

SUMMER OF APPRECIATION

IMPACT REPORT 2026

We ♥ Volunteers



FOREWORD



Annabel Turpin
Chief Executive
Storyhouse

Summer of Appreciation is a wonderful example of what can be achieved through collaboration, shared ambition and a commitment to making a positive difference in our communities.

At Storyhouse, we believe that everyone should have opportunities to experience culture, discover new places and feel part of their community. This project has brought that ambition to life in a different and exciting way, creating a programme of experiences for volunteers across Cheshire West.

What began as a simple idea has grown into a successful partnership, with eight organisations contributing their time, spaces and expertise. From behind-the-scenes tours to outdoor adventures, the programme has offered opportunities not just to enjoy something new, but to meet people, exchange

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ideas and discover more about the extraordinary range of organisations working across our borough.

The findings in this report are particularly encouraging. Beyond the impressive levels of participation, they show that volunteers have developed new connections, gained a greater understanding of other organisations and felt a stronger sense of belonging.

There is real potential to build on what has been achieved this summer. Summer of Appreciation offers a model for how organisations of different sizes and purposes can work together creatively, making better use of the resources and opportunities already available within our communities.

Thank you to Cheshire West Voluntary Action and every partner who has contributed to making this first Summer of Appreciation such a success. We look forward to seeing where it leads next.

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Gary Cliffe

Chief Executive

Cheshire West Voluntary Action

Volunteering can sometimes sound like quite a small word, but what it represents is enormous. It is people giving their time, energy, skills and compassion to help somebody else, strengthen a community, or make something happen that otherwise simply wouldn't.

Across Cheshire West, volunteers support people when they're struggling, tackle loneliness, run groups and activities, provide transport, help in food projects, support families, protect our environment, raise money and keep hundreds of community organisations going.

And the important thing is that much of this happens quietly. There are no headlines and often very little recognition — people simply see something that needs doing and get on with it.

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For the partners involved, this Summer of Appreciation is certainly about saying thank you... but also much more than that.

It is also about bringing volunteers together from different organisations. It is about creating a community of volunteers, where we can celebrate the lasting impact they have on our communities. And it is about enabling smaller community organisations to celebrate and reward their volunteers as well, where larger organisations with greater resources can support those with fewer.

INTRODUCTION

Summer of Appreciation was inspired by a similar project organised by the North West Heritage Volunteering Group. In 2025, their 'reciprocal visits' scheme brought volunteers together to explore each other's sites, share ideas and experiences, and discover the wealth of skills, knowledge and opportunities that volunteering can offer.

Conceived and pioneered by Storyhouse, Summer of Appreciation built on this idea, expanding its reach across Cheshire West to celebrate the borough's incredible volunteers through a programme of free events, activities and experiences.

Storyhouse and Cheshire West Voluntary Action worked in partnership to develop and deliver the project, bringing together a range of organisations and partners to create a programme with broad appeal. Storyhouse developed the project's branding and led its communications and marketing, while also hosting the launch and finale events.

PROJECT AIMS



The ethos behind this project aligns with the **Cheshire West Vision for Volunteering (2025-2030)**. Summer of Appreciation fulfils the aim of creating a more collaborative community around volunteering, enabling larger organisations to share their resources with smaller ones. That way, volunteer-led groups who might not have the means to reward their volunteers in this way can participate in this fantastic project.

SUMMARY

Summer of Appreciation partners were delighted to offer a range of free events and activities throughout the Summer, starting in June lasting through to the end of August.



383

Unique volunteers engaged
with events or activities



31

Events



1,241

Hours of 'appreciation'



456

'attendances' at
events or activities



8

Summer of Appreciation
partners



57

Organisations (VCFSE sector
and statutory partners) sent
at least one of their volunteers
to an event or activity



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EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

A fantastic and varied programme of free events were offered to the inspiring volunteers of Cheshire West.

These events took place in Chester, Ellesmere Port, and Northwich.

The logo for Storyhouse, featuring the word "STORYHOUSE" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font on a red rectangular background.

- Backstage Theatre Tour
- 'Moonlight Flicks'
Grosvenor Park cinema screening



**English
Heritage**

- Exclusive
Chester
Castle tour



- BBQ,
Boccia, and
Bikes!



- Chester Zoo tour
- Chester Zoo nature
reserve walk and tour



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EVENTS & ACTIVITIES



- RSPB Burton Mere: guided walk across the reserve



CHESTER
CATHEDRAL

- Cathedral Tower tours
- Discovery tours
- Free tea and coffee



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EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

Cheshire West Voluntary Action (CWVA) played an integral oversight role, coordinating the project's ongoing management and delivery. This included support with communications, using Plinth (our social impact system) to manage bookings and gather feedback, bringing partners together, and hosting an accessible programme of events for volunteers to access.

This project is a prime example of partnership working in action - 8 amazing charities pooling their resources to offer something truly special.



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FEEDBACK

Every volunteer who engaged with Summer of Appreciation was given the opportunity to leave feedback. A total of 79 responses were received, the majority of which were very positive.

This feedback is invaluable. As a partnership, it enables us to demonstrate the collective and lasting impact of the project, how we were able to achieve our outcomes, and the need to adapt and expand moving forward.



96%

would recommend the
Summer of Appreciation
project to other volunteers



89%

said they have an even
better impression of the
partner charities involved



72%

felt more connected to a
wider community of
volunteers



67%

felt more valued and
appreciated as volunteers

FEEDBACK



85%

enjoyed the experience of participating in the project



65%

felt the project motivated them to continue or enhance their volunteering



84%

would take part if Summer of Appreciation happened again in future



“I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to Chester Zoo nature reserve and meeting the Chester Zoo volunteers. It was a super day and was very well organised.”

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FEEDBACK

“I hadn’t realised I was part of a much bigger volunteering community. I now know much more about the wonderful work done at other organisations. I feel very proud to belong.”



“What a wonderful idea! The kindness and generosity of the organisations plus the friendliness of the volunteers who guided us around was outstanding. I’ve met people from a range of other organisations. Although things were a bit awkward between strangers at the start, we soon all became pals.”

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FEEDBACK



“I don't volunteer for 'rewards' but this lovely project was affirming and encouraging. It also gave me an appreciation of the wealth and breadth of skills and knowledge that other teams of volunteers have.”

“I volunteer with several organisations and this summer of appreciation has encouraged me to talk to other people about what I do and find out what else is going on in the area. It has made me and others feel appreciated and recognised...”



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THANK YOU

CWVA would like to thank a number of partners and stakeholders, all of whom played an integral role in driving forward this project without dedicated project funding.

- **Summer of Appreciation delivery partners:**
Canal & River Trust; Chester Cathedral; Chester Zoo; English Heritage; Live! Cheshire; RSPB Burton Mere; and Storyhouse - for providing a range of events and activities
- **Storyhouse** - for inspiring the project, and taking a lead on communications and marketing
- **Delivery volunteers** - for the amazing volunteers who led an event, gave a tour, or served a cup of coffee
- **CWVA members and statutory partners** - for helping to spread the word about the project to their eligible volunteers
- **Volunteers across Cheshire West** - for everything they do for our communities, day in, day out...