



Volunteer Strategy

2026 – 2029

1. Introduction

Balance Support CIO is a charity with operations across SW London delivering specialist services to people with learning disabilities and enduring mental health support needs. We believe that volunteering is one of the most beneficial routes to engage our local community, whilst adding unique perspectives to our workforce and, in turn, giving those we support access to more diverse staff and experiences to work alongside.

This strategy reviews the current context and our response in building volunteering across the charity and its operations over the next 3 years. The charity is starting from a low base in terms of participation and the registered numbers of locally based allies. This strategy sets out how we will manage and improve our current position, building on the knowledge of what we have done to date and identifying options for progression and growth up to and beyond 2028.

Change and development will be based around a set of core priorities and key performance indicators, balanced against a range of baseline indicators against which the charity can measure its progress against. Qualitative and quantitative measures are set out to enable the charity to track progress against the wider objectives of our operations. Likely returns of investment against the costs of implementation, as well as the in kind benefits likely to accrue to the charity as a result of wider community inclusion in the delivery of our services.

“Volunteering at Balance has been truly valuable for me — it helped me regain experience, rebuild my confidence, and provided me with a meaningful “first job” experience in the UK after my long career break.”

Candy, Volunteer at the Balance Head Office



2. Our Direction and Purpose as a Charity

2.1. Our Mission

Balance's mission is to become a sustainable deliverer of high-quality support to enable adults with learning disabilities to become less reliant on services and reach their potential.

We do this by:

- Supporting people to live safely and healthily in their own homes
- Providing the tools and opportunities that people need to live independently successfully.
- Ensuring people have choice and control over the support they receive

2.2. Our Objectives

Our corporate objectives are to achieve the following:

1. That we build services that are financially sustainable and resilient to changes in local markets.
2. That our interventions are quality assured and deliver consistency across our operations and development practice
3. That the skills, abilities and knowledge of those who work for us or use our services are central to how we design the work around them.
4. That our operations are scalable, targeted and appropriate to our core business.

2.3. Our Values

Our values underpin who we are and how we work. They recognise that Balance is a complex organisation with a range of internal and external audiences.

They articulate our intention to build an adaptable organisation, one that recognises the contribution that all participants bring to shaping its resilience and development priorities.

- **Empowerment** – Helping people to have a voice.
- **Partnership** – Working effectively with other services.
- **Sustainability** – Protecting the future of our work.
- **Staff Recognition** – Valuing each other in our daily work.
- **Professionalism** – Providing a reliable and high-quality service.
- **Independence** – Helping people to live the lives they want.

3. Our Strategic Position

The charity has undergone profound change since its last strategic review in 2022. With changes to our operational philosophy, wholesale digitisation of our administrative and front-line functions, growth in our contractual relationships, increases in staffing and wider relationships established with partners and organisations across the communities in which we work.

The corporate strategy acknowledges the charity's poor performance in developing and sustaining volunteering as a key part of its operational profile. The 2024 corporate delivery plan identifies the recruitment of a specialist post as key objective in realising change against our baseline at the time of:

- **Volunteering in the charity has remained at a low rate of participation – 13 in total for the year, with 12 currently active (excluding trustees) at September 2024.**

And whilst no provision is made for targets that identify growth as critical performance measures, there is a recognition of currently poor performance and a requirement to address it.



4. Context and Landscape

For community-based charities, the building of local constituencies, brand allies and community-based collaboration is integral to their sustainable development.

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)¹ says that there are four benefits in sustainable development of volunteering for community-based organisations:

Access to Skills	Volunteers bring a range of knowledge and skills.
Wider Reach	By involving volunteers, you can gain a greater reach into your organisation.
Creating Opportunities	Providing opportunities helps connect people and can provide future employment opportunities.
More Relevance	Volunteers can bring new ideas and support the development of an organisation.

Specifically, they state that - 'helping people or improving things was the key reason people said they started volunteering and those who felt they had a positive impact on others were much more likely both to be satisfied with their volunteering and to continue with it. Those who volunteer also report a wide range of personal benefits from volunteering, including enjoyment and improved well-being.' (NCVO.p85)

Within a more localised context, the NCVO's evaluation is echoed in research conducted for Volunteering Kingston's 2025 strategy²:

- 79% of volunteers they surveyed feel more connected to the community since volunteering.
- 83% of volunteers feel their volunteering has made a positive impact on their community.
- Though 61% also stated that volunteering needs a higher profile locally.

The evidence of barriers to volunteering locally mirrored national data sets, with those surveyed stating there is often:

- not enough variety in volunteering opportunities
- potential volunteer applied but didn't hear back.
- the times available didn't fit with the volunteers' availability.
- a failure of existing volunteering opportunities to satisfy demand.

1 A McGarvey et al (2020) Time Well Spent, NCVO, Available at: <https://ncvo-app-wagtail-mediaa721a567-uwkfinin077j.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/time-well-spent-a-national-survey-on-the-volunteer-experience.pdf>

2 Volunteering Kingston (2025) Kingston Volunteering Strategy 2025 – 2029, Available at: <https://www.volunteeringkingston.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/VK-Volunteering-Strategy-2025-2.pdf>

The picture nationally is also changing. NCVO updated review of its 2020 report Time Well Spent in 2023, shows the continuing fall out from covid on volunteering, inflationary pressures on the cost of living, reductions in economic participation and the costs of volunteer management have all begun to take a toll on how organisations recruit and retain volunteers. Structural challenges included the following key findings:

- A noted drop in some key volunteering activities between 2018 and 2022 with the overall likelihood to continue volunteering declining slightly from 80% in 2018 to 77% in 2022
- The proportion of the UK population who had volunteered at least once a week had fallen to 16% in 2022 compared to 23% in 2020.
- Diversity across volunteering has fallen. In 2018, 73% of volunteers said there were people from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures in their group. In 2022 this has dropped to 66%.
- Since 2020, online volunteering has become more prevalent in the sector with Volunteering online or over the phone now the third most common place to volunteer.

Sustainability and structural issues across the sector are additionally likely to impact on the decisions charity's make in relation to how the expand resources on development and sustainability, including volunteering. NCVO's The Road Ahead 2025³ assessment of the sector acknowledges:

- The unpredictable and challenging times the charity and the wider voluntary sector have experienced in recent years looks set to continue.
 - The increases to employer National Insurance Contributions, which came into effect in April 2025, is estimated to put at an additional £1.4bn strain on the charity sector in how it manages its resources and sustainable development.
 - Rates of individual giving and charity donations have fallen to their lowest levels since 2016.
 - Recruitment and retention of trustees is proving increasingly problematic with 79% of charities finding it difficult to fill board vacancies, often with delays of over six months.

However, whilst recruitment and retention of volunteers may represent a challenge, there is enough supporting evidence to show that Balance is still operating within a market where people still wish to participate.

- People who volunteer have an overwhelmingly positive experience of volunteering, with NCVO citing 92% as stating this was the case.
- Motivations for volunteering are still consistent with volunteers indicating the primary motivation is to help others.
- 81% (NCVO) said that the organisation with which they volunteered was flexible in how and when they volunteered.

The 'Comparing National Enabling Environments for Volunteering' report, commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the summer of 2023, examined the differences in the environments that exist to support volunteering in different national contexts.

³ NCVO(2025), The Road Ahead, Available at: www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/the-road-ahead-2025/

The key findings, applicable to Balance, were that:

- Locally-led approaches can improve efficiency and outcomes in both the short and longer-term.
- Using the knowledge and networks of existing local organisations helps new initiatives to function efficiently and effectively.
- Recognising the importance of place in people's motivations to volunteer is also seen as a route to retaining volunteers who want to support their communities.
- It is time to update the language used to describe volunteering. With other governments finding that using language that better reflects how volunteers themselves perceive their role (such as 'helping out' instead of 'volunteering') can do a lot to broaden the appeal of volunteering and make it feel more inclusive.

Our own independently commissioned evaluation and review in 2022⁴ and 2023⁵ provided a number of key observations and recommendations. The Barnes review recommendations and our subsequent actions are set out below:

Recommended Action	What We Did
Develop a plan to address deficits in our volunteering profile	This is the plan that has been developed to address that gap.
Develop consistent communications that identify why people should volunteer for the charity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A revised and updated handbook• A revised and updated volunteer policy• Volunteer expenses policy.• Dedicated pages on the charity's website
Review how we interview, induct and support volunteers over the long-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• See above.• Instituted mandatory training programme at induction and ongoing as necessary.
Revise our policy and volunteer related documentation and to ensure they are widely accessible through our website and other communications tools.	See above.
Recruit a Volunteer Led to oversee and increase the charity's development and delivery of volunteering across its business.	There is a designated Quality and Development role within the organisation which leads on volunteering.

4 Sasha Barnes (2022) Volunteer information and services review, Balance Support, Available at: [Governance/HR/Volunteering/Development](#)

5 P.Paliokosta et al (2023) Balance in Bloom - Supporting growth and enhancement of Balance Horticultural Service as a more dynamic therapeutic resource, University of Kingston, Available at: [Finance/Contracts/Bids 2023/University of Kingston](#)

The review from the University of Kingston made the following thematic observations:

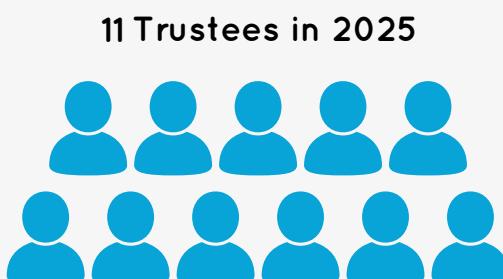
Recommended Action	What We Did
Update job and volunteer role descriptions to better reflect actual responsibilities.	All job descriptions and role descriptors were re-written to reflect what people do and who for.
Increase clarity and understanding of the structure and difference relating to staff and volunteer roles.	Completed as part of the overhaul of our recruitment practice and strengthening volunteering against in line with our policy environment.

5. What our Data Tells Us

The charity has registered growth in both the number of volunteers and the number of hours contributed by volunteers in the support of our services. Growth though has been slow and incremental. Increases in the charity's reach, public access to our services, and wider public recognition of what we do, and the opportunities have all had an impact.



7 Trustees in 2022



In kind value of volunteering to the charity £53,724 in 2025

Change in volunteer hours *

1,084 Volunteer Hours in 2022



2,304 Volunteer Hours in 2025



* Excludes Trustees

Continued investment in the management and support of volunteers as part of a sustained programme of development will be essential in building new capacity and localised involvement in the charity's services.

Whilst revenue support from the National Lottery Community Fund has been integral to funding centralised management and oversight. With only one year further to support this, the charity will need to explore further options for sustainable investment to underpin its future work.

6. Delivering a Future for Volunteers and Volunteering

Balance values the skills and experiences our volunteers bring to our charity. Volunteers enhance the support we can offer and enable us to increase the capacity and reach of our services. Volunteers also break down the barriers many of our clients' experience in being part of their local communities.

Balance is committed to making the organisation and the services we provide open, welcoming and diverse. We welcome volunteers of all ages and from all sections of the community to enrich our volunteer workforce.

Volunteers may occupy a range of roles in supporting our work and values:

- The Horticultural Coach will provide one to one support and insight into garden skills and activities
- The trustee, leads the strategic development of our operations against our charitable objects and values
- The corporate volunteer provides knowledge and resources to support our central functions.
- The befriending volunteer provides social and collaborative support to reduce isolation.

How we value our volunteers is central to our retaining them as a resource, growing and diversifying their role and building a sustainable organisation rooted in its community.

Costs of volunteering and its development will remain centralised with general management, governance, training managed and delivered through a dedicated resource. However, locality-based management will remain the responsibility of operational managers. With task allocation, day to day supervision and limitations on expectations and responsibilities agreed with departmental managers and team leads.

Both qualitative and quantitative returns on investment will underpin the value the charity accords volunteering as a sustainable resource across its services. Whilst volunteers are not a replacement workforce, they bring added value in terms increased capacity, skills, knowledge and social capital. Time dedicated to support interventions and activities within our services reduce the potential recourse to additional staffed provision. Particularly where those activities are part of a wider programme of non-funded or socially cohesive support.

Valuing volunteers, and volunteering will remain central to how we manage and shape our offer now and in the future. But understanding its impact for those that deliver it, benefit directly from it and the likely accruals to the charity both operationally and financially will all be central to our understanding how well it works and for whom.

Building a sizable cohort of non-paid staff across the business will require the charity and its people to fully embrace the critical value that volunteering brings to both their work and the lives of the people they support. Volunteers are our people. They live in the communities in which we work, they will have knowledge, skills and insights on which the charity depends and their participation is a clear articulation of the charity's values in action.

7. Our Strategic Priorities and How We Will Deliver Them

Volunteering will be valued and celebrated across all services at Balance, with an understanding of how it contributes to wider objectives. Over the next three years, priorities to grow both the recognition as of Balance as a place to volunteer and to increase the number of options for volunteering in the charity include:

1. Strengthened relationships with brand allies and partners within the communities that we work
2. Increased numbers of volunteers with a wider representation from our communities to accurately reflect their diversity of talent, skills and background.
3. Leverage data and evidence to inform the growth and impact of volunteering on the charity as well as those providing their time.

The action plan set out in the following pages are the commitment the charity will make in shaping volunteering and its role within the charity and its future development >



Action Plan

What we know	What will we do?	How will we do it?	How will we know we've made a difference?
<p>Volunteers feel more connected to their local community once they start volunteering.</p>	<p>Strengthen relationships with our brand allies and partners within the communities that we work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend local events and drives for volunteering to meet new people from the communities in which we work Hold open days at our sites to show potential volunteers the environment in which they will work Continue to support and grow our profile within local learning disability networks as a vehicle for promoting opportunity within the charity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased recruitment from community events by 30% from existing baseline in 2029 Increased engagement across all digital and social media by 20% against existing baseline per year Grow of attendance and participation in open days by 10% against current baselines each year to 2029 95% of surveyed volunteers cite the charity as providing a positive opportunity for inclusion in a local and community-based provision annually
<p>Volunteers cite a lack of diversity in the groups in which they volunteer.</p>	<p>Increased numbers of volunteers with a wider representation from our communities to accurately reflect their diversity of talent, skills and background.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate and diversify our provision for volunteering across all operations to reduce barriers and widen options for participation Grow volunteering involvement in the delivery and support of one-to-one activities Identify and build targeted opportunities for 18–25-year-olds to drive pre-employment skills and knowledge of our sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x review and re-provision per service of its existing opportunities for volunteering by end 2026 15% increase in client facing one to one support hours for volunteers each year against 2025 baseline 1 x targeted programme designed and promoted to FE colleges for each borough in which we are engaged

What we know	What will we do?	How will we do it?	How will we know we've made a difference?
<p>Locally-led approaches can improve efficiency and outcomes in both the short and longer-term.</p>	<p>Build quality information and insights into the positive impact that volunteering has for the charity and those offering their time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop learning and engagement opportunities for volunteers, which substantiate their relationship to the charity, its values and objectives Publish case studies and positive outcome for volunteers to recognise their contribution and experiences of volunteering for the charity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of all newly recruited volunteers complete all mandatory and induction training 1 x video blog, picture-based story or linked social media post per quarter per service. 4 x group meetings per year 1 x one to one evaluation per year 1 x Annual Volunteer Survey 20% minimum return on investment per year as a in kind proportion of time given by volunteers
	<p>Increase the number of hours supplied by volunteers to support users of our services in community settings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to support volunteers through regular meetings so they have the space to discuss their experiences, reflections and possibilities of volunteering in the charity Recruit a specialist Volunteer Coordinator to drive volunteering as an additional support resource to the charity and its services 	

What we know	What will we do?	How will we do it?	How will we know we've made a difference?
<p>Using the knowledge and networks of existing local organisations helps new initiatives to function efficiently and effectively.</p>	<p>Increased numbers of volunteers with a wider representation from our communities to accurately reflect their diversity of talent, skills and background.</p>	<p>Build partnerships with key VCS Agencies/ Volunteer Centres to ensure that Balance is registered as key provider of volunteering in its respective boroughs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 2 x recruitment campaigns annually per borough VCS partners Attending at least 1 x community based promotional event per borough per year
<p>In 2025 there were 13 volunteers delivering 2,948 hours of support per year.</p>	<p>Increased numbers of volunteers with a wider representation from our communities to accurately reflect their diversity of talent, skills and background.</p>	<p>Review and evaluate volunteer engagement through the following core metrics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of active volunteers Number of volunteering hours delivered Representative of our communities of operation Proportion of volunteers reporting a positive experience Number of community organisations engaged with our volunteering programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40% increase in volunteers against 2025 baseline by 2029. 15% annual increase in hours against 2025 baseline 2 x targeted campaigns per year per borough. 20% improvement against current diversity baseline 95% report satisfaction with volunteering at Balance annually At least 2 x recruitment campaigns annually per borough VCS partners, per year

Appendix

Practical Information and operational considerations.

How can I become a volunteer at Balance (Support) CIO?

Please register your interest in volunteering by emailing info@balancesupport.org.uk

You will be emailed a copy of the volunteer application form which will require two references and a DBS check (Balance will cover the cost of this).

What skills or attributes do I need to become a volunteer at Balance?

- Compassion
- Connection
- Respect
- Patience
- Communication

How will Balance share volunteering opportunities?

Through our website balancesupport.org.uk/volunteering as well as occasionally through job websites, such as Charity Jobs, or partners, such as Kingston council.

How will equity, diversity and inclusion best practice be embedded into volunteering to make it inclusive and accessible?

We ensure that our processes are easy to understand, that we address potential barriers, and are actively seeking diverse perspectives.

We want it to be easy for people to apply to be a volunteer, get the training and support they require, and feel part of the team. We are flexible with the amount of commitment that volunteers are able to offer and have multiple roles for people to support the work that we do which all require different skillsets and abilities.

We are able to make reasonable adjustments to the work that you want to do with Balance and our clients and are always open to discussions about changes that we should be making to the volunteer roles.

How will Balance recruit, train and support volunteers?

Balance has a robust training programme for all volunteers and staff which is paid for by the organisation. We will continue to attend volunteer fairs and market our opportunities both on our website and with our partners. Once in post, volunteers will be supported by a dedicated member of staff.

How will Balance value and develop volunteers?

Balance holds quarterly meetings with volunteers to ensure they are still getting what they want out of the role and to discuss any updates to the company. We follow a standardised practice of updating mandatory training in line with permanent members of staff however, volunteers are also able to ask for additional support as necessary if they feel it would support their work at Balance.

How will the organisation remove or reduce barriers to volunteering?

Whilst there is a minimum request for support from volunteers (1 session per week/fortnight for a minimum of 6 months), Balance understands that this is not always possible for people to fit around their lives. Therefore, we have a flexible approach to volunteering and just ask that availability is communicated with an appropriate member of staff within a reasonable timescale.

We have a number of volunteering opportunities which each require different skills and commitment. We work closely with potential volunteers to ensure that they are aware of the needs of the role, and Balance is aware of any adjustments needed to make the role accessible to the individual.

How will Balance seek feedback and use volunteers' experiences to improve things?

During the formal quarterly meetings with volunteers, they will be asked for feedback which will be recorded and used to shape each service, so we ensure that we are providing the best possible experience for our clients and staff alike.

Who will make decisions about volunteering and the policies that affect it?

Our CEO and trustees make all decisions with regard to volunteering and the policies that affect it.



balancesupport.org.uk

Charity Number 1190859