



VITA and Vitalise Volunteer radio recruitment campaign

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1. BACKGROUND

Vitalise are keen to recruit more older people to volunteer, both residentially and on an ad hoc basis at its five centres for people with disabilities.

The percentage of residential volunteers aged over 60 had been in decline over recent years from approx nine per cent in the late 1990s to around five per cent in 2005.

Initial discussions were held with VITA in September 2005 with subsequent meetings over the following weeks.

It was agreed to run a recruitment project, focussing on a radio appeal and open day, with a further option of concentrating on older people in a press appeal later in the year.

2. RADIO APPEAL

Advice suggested a local, targeted radio appeal was likely to be most successful, so we decided to focus the appeal on one regional Vitalise Centre, Skylarks in Nottingham.

Various options were considered. SAGA Radio in the East Midlands were approached and presented a strong case, offering excellent coverage in the region and a good match with their core target. (Adults aged 60 and over 512,000, SAGA monthly audience 408,000)

An 18 week campaign was produced using a 50 second commercial featuring interviews with actual older volunteers, promoting an authentic message and call to action, via local telephone number. Three versions of the commercial were produced and used in the early part of the campaign. All involved in the production of the appeal were optimistic at this stage and felt the advert worked well.

Transmission began on 27 February 2006.

The initial results were very disappointing, with only four recorded responses during the first two months. This prompted a change to the advert.

One aspect of the original message which it was felt might have attributed to the poor response was the potential for some confusion or ambiguity over the name of the organisation. In the Midlands region, 'Skylarks' (the local Vitalise centre) is a more readily recognised than 'Vitalise'. Another factor may have been that Vitalise changed name only 15 months earlier after being known for over 40 years as Winged Fellowship Trust. National corporate guidelines and protocol dictated 'Vitalise' needed to be in the message.

The revised advert was based on a more traditional professional voiced script and used only 'Skylarks' in the main body of the more orthodox appeal. Sadly, this showed little improvement in response.

In total, only ten respondents have been recorded on the Vitalise database to date.

It is possible more people responded and were simply referred to the Vitalise main booking office in Kendal, although efforts were made to manage calls locally.

There have been several changes in staff at the Skylarks centre too and this may have hampered continuity and communication.

A coded system is used to record sources of information on volunteers' records and this has been used to extract the data. It is possible more people registered as a result of the appeal but didn't give the source.

Further analysis of the transmission times for the radio appeal showed around 40 per cent were outside what could be considered 'regular' listening periods, that is between 8am and 11pm. However these were included for little or no cost as part of the package, which did include comprehensive coverage within these times, including weekends.

There were early hopes and efforts on the part of VITA and Vitalise to involve a celebrity in voicing the appeal. Unfortunately this couldn't be arranged and this too may have affected response.

3. DEALING WITH RESPONSES

It was decided the Skylarks centre would be the most appropriate point for responses for four main reasons;

- it gave a local phone number which local people would recognise.
- it offered answering by actual people 24 hours a day, seven days a week instead of an answer phone message
- callers would be speaking to staff at the centre, who would be in a position to answer any initial questions on volunteering
- there would be every chance the people answering the call might meet the volunteer at some point during their volunteering.

4. PREPARATION

A meeting was held with all the Skylarks centre staff on 24 February, four days before launch of the appeal. The adverts were played to the team and a briefing paper circulated. (Appendix one)

Response sheets were distributed and made available at the various phone locations around the centre.

5. OPEN DAY APPEAL

As part of the project an open day for volunteers would be held at Skylarks. The emphasis was on local people in the hope of building up the local community support.

The day was organised for Friday 9 June 2006. This date coincided with the end of the SAGA radio appeal and close to national Volunteers Week (1-7 June).

Local community radio was approached and made announcements in the week prior to the open day.

Flyers were produced and distributed in local area; 18,000 in the West Bridgford area and a further 10,000 in Clifton. Some local shops and the local library displayed and distributed the flyers.

The centre was open for visitors from 11.30am to 6pm, with staff available for tours and questions.

Expectations were quite high following reports of several people saying they had seen the flyers or heard the radio announcements.

In total, 25 people attended the open day. Two people registered and booked in as volunteers the following week.

The remaining people who responded to the open day were contacted again two weeks later and sent registration forms and further information with options to help. No further analysis has taken place to date.

All the people who responded to the radio appeal and open day will periodically be sent information by Vitalise including appeals to volunteer, so it is hoped more people will ultimately come forward.

The VITA/SAGA radio appeal was publicised in the Vitalise national newsletter in the spring and mailed to approximately 40,000 people.

Reference to the appeal, including the sound files have also been publicised on the volunteer's section of the Vitalise web site. It is hoped this may prompt further responses.

6. LETTER TO THE EDITOR APPEAL

Vitalise has had success with a letter to the editor type of appeal in the past and discussed making the focus of the next appeal on 'older people'.

Due to heavy demand at the Vitalise centres and unprecedented numbers of residential volunteers in 2006, this appeal has been scheduled for September, slightly later than originally planned to cover the recruitment need for autumn shortages.

This appeal will have national coverage, but is organised to have regional or local interest featuring the five Vitalise centres.

Regional recruitment officers will act as first point of phone contact, but the central website and address will also be used. Response analysis will be available at a later date.

7. FURTHER IMPACT OF THE CAMPAIGN

The volunteers involved in the appeal have commented that months later they are still being referred to as the 'Saga radio volunteers'. This shows the power of word of mouth to get across messages, and that maybe the benefit of this campaign was more around awareness-raising than recruitment. More people did take note of the appeals than can be quantified, enough to mention it to friends, but not ring Vitalise. The people who heard the appeal may not have been thinking about volunteering at the time, but the name clearly lodged with them. Vitalise can assume there will be impact in the future, even it's just name recognition which would help with other appeals or service referrals, if not actual volunteering.

Vitalise has had it's best ever year for residential volunteering in terms of numbers, and there is a range of factors contributing to this. However, the VITA campaign was the only formal commercial appeal Vitalise embarked on in 2006. Such an appeal would normally be outside the scope of resources available but was a major difference to the recruitment strategy of previous years.

It is impossible to say whether there is a link between the radio campaign and this increase in volunteer numbers, but it may have achieved more than is apparent at first glance. Even if on a simple awareness-raising basis, the campaign may have brought benefit to Vitalise.

APPENDIX ONE

SAGA radio appeal. SKYLARKS February – June 2006

Background

The appeal is specifically aimed at older volunteers.

It is a commercial appeal, funded by VITA. Vitalise are working with VITA and we decided to focus the project on Skylarks and the East Midlands area.

The appeal advert will be broadcast most days, sometimes two or three times a day, (between 6am and midnight) over an 18 week period, up to the end of June.

The broadcast area covers the four major East Midlands counties, but people outside the region may pick it up too.

Responses

As it is a funded project, it's really important we monitor responses carefully and are able to report back. This is where we need your help and co-operation

Response sheets will be available by the phones. Please record any responses including date and time if possible.

We'd like to know if people are interested in occasional daily help, or the residential side. Local people can be invited to pop in for a cup of tea and a chat and arrangements can be made as appropriate.

We know older volunteers are more likely to continue their involvement as volunteers and can often help out at short notice, which is a real bonus.

We're actively seeking more people to help on a daily basis, either ad-hoc, or on a specific regular basis. This too could be very beneficial for the future, allowing more flexible working for residential volunteers, or guaranteed help for trips or entertainments. People may also be interested in helping in the shop or garden.

Who is *your* favourite older Volunteer? The next person to ring could be another _____ (please fill in the gap with your favourite volunteer.)

We're planning an 'open day' for potential volunteers at Skylarks on Friday 9 June and will be distributing a flyer locally to promote this (again supported by VITA).

Anyone responding nearer that time can be encouraged to come along.

You shouldn't need to spend much time on the phone with people and we appreciate you are busy with other things most of the time, but getting across the enthusiasm, warmth and passion for what we do at Skylarks will make a BIG difference in

capturing peoples interest and you are the best people to do this. How nice is it to actually see the person you've spoken to on the phone too. ***Trust me, this is the key!***

We really do appreciate your support with this appeal. Let's hope it brings results.

Very many thanks,

Dave Clough
Volunteering development manager



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