Volunteering – A Labour of Love

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A labour of love is, I feel, an appropriate answer when someone asks you why you volunteer your time to lend a helping hand to someone or an organisation. Trying to describe volunteering is to say it comes in all shapes and sizes.

When thinking of voluntary work, there is a tendency to think of people who volunteer their time in the nation's hospitals. However, there is more to volunteering than just working in hospitals. For example, those who are rail enthusiasts. Visit places like the Great Central Railway at Loughborough or the Seven Valley Railway in Shropshire and you will find people not just maintaining the railway's steam engines, referred to as rolling stock, there are also those who maintain the railway's efficient day-to-day running. These are people such as the station staff, ticket inspectors, guards, signalmen, track maintenance staff etc. and who are all volunteers. There is, of course, a nucleus of salaried staff in places such as a heritage railway centre but a large percentage of the workforce are all volunteers.

As further examples, you only have to walk up and down Britain's high streets to see the many charitable outlets that are all run by volunteers. Indeed, one only has to look to the more recent past when the government appealed for 250,000 volunteers to help run the N.H.S. vaccination centres during the covid-19 pandemic. The response the government received was overwhelming. Instead of just 250,000 people answering the call the number of people coming forward to volunteer rose threefold to 750,000 people. All coming forward to help run the country's vaccination centres.

Apart from volunteers maintaining the smooth running of vaccination centres, some volunteers regularly put their own lives at risk as members of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution or as members of the UK's National Parks Mountain Rescue Teams. In other words, these are people who have regular full-time occupations but are willing to face atrocious weather conditions at sea or up a mountainside to rescue those who have got themselves into difficulty.

To attempt to name every charitable organisation, youth group, and homeless charity that is run by volunteers is impossible. All I can say is, you all know who you all are and know how much your work is appreciated.

From my perspective, as chair of the Friends of Woodthorpe Grange Park, as a group on Saturday mornings for two hours we garden in specific areas in one of Woodthorpe Park's gardens. Apart from keeping certain areas weed free, as a group, we have restored the ground of the north and west-facing walls of the former kitchen garden. From an area that was choked with bindweed to an area that is now all lush and green suitable for butterflies and other insects.

This, of course, is just one example of the work that we, as volunteers, have carried out. To add another string to our volunteering bow, I and another member occasionally lead heritage and tree walks around Woodthorpe Park. All of which attract a large group of enthusiastic visitors to the Park.

There are, of course, other similar groups dotted about the parks in the City and County of Nottingham. Some of which have been established longer than others. However, they like me all share the same self-satisfaction of having done voluntary work that is appreciated, not just by those in authority but, by members of the public. And, as I said at the beginning, like all the many diverse voluntary groups and organisations there are, we share one thing in common, we do it because it's "A Labour of Love."