



Catherine Perez-Phillips, manager of the Hammersmith and Fulham Volunteer Centre, is urging Londoners to give up some time and offer a helping hand to those in need

‘So many things simply wouldn’t happen if it wasn’t for volunteers’

BY JACK DIXON
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VOLUNTEERS have a bigger part to play in London life than ever before as increasing numbers of people choose to give up their time for a worthy cause.

That is the view of Catherine Perez-Phillips, manager of the Hammersmith and Fulham Volunteer Centre, who is urging Londoners to take a step back from their busy lives and offer a helping hand to those in need.

The centre, in King Street, Hammersmith, is marking the nationwide Volunteers Week campaign with a series of events promoting hundreds of opportunities across the borough.

For some, says Ms Perez-Phillips, it’s a chance to go the extra mile, while others can build up their CVs with valuable workplace experience.

Experts even suggest that doing a simple good deed can work wonders for our mental health as we switch off from our own lives and think of others less fortunate.

“No matter how much or how little time you have there is something to suit everyone,” said Ms Perez-Phillips, who has been at the helm of the Hammersmith centre since September 2013.

“Obviously the sort of things that come to people’s minds are the charity shops but there is a



A Hammersmith and Fulham Volunteer Centre awareness event

lot more on offer. There are lots of befriending opportunities, helping children to read and assisting with after-school clubs. Gardening and driving are also popular, as well as office-based roles.”

Perhaps surprisingly, volunteering is now one of the biggest drivers of the UK economy, contributing more than £23 billion every year.

Celebrations are taking place across the country to mark the efforts of our unsung heroes during Volunteers Week, which runs until June 12.

The team at the Hammersmith centre are among hundreds nationwide who are holding events

to raise the profile of volunteering in their community.

A string of local organisations put forward a public face during a networking event at Hammersmith Library last week, while the team has also been doing the rounds at the W12 shopping centre and Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College to spread the word.

Ms Perez-Phillips says now is as good a time as any to try your hand at unpaid work.

“As much as you might give up your time without pay, you receive back in other ways – in terms of personal satisfaction and building your skills for work.

“There are many relationships

that people make as a volunteer that are so special purely because the person is not being paid.

“For somebody to be visiting somebody who is elderly and isolated, that’s something that could never be a paid role. It just wouldn’t be the same relationship.”

Ms Perez-Phillips says a lot of the people who visit the centre to be matched up to an appropriate volunteering role are looking to build their career prospects.

But she believes there is still an appetite and an enthusiasm for helping others – a sense of community that keeps London ticking over.

Do we need to do more to keep the Big Society dream alive?

“I don’t think there’s a sense of needing to get back to it,” she says. “People have always volunteered and will continue to do so. Sometimes if people feel that it’s a Big Society, that can actually put people off.

“There are lots of people making a huge difference to the community. After-school clubs, recycling, supporting people who are elderly and isolated by getting out to the shops – so many things simply wouldn’t happen if it wasn’t for volunteers.”

For more information about volunteering opportunities in Hammersmith and Fulham, email enquiries@hfvc.org.uk or call 0208 741 9876.



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