

Volunteering Through Passion

In my time on placement one thing which has stood out has been how personal passions drive projects and in particular, volunteers. Being able to share something they personally benefit from makes the giving of time and skills appealing to those who may on occasion feel they are unable, too busy or have nothing to give.

This has been clear across each project as crafters, story tellers, bakers and more have flocked to give above and beyond what they initially intended. Nowhere has it been more obvious than in an unintended project; **Mana Potion** – an event where those seeking community, company and models of positive wellbeing can come and enjoy in their own way and time through play. The name is a play on the idea of Mana from heaven and the concept of a Mana Potion a frequent element in games, which refills your Mana/Mental Points.

Before going any farther, it is important to note that Mana Potion is modelled on another project called **Friendly Friday's**, where a community centre is opened with safe comfortable activities, cheap food and drink and relaxed activities. It has been successful in building community in friendships and mutual support and the occasional bit of activism. It has also become a 'home from home' for many attendees. All people are welcome, no matter their age or background. The youngest "fan" is just 5 years-old and the oldest just celebrated her 98th birthday at Friendly Friday's.

This simple *come and go* as you please organically structured model was the model which made Mana Potion possible.

Mana Potion began when a group of friends noticed the benefits they had gained from a year of regularly meeting to play Table Top Games, to their mental health, confidence and other skills. They questioned me as to why this was something which should be limited to themselves and were told as long as they gave their time, there was no reason it couldn't be.

In partnership with Edgeley Community Church, Mana Potion was launched in August 2018 and welcomed 30 people on its first day with plenty of feedback and enthusiasm from all who visited. There was no trend in age, gender or background. The most common question (apart from "where is the bathroom"?) was "When is the next one?". It was a greater success than expected and has resulted in a large amount of fellowship between visitors, such as an attendee showing up with pizzas for all who attended and insisted each volunteer get a slice.

After each event volunteers clean and tidy away, they have worked for about six hours when all is done but never is there a complaint or sigh of exhaustion. They will refuse to go home until they have sat, shared food and all the wonderful things they have seen that day.

"Did you see that little boy invite that older man to play chess, he never speaks to anyone? They played three games".

"The Dungeons and Dragons players literally jumped for joy today, they did some incredible stuff we couldn't make it up. People stopped to watch."

"Today she told me thanks to Mana Potion she and her daughter have found new ways to connect."

"We need more tables, I ended up playing Jungle Speed on the floor earlier."

A benefit of the Friendly Friday's model is that those who attend regularly have the opportunity to take part in the day to day needs of the event and take ownership. Nine months on regulars have no qualms showing up early and helping set up and staying late to help tidy away. They donate games

and offer to run and demonstrate games to newcomers and freely share how they want the project to evolve. These regulars like to describe themselves as unofficial volunteers, that said they wouldn't mind having a t-shirt to make it official! Their passions for table top games and their benefits have created a small community which supports each other both in and outside of the project.

Each event is a confidence boost and a natural high unexperienced by our volunteers before, because none of them have been invited to before. All volunteers apart from myself are not religious, they have no theological drive to the work, it's pure passion. As a result of the time spent volunteering with Mana Potion volunteers have noticed an increase in confidence, the way they think about accessibility and inclusion and public speaking ability. They take pride in the work they do there and are keen to share it. Now the question they are asking is "How many people are missing out on using their passions for this kind of work because they haven't been asked?"