

Seadream Education CIC

Providing young volunteers with skills and experience to move into the workplace

Context

Seadream Education CIC is a not-for-profit organisation based in Devon, delivering science and engineering activities to instil an interest and understanding about the natural world with a particular focus on the marine environment. Its activities include creating and teaching national curriculum-related science resource kits in schools, training and materials for teachers, marine biology research projects and promoting its work at public engagement events. Seadream also mentors young people who are not in employment, education or training.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Seadream had two paid members of staff and five volunteers. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, volunteers have reduced to four as there have been fewer opportunities to deliver public engagement and school activities in person. Instead, sessions have been run online and required less resource.

Challenge

Given the small number of paid employees, Seadream sometimes requires additional capacity to meet the demand for its activities and fill gaps in the team's skills. This includes supporting the set-up and delivery of activities at large events such as country shows or music festivals.

“[Volunteering] means a huge amount, because we don't need regular support, and we can't afford regular support, what we need is support during these [large] activities, when it's too much for our small team to deal with, just occasional support.

Community business representative

One of Seadream's objectives when recruiting volunteers is to provide opportunities to help young people develop skills and experience to progress into work.

Action

Seadream has a two-pronged approach to recruiting young volunteers seeking to increase their skills and experience in the subjects it covers in activities. Firstly, it invites young people who have participated in its educational mentoring to volunteer with them. Secondly, it works with lecturer contacts in the subject-relevant departments at its local university to advertise its volunteering opportunities and identify students willing to offer their time in return for developing skills and experience to strengthen their CVs.

“[A young volunteer might ask] ‘Can I do work experience with you? ... Can I volunteer for you?’ It's people that have experienced what we do and what we deliver, that end up volunteering for us. The student at the university, she was on the mentoring programme two years ago.

Community business representative

To support engagement and retention, Seadream also funds training for its young volunteers, so long as that aligns with its vision. This both enables the organisation to deliver activities run by trained volunteers and also increases the skills of the volunteers. The training has included a weekend's snorkelling safari teaching and marine mammal medic courses.

Result

- Seadream's approach to volunteering helps it achieve its objectives, including:
- having and retaining a flexible and cost-effective workforce
- supporting young people to gain training and experience ready for the workplace
- increasing the number of local people able to support its vision to protect and promote the environment.

The latter includes volunteers who, as a result of training funded by Seadream, help rescue marine animals.

“... We've put people through the marine mammal medic course, so that's for the environmental message that we [promote]. So, if they have to go on a call-out, then they've got the qualifications, and the membership, which pays for their insurance, and we can [also] give them travel expenses, if they go rescue a seal.”

Community business representative