareness of the charity’s mission too.

David is a great asset to the Witchurch charity shop team. He has been volunteering for over 5 years. Working with and supporting volunteers with learning disabilities is rewarding for the whole team. David does an excellent job of tagging and steaming the clothing and helping us to prepare the items in the sorting room before they go out onto the shop floor to be sold. David also helps with cleaning and sorting donations. He likes checking all the dvds and cds to make sure they are not scratched and in good condition, he has a good eye for detail.’

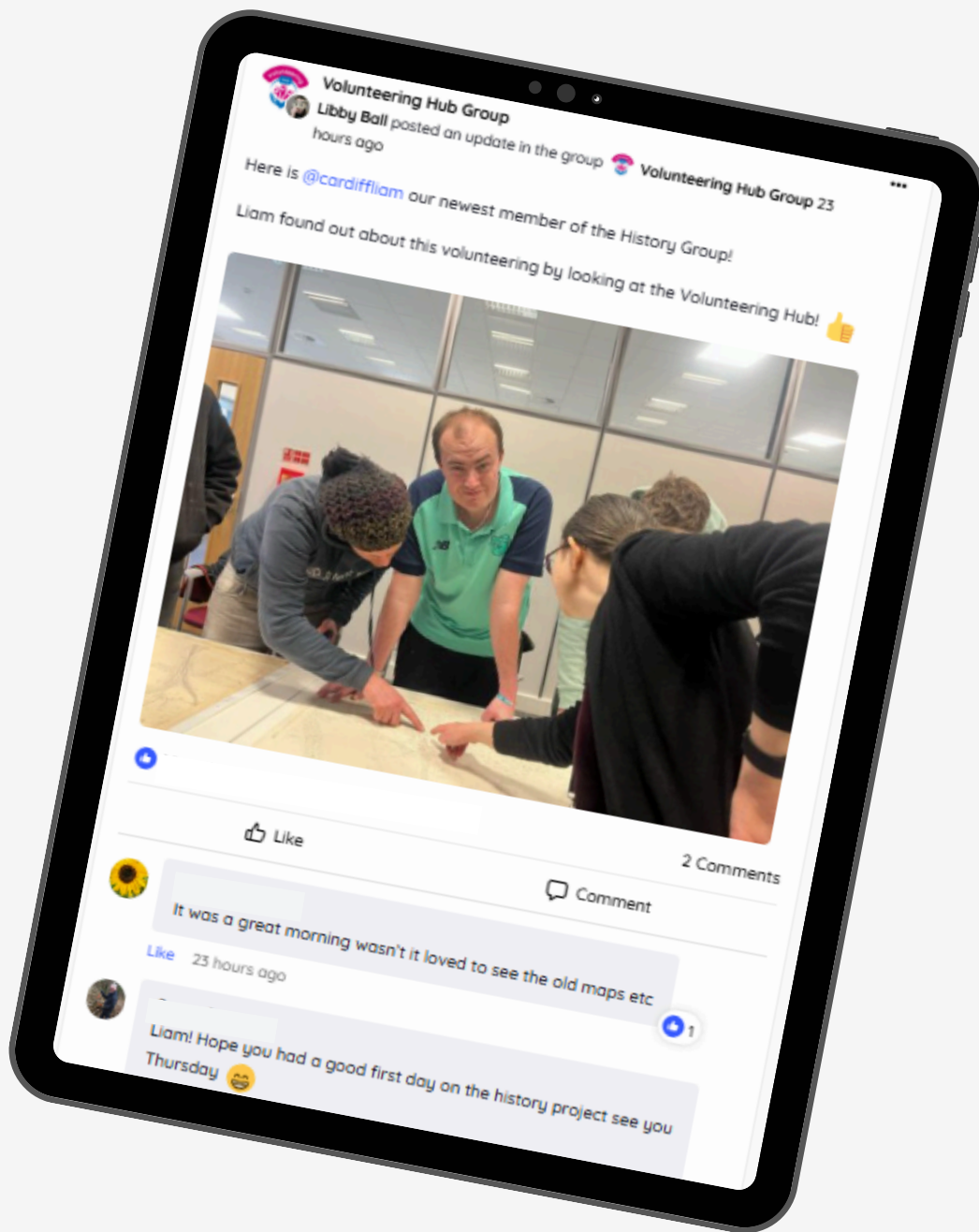
# Liam case study



Liam, a gentleman with a learning disability, has been working with his dad to look for more activities, as staying at home too often is affecting his wellbeing. Liam has made good use of the Volunteering Hub to access new opportunities and make positive steps towards improving his wellbeing.

We met with Liam and supported him to have a look at Insight, the Volunteering Hub and to create an account. Owen, one of Liam's friends from his volunteering role with Innovate Trust's Secret Garden Project, regularly uses Insight and the Volunteering Hub. The two discussed the benefits of the Volunteering Hub together. This helped to encourage Liam to download the app and create an account.

# Liam case study



Once set up, Liam immediately took to Insight, added a new profile picture, wrote a couple of posts and shared some pictures in the Volunteering Hub.

# Liam case study

We then met with Liam and his dad again around a month later to give them both a more in-depth demo now Liam had a basic understanding of what Insight and the Volunteering Hub were. We supported Liam to log into his account on one of our tablets. Then we showed him a few videos on the Volunteering Hub and supported him to navigate through the 'information and guides', 'stories' and 'volunteering opportunities' pages. Liam even trialled out the screen reader setting for us!

Dave, Liam's dad, was very pleased with being included in the demo as he could then support Liam to look through it once a week in their own time. Including parents and carers in this way has been important in successfully engaging individuals with the Hub.

After looking through the opportunities listed on the Volunteering Hub, Liam decided to try the History group. This was a very different type of group to what Liam had done before and he didn't know any of the current volunteers. Liam expressed that he was nervous about meeting new people but was still very much looking forward to trying a new opportunity.

Liam attended his first history volunteering session at the Glamorgan Archives. He arrived on time and didn't come across as nervous, in fact, he struck an immediate connection with George and the two of them worked and chatted together throughout the session. Liam engaged brilliantly during the session, asked lots of questions and shared lots of ideas too. Liam told us he would be back!

# Liam case study

Liam reflected on his first session: **‘I like this group. It’s something new. I met loads of people today. It’s nice to make new friends. We’ve been looking at maps of St Fagans and learning about the past.’** Attending this first opportunity has helped him to get out of his comfort zone and to realise that meeting new people can be a good thing. Liam had some positive words to say about the Volunteering Hub too:

**‘The Volunteering Hub is good for finding what you want to do. It was good because it helped me.’**

We were delighted with Liam’s progress and shared a post highlighting his story on the Volunteering Hub so that others could see the benefits of trying something new.

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to all our partners and members who continue to make Insight the success that it is today.

Thank you to the Welsh Government and WCVA who funded the Insight Investigators project through their Strategic Grant fund.



Gwirfoddoli Cymru  
Volunteering Wales

Thank you to the organisations who have posted volunteering opportunities on the Volunteering Hub, have partnered with us to include the individuals they support in its creation and the organisations who we have consulted with or received feedback from:

Learning Disability Wales  
SVC  
Ty Draw Day Centre  
Ysgol Y Deri  
Iris Care Group  
Mirus  
Marie Curie  
Museum Wales  
Inform CTM  
Sight Loss Cymru  
Oxfam

Cardiff Dogs Home  
Vale People First  
Cardiff People First  
Meadow Street Gardens  
Down To Earth  
Coalfield Flower Farm  
Keep Wales Tidy  
Keep Grangetown Tidy  
Vale Council Rangers  
Green Squirrel