

Wiltshire Parent Carer Council: Recruiting, Supporting and Valuing Volunteers



About The Wiltshire Parent Carer Council

The Wiltshire Parent Carer Council (WPCC) is a large and well-established parent carer forum (PCF). It was founded in 2008 and is an independent organisation. The WPCC is managed and run by parent carers, for parent carers.

In addition to focussing on participation and coproduction at its core, the organisation delivers a number of other services and offers of support for parent carers, including its Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Service, (known as SENDIS) and a dedicated ND Advice Line. SENDIS provides information, advice and support to families. The WPCC also supports the administration of the Wiltshire Short Breaks Scheme.

The DFE grant part-funds their parent participation work and they receive funding from both the LA and Health in addition to the DFE grant.

The WPCC has developed a volunteer model to support their parent participation work, strategic engagement and their information and support offers.

The Importance of Volunteers

The WPCC says volunteers are one of their most valuable assets. The WPCC has developed a structured volunteering model that supports its parent participation work, strategic engagement and its information and support offers. The WPCC says their model would not be possible using the annual DFE grant alone. Additional funding is essential to provide the level of staffing, training, coordination and wellbeing support that volunteers receive.

The WPCC embeds volunteers in a variety of ways within the organisation. Volunteers represent WPCC at strategic meetings and transformation boards, lead key pieces of strategic work, facilitate parenting courses, act as observer moderators in SEN decision-making groups, and support engagement, promotion and events. Through this work, volunteers alongside the organisation's membership, help to shape local SEND services and ensure lived experience remains central to decision-making.

Strategic Director Stuart Hall said:

“At the heart of the WPCC is a simple belief: parent carers of children with SEND deserve to feel heard, connected and empowered. To help make that happen, the WPCC has built a volunteer model that is not only structured and professional, but also deeply values-based. It is an approach that values parent carers as experts by experience, gives them meaningful roles, and provides the training and support they need to empower them.”

He said; *“Parent carers often juggle overwhelming responsibilities, and many have had to take time out from careers due to the demands of their caring responsibilities. By recruiting parent carers as volunteers, the WPCC ensures that lived experience remains at the very centre of local SEND discussions and at the same time, volunteers gain skills, confidence, wellbeing benefits and valuable experiences that can open new doors in their personal and professional lives.*

How the WPCC Recruits Volunteers

Because volunteers represent the WPCC in professional settings including meetings, events and training sessions, the recruitment process is clear, open and robust. The WPCC advertises specific volunteer opportunities and provides clear role descriptions along with an explanation of why each role is needed.

There is an expression of interest stage which usually includes face-to-face information sessions. These sessions allow people to find out more about the role, ask questions and decide whether it feels right for them, without any pressure to commit. The WPCC reimburses reasonable out-of-pocket expenses such as mileage and parking for attending these sessions. The WPCC often incorporates discrete activities into these sessions to help inform suitability for a volunteer role. Where appropriate, DBS checks are also carried out.

Stuart said, *“The WPCC is always transparent in explaining that sessions are as much about determining suitability for the role as they are an opportunity for individuals to decide if the role is the right fit for them.”*

Training, Induction and Ongoing Support

All successful volunteers receive structured training, induction and mentoring. This process is usually coordinated by the WPCC’s Volunteer Coordinator and is tailored to the specific role. Volunteers are given the information, ongoing support and tools they need to feel confident in their work.

Training may be supported by other services and is followed by ongoing support, supervision and opportunities for reflection. This approach ensures volunteers feel valued from the very beginning and continue to feel supported throughout their time with WPCC.

Stuart said; *“This process ensures that volunteers feel valued from the start, and that they are supported to succeed.”*

The Role of the Volunteer Coordinator

The WPCC’s ability to support volunteers so thoroughly is only possible because of its dedicated Volunteer Coordinator member of staff, a role that is not funded by the parent carer forum DfE grant. The WPCC Volunteer Coordinator ensures that:

- every volunteer has a named point of contact
- ongoing training is organised and relevant

- ongoing wellbeing support is available
- volunteers are placed in roles that match their strengths and interests
- communication is consistent and supportive
- the team environment is welcoming and inclusive
- volunteers receive regular support and supervision
- communication is coordinated
- different volunteering teams meet to help them feel more connected, supported and valued

The Volunteer Coordinator manages a dedicated budget to organise regular volunteer meet-ups throughout the year. The WPCC also runs at least two Away Days each year, bringing staff and volunteers together as one team. Volunteers attend all Away Days and are treated as full and equal members of the organisation.

Stuart said: *“These serve to not only bring our volunteers together regularly and ensure they feel connected, informed and valued, but we offer wellbeing opportunities through these sessions to help ensure that we give back to our volunteers, tangibly demonstrate their value and invest in their wellbeing.”*

How the Volunteer Model is Structured

The WPCC’s volunteer roles are organised into two broad groups: Operational and Strategic. Operational volunteers are supported by the Volunteer Coordinator and are involved in activities such as facilitating courses, supporting engagement, acting as observer moderators and supporting with hosting events. Strategic volunteers report to the Chair of Participation and focus on leading strategic workstreams and representing WPCC on transformation boards.

Training and Development Opportunities

The WPCC believes in investing in the development of volunteers. As a result of funding additional to the DfE grant, WPCC volunteers benefit from:

- Comprehensive induction training and mentoring
- Ongoing skills-based training (e.g. safeguarding, understanding SEND systems, Equality and Diversity etc.)
- Attendance at team training and Away Days
- Regular check-ins and supervision, tailored to individual needs; both on a one-to-one basis and in groups
- Opportunities to shadow, learn and build expertise.

The Impact of Volunteering with WPCC

WPCC parent carers report that becoming a volunteer brings deeply personal benefits, including:

- **Reduced Isolation**
Volunteers connect with other parent carers who truly understand their experiences. Many describe the WPCC as the first place they felt genuinely “heard”.

Improved Wellbeing

- Having a purposeful role outside of caring responsibilities can boost confidence and self-esteem. Wellbeing activities, along with regular support and supervision, help maintain positive mental health.
- **Friendship and Community**

Volunteers become part of a warm, supportive team. Laughter, empathy and encouragement are key parts of the experience.

- **Work Experience and References**

Volunteering provides recent experience for those who have been out of paid work. Volunteers gain new skills, build their CV and can request a reference.

The WPCC says that five volunteers have gone on to paid roles within the WPCC and at least three others have gone on to paid work outside the PCF.

- **A Renewed Sense of Identity**

Many parents say volunteering reminds them that they are more than a carer. It highlights that they have expertise, insight and value beyond their caring role.

A Model Built on Partnership and Respect

By investing in a structured and well-supported volunteer model, the WPCC ensures that families' voices remain central, volunteers feel empowered and supported, and the organisation continues to grow and strengthen the SEND community across Wiltshire.

Stuart said: *"The WPCC's volunteer programme is much more than a way to deliver engagement. It is a partnership between families, the local authority and the WPCC; one where parent carers are respected as equal partners and given the tools they need to thrive.*

"The model also helps to ensure that the WPCC continues to grow, evolve and thrive. It is a model built on dignity, professionalism and compassion, and one that continues to strengthen the SEND community across Wiltshire."

To hear more about Wiltshire Parent Carer Council and their current projects go to the [Wiltshire Parent Carer Council](#) website.