

We Give Our Time

Friday 13th January 2012: Live Chat with Alice Sander and the Events Team

Last week we hosted a live chat session with Alice Sander and her events team in Fundraising. Alice and her team spoke to us about National events, Challenge events and other ways to get involved in fundraising with Macmillan.

For those of you who couldn't make it to the chat, I have posted the transcript up here and hope it is helpful to you. Thank you to everyone who made it too.

ET = Events Team; AM = Amy – Macmillan; HM = Helen – Macmillan; KM = Karen – Macmillan;
GUEST = Volunteers/Time-givers signed on

AM: So Alice, it would be great if you could give us a bit of an introduction to events, challenge events in particular and what you do

ET: Sure, so I currently work in the Challenge Events team at Macmillan, working on a variety of running events, ranging from marathons to smaller local runs. But the challenge events team covers a whole host of events from hiking to swimming to cycling and triathlons - Ooh (gosh, we do do a lot!). So there's certainly something for everyone

AM: Could you tell us a bit about how volunteers can get involved in those types of events?

ET: Absolutely, volunteers are so important to help our events be as successful as possible!

AM: If any of the other challenge events team members want to chip in please feel free to do so

ET: We need volunteers to help cheer on our participants or help with on the day activities such as charity tents for example

GUEST: Do you have a regular team of cheerer volunteers?

ET: We also have one bespoke running event on our programme, which is The Macmillan 10k. For this event we need volunteers for even more roles such as marshalling the route, handing out medals, handing out water and of course lots of cheerers.

ET: For some events, such as London Marathon, we do have lots of people who like to come back year on year - cheering at events like this is actually a really fun day out!

ET: It is the same for Macmillan 10k, we have a certain number of people that come back every year but we always like to recruit more new people as the event gets bigger

HM: Sounds like volunteers keep things running... literally.

GUEST: We sometimes have difficulty finding cheerers for Laser running events. How do people get recruited as volunteers?

ET: I know, it can be difficult to recruit volunteers in London as there are so many events in London which is why we do try and recruit as many new volunteers each year as possible!

AM: Do you guys see We Give Our Time as a possible platform for recruiting further volunteers if it goes live beyond the pilot scheme?

GUEST: Possibly, for recruiting existing volunteers who want to get involved in other ways.

ET: I certainly think we could use We Give Our Time as a possible platform. We have been working closely with the volunteer team in order to maximise recruitment of volunteers. I think the key message is letting people know that volunteering opportunities are available within our events and they only have to commit to that day.

ET: Since Do-it linked with our website it has helped a lot.

ET: Having big corporate partners has helped this year as well, such as boots who came out in force for The Great North Run this year. This is something we can maximise on this year as well.

ET: Placing volunteer asks on our event pages has also helped, people who are interested in the event but maybe not participate can get involved by volunteering and not miss out. Timing is key too, you need to ask early! Get the date in the diary!

GUEST: And also maybe friends and relations of the runners

ET: Yep, definitely, we'd always encourage runners to bring their friends, family and colleague along on the day of their event

AM: Yeah that's a good one. You have quite a bit of overlap with events volunteers at the Hammersmith Office don't you?

GUEST: Yes - although I am gradually passing that over to the new Fundraising Support Centre so we need to keep them in the loop

AM: Ah yes. Well if you think of any ways in which We Give Our Time can be used to promote events do let us know.

ET: Hopefully having the new fundraising support centre can help us to recruit volunteers in areas outside London as well. That would be great as there are so many events all across the country that need volunteer support!

GUEST: I think there is a FRS team for each region

AM: I think a start would be putting some info about events onto the Useful Links docs

ET: Exactly, it is something we will still need local fundraisers to help with but having a central point will hopefully make things a bit easier

AM: yes I think you're right, but Alice and co will know more about that than I do!...

ET: Yes, each region will be represented at the FSC, and they in turn will be in contact with each of the regional FRMs

ET: Absolutely Amy, we are always looking for new ways to recruit volunteers and new ways to reach people we may not have reached before This is something we will be doing a lot with social networking next year as well Facebook and twitter will be great tools for recruiting volunteers

AM: Alice and team, do you have any specific questions you'd like to ask volunteers?

ET: What do you think attracts events to certain volunteers and how could we maybe improve our tasks to gain more new people? Have you got any advice on how we can provide a better volunteer experience?

GUEST: A clear role on the day and proper briefing is important, with good information well in advance

GUEST: Sometimes maybe in the Laser events

GUEST: I think the briefings I have seen for the challenge events have been good though, but I haven't attended any as a volunteer

ET: Do you think this is something we have been lacking at all?

ET: Could you maybe give me an example of an event where you think we could have given a better brief; this will then help us to improve.

GUEST: I don't think the ones I have in mind are your events

ET: So are these for smaller local runs?

GUEST: Yes smaller local runs often organised by other groups but with some runners for Macmillan

GUEST: We probably get the information from the organisers rather late in the day as well

ET: So do you think we maybe need to pass on the briefs we use to the local fundraisers so they can be of the same standard?

HM: I think that makes a good point in general though - if you find there is great feedback on particular briefings then it would be helpful to share that across the events

ET: I believe providing briefing templates is something that is being worked, on going to 2012

ET: That can sometimes be a problem, if we don't have information from race organisers it is hard for us to know the exact details of the day but then again that does relate to the smaller local runs as well. But you are right; we are always looking for feedback from volunteers to improve.

GUEST: Yes - I think it the smaller local events organised by supporters (rather than Macmillan directly) where the briefings maybe rather light on details

AM: Generally, from what I've heard, events is one of the better areas of volunteer involvement in terms of volunteering experience

HM: My volunteer experience at Macmillan is with the Volunteering and Community Action Team. I'm certainly getting the volunteer benchmark experience!

AM: heheh! I haven't bribed her, honest

ET: We actually sent out a survey to all our Macmillan 10k volunteers last year so we could see how they felt about the day and what we could do better

AM: Ooh, what was the general consensus?

ET: It was very good! The Macmillan 10k is slightly different being a bespoke event however

ET: One of the problems we did have though was that some volunteers didn't turn up which meant people had to marshal on their own

ET: Yes, that can be difficult, can't it - it's difficult when people are volunteering their time but their involvement on the day really is so important and useful!

ET: Exactly, it is hard as you can never expect that everyone will turn up

GUEST: Yes - we have had a few 'no-shows' from volunteers - difficult to manage this

ET: For this reason we also rely on staff to come and volunteer at events as well

ET: I think we will increasingly try and send such a survey to volunteers at various events as their feedback is so important

GUEST: Do we give volunteers feedback after the event on how much was raised?

ET: Yes we do. We also send them nice quotes from participants

AM: Hmm, is there anything Macmillan could do to support these smaller local events better than?

ET: The best feedback we had was the organisation of the day and the briefings so these are definitely the most important things.

ET: Yes, I think when volunteers hear what a great difference they've made to someone's event experience, it hopefully encourages them to join us again!

AM: I had a lovely quote from someone the other day about giving a mars bar to a marathon runner who wasn't even running for Macmillan. But she said the poor man was on the hardest leg of the marathon and his charity wasn't even there to encourage him. So she gave him a mars bar anyway.

ET: Things like that are lovely

AM: The result was that he became a staunch Mac supporter and has been ever since!!

ET: I think that's why runners make the best cheerers as well because they understand what it means and how much its needed

AM: Just from one mars bar!!

ET: That's a lovely story - an example of how important our support is!

HM: ... and how difficult it is!

ET: Ha-ha, that's one powerful mars bar!

AM: So that's a real case of how important the volunteering experience is (in this case the experience of the volunteer runner)

ET: They are the best stories when people run for us because they saw us cheering at a previous run where they weren't supporting Macmillan

GUEST: Need to get this 'importance of cheerers' into our recruitment - I guess we probably do anyway

ET: Absolutely Andrew it is something we always need to stress as it is so important, we do this as our thank you's to volunteers as well as we really couldn't do it without them

ET: Yes, we do communicate this to all of our runners in their newsletters that they receive before events

HM: Absolutely! I'm feeling encouraged to be a cheerer at the next London event!!

AM: Me too!

ET: That's what we want girls! Now spread the word

ET: Yay, definitely come along, it's such a fun day!

AM: So how do you get involved in these types of opportunities?

ET: The whole city really comes together! Its the 22nd April this year.

HM: Yeah, how do I sign up?

AM: Are they advertised on Do-It nearer the time?

ET: That is London Marathon Alice is talking about

ET: Yes all our events are advertised on do-it

HM: Is there a mailing-list for those who have already taken part in previous events?

ET: and on our facebook page which is www.facebook.com/macmillanrunningevents. At the moment we all have separate volunteers lists but it is something we are looking at putting all together so we can mail everyone with a list of events rather than separately. All you need to do is fill out the form on do-it or comment on facebook or email running@macmillan.org.uk and we can put you on our volunteer list for the event you want to help out at

ET: Yep, that way volunteers will also have a better idea of all the events we do and could hopefully plan a small calendar of volunteering opportunities for us!

ET: All our events are listed on the Macmillan website as well

HM: So this mailing-list is separated by events?

ET: Yes, the lists are according to event

AM: So if you're not regularly looking at Do-It, is there something you can add your name to, like a mailing list for people who are interested?

GUEST: On our list of Laser events volunteers we have some who have said they don't really like cheering - need to find out why - could be useful information.

AM: Just catching up on the last bits and realised my question has been answered already!

ET: Yes Amy, emailing the running inbox or calling us is best for that. You are right.

AM: mm that's interesting

ET: They would also be perfect for an event like Macmillan 10k where there are more roles

AM: also, something that will really help with all of this is CRM

ET: Yes but as we mentioned, there are other ways they can support us

ET: or for events where we need help in charity tents with refreshments etc

AM: We'll be able to understand what customers want to be kept informed about, events being one of them

ET: That would be really useful. Looking at how CRM works it will help with who we approach from events. Unfortunately it may be a while until CRM is tailored for the events team.

GUEST: So we need to make sure the Laser volunteers have details of all the London events - not just the 'local' Laser ones

ET: All the London events should be included in the local lists

ET: Yes, they are all included

GUEST: Do you usually need volunteers for all the London events?

ET: Yes, we need volunteers for all our events the more the merrier. It's always great to have Macmillan presence at events!

GUEST: OK - let's follow this up off-line

ET: We encourage local fundraisers to attend smaller events and recruit volunteers for them. And we're always more than happy to offer any help or advice they may need for this

KM: Hello just thought I'd drop in and see what was happening!

ET: We're just chatting about ways in which people can volunteer with us at events

AM: Well we're having a great discussion with our guests about challenge events

ET: Feel free to ask anything you are wondering about as well

HM: What about the Challenge events such as Hiking Abroad? A few friends and I are interested in taking up one of those challenges

KM: Great - I need to find my first half-marathon to run this year - do we have a list?

ET: We do, were you looking for one in London or anywhere? I can send this over to you, that's great news!

HM: I've had a look at the Fundraising pages on Macmillan's website - we're spoilt for choice!

KM: I live in Yorkshire so Northern or Midlands would be easier...

ET: Indeed we are. The choice is massive

ET: You really are Helen and you can run for Macmillan in any running event that there is, it is just that we only have guaranteed places in a certain amount of events. Karen, The Great North Run would be brilliant for your first half marathon. It is probably the most famous half marathon there is and it is based in Newcastle - this is a bit further away from you but worth it for the atmosphere. We have places available in Great North but there are also Leeds or Birmingham half marathons.

AM: Feel free to continue chatting after 4pm everyone, but I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank Alice and the whole challenge events team for hosting this discussion.

ET: Thanks Amy. Unfortunately we will have to go so if anyone has any last questions, please do let me know!

AM: Even though there wasn't a massive take up from volunteers I think it's been useful for the people who could attend

GUEST: Yes - useful thanks - signing off now

ET: Thanks everyone and it's been a pleasure chatting!

KM: I know a few people who've done the Great North so will look into that and the Leeds Birmingham ones - thanks for help!

HM: Ok, I will get in touch offline with questions about the hiking abroad

ET: Do Helen, we have some brilliant ones in 2012.
