



MAGNA VITAE TRUST FOR LEISURE & CULTURE

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Magna Vitae Trust for Leisure and Culture, based in Lincolnshire, puts the well-being of staff at the core of its activity. The Trust has now created an innovative, successful Skill Builder Programme specifically designed to support the local coastal community secure skills and employment post-Covid.

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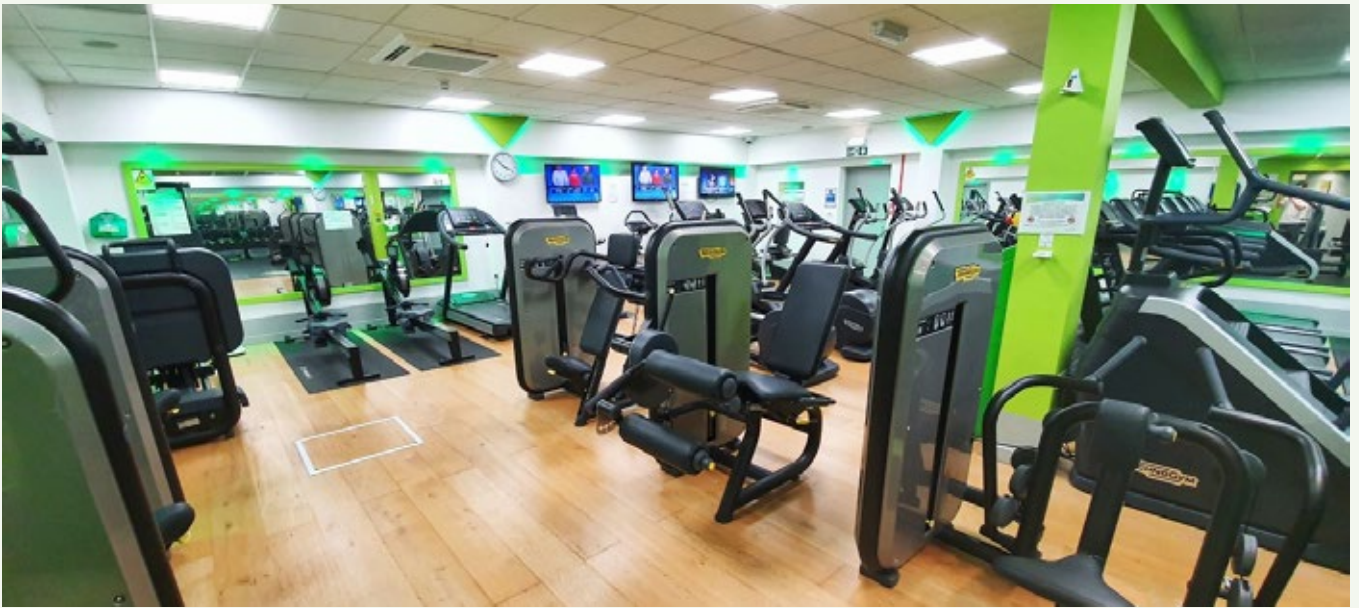


Magna Vitae Trust for Leisure and Culture, based in Lincolnshire, considers the health and well-being of its customers, staff and the wider community its top priority. Challenged with recruiting new team members post-Covid lockdown, the organisation, with support from local partners, took a proactive approach, designing a Skill Builder Programme to improve physical and mental well-being and to upskill and support participants into full-time employment post-Covid on the coast.

This ground-breaking programme has delivered impressive results.

This best practice guide has been commissioned as a series as part of the "Coastal Sustainability through careers and business skills in Greater Lincolnshire" Coastal Communities Fund project.





SETTING THE SCENE

Magna Vitae is a Charitable Trust providing an extraordinary range of cultural, leisure and health-related facilities and gyms in Lincolnshire, with the aim of improving the lives of local people and the wider community.

Historically a council run facility, Magna Vitae formed a Charitable Trust more than seven years ago but remains a partner to East Lindsey District Council which provides significant support for its work.

With an incredible passion for health and well-being, the organisation advocates the importance of being active and the positive impact this can have on an individual both physically and mentally. Recognising that this can mean different things to different people, Magna Vitae provides an unrivalled range of leisure opportunities, from swimming pools and gyms to outdoor sporting activities, cafés, theatre, festivals and events on the beach.

“We improve the well-being of our community, enabling people to live great lives”

Currently employing 175 team members in full-time, part-time, holiday and weekend work, the organisation faced a significant recruitment challenge following Coronavirus national lockdowns. In response, with the support of local partners, Magna Vitae developed the Skill Builder Programme, designed to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of participants, provide specific work-related training and skills to increase their employability and support them into full time employment.

APPROACH



TACKLING A RECRUITMENT CRISIS

Prior to Covid, Magna Vitae advertised for a receptionist role and received over 85 applications from highly skilled, capable individuals. Coming out of lockdown months later, the organisation advertised again using the same wording and imagery and saw just five responses.

“We were aware early on that we faced a recruitment challenge post-Covid lockdowns, a situation that was replicated locally, regionally and nationally”

In discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Magna Vitae quickly realised it was not alone in these recruitment challenges. The pandemic had seemingly created a fear around changing jobs, whilst those who had been out of work either didn't know how to or felt unable to start again. In response, Magna Vitae began to reflect on its own situation and realised that for individuals who had been out of work for six months to a year and were now being asked to change a habit, to come into a workplace with people they didn't know or training as a lifeguard when they had no body confidence, for example, was a lot for someone to take mentally.

“We realised the negative impact that Covid lockdowns had on the physical and mental wellbeing of the workforce”

Facing an unprecedented recruitment challenge, the organisation identified that it must first address the physical and mental well-being of potential applicants before getting them skill-set ready and into employment. With funding from the Coastal Communities Fund, Magna Vitae launched the Employability Programme (renamed Skill Builder Programme), with the objective of getting people who were out of work on the coast back into employment.



The 12-week programme aimed to change the perception that work on the coast is only seasonal, instead identifying year-round opportunities and supporting participants to upskill so they became more attractive to local businesses.

INCORPORATING EXISTING TRAINING RESOURCES

Determined that the Skill Builder Programme would deliver high quality training in the most appropriate skills, Magna Vitae incorporated its existing certified courses, such as first aid, and adapted its online staff training in regard to manual handling and safeguarding.

When identifying gaps in its offering, the organisation connected with local training providers including Boston College, who were able to provide customer service elements and mental health first aid.

“The real strength of our programme is that we provide transferable skills, such as customer service, mental health training and risk assessment processes, topics we know lots of industries will require”



ADAPTING TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Quickly identifying that potential participants were put off applying because they were not ready for a job, the initiative was renamed Skill Builder and the approach shifted to building individuals up over the course of the programme so that by the end they were ready for employment. The organisation also realised that participants had differing needs and therefore it could not be rigid with the 12-week completion deadline, instead treating everyone as individuals and working at their pace.

MEASURING PROGRESS

To determine the success of the programme, Magna Vitae stayed in touch with participants throughout their journey, periodically asking for flash scores as to how they were feeling about themselves and about getting a job, a model that previously worked well in exercise referral programmes.

As well as assessing confidence levels, the organisation looked at how many courses they had completed, with a minimum of 3-4 qualifications or training elements as a benchmark.

The biggest measure of progress was how many went into employment following completion of the programme, Magna Vitae stayed in touch with individuals, helping them complete applications and prepare for interviews.



RESULTS

- **12 individuals completed the programme, 8 went on to full time employment and the others are actively progressing their careers**
- **The programme has aided recruitment with local organisations, 5 individuals are now employed by Magna Vitae**
- **The Skill Builder Programme has recently been awarded coastal communities funding for a second round**
- **The willingness of participants to get involved themselves and become mentors to new recruits has added strength and depth to the programme**
- **Sharing imagery and success stories of staff in their late 40s early 50s has inspired others of the same generation to join the industry**
- **Magna Vitae currently employs 175 members of staff in full-time, part-time, holiday and weekend work, up from 65 post Covid lockdowns**
- **Increased engagement on social media with new likes and interactions when sharing success stories from the programme**
- **Investing in the community has created a positive impression of the organisation and its place within the local area**
- **Staff from Magna Vitae will be speaking at a Coastal Community Fund event, alongside an individual from the programme who would never have put themselves forward in the past**
- **Improvements have been made to the organisations own staff training and communication as a direct result of learnings from the Skill Builder Programme**

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNT

ENGAGEMENT AND ENROLMENT

To begin with, the programme struggled with engagement and Magna Vitae returned to its partners to gain insight into why and how its approach needed to change. Ultimately, it would have to convince individuals to get involved. In response, when advertising for its own vacancies, the organisation began to engage with those who had been unsuccessful and instead of simply turning them down, spent time with them identifying skills gaps, improving their CV and determining if they were a good fit for the Skill Builder Programme.

“Ultimately we want to improve the lives of our community, we want people to be employed because we know we will all benefit in the long term”

When talking to programme participants, the organisation quickly identified that the enrolment form was a barrier to entry with people either not completing it or seeing a drop off in involvement at this stage. Realising this part of the process was too overwhelming, it was removed and instead applicants were asked to meet face-to-face for an informal chat, when one of the team would gather the required information.

“When any barrier becomes a reason not to get involved, stop, reflect and adapt”



SEEKING PARTNER SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED

One unforeseen element the Trust struggled with initially, was the lack of expertise to deal with and support individuals with complex needs. In response, Magna Vitae connected with other local organisations who could help, such as The Building Better Opportunities – MOVE project in Skegness which provides work experience and aims to get people into paid work. Also sign posting individuals for additional support through charities such as Bro Pro UK.

“We hadn’t appreciated the level of support that individuals would need, we assumed they would be ready for work”

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

Magna Vitae recognises that its most challenging time will come over the next 18 - 24 months. The impact of rising energy prices on a business that maintains multiple, large-scale venues and swimming pools, is immense. Appreciating that some of its roles offer the minimum wage, but that it cannot afford to increase its rate of pay, the organisation is looking into new ways to add value for its team, including partnering with other local businesses who will provide staff discounts in return for corporate membership to Magna Vitae venues.

In response to the needs of its team, venues now offer to open 15 minutes early so staff can use its showers before work. It understands the importance of treating everyone as individuals and tries to help where it can, including allowing the use of its washing machines for cleaning uniform and being flexible on working hours/ location (where possible) to reduce travel expenses.



TOP TIPS

1. **Focus on quality not quantity. Start with small steps, ensure there is value in what you are doing and that there is going to be a positive impact**
2. **Seek partners for support. There will be challenges you have not thought of, speak to your team for ideas to help alleviate these barriers**
3. **Treat everyone as an individual there is no mass answer, everyone needs different support**
4. **Touch base with participants regularly to see how they are progressing and do not be afraid to stop and rewind a bit if that is what is needed**
5. **Focus on the positive because there will be one and keep fighting. Consider where that individual would be now, if the programme stopped**

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