

Case study: Being specific without losing flexibility

CHAS' approach to volunteer recruitment

By Fiona Harvey, Head of Volunteering, Children's Hospices Across Scotland (CHAS)

This case study explores how CHAS improved volunteer recruitment by becoming more specific about the roles, locations, shifts and levels of commitment it advertised, while still offering flexible ways for people to get involved. It shows how clearer role descriptions, targeted promotion and a tailored application process helped volunteers make more informed choices, reduced wasted time for staff, and supported stronger engagement across retail, events and the More Than a Hospice appeal. CHAS is an exemplar of good volunteer practice, and an achiever of Investing in Volunteers.



Figure 1: CHAS volunteers helping out with the launch of the More Than a Hospice Appeal by collecting donations at Edinburgh Waverley Train Station.

Organisation details

- Organisation name: CHAS (Children's Hospices Across Scotland)
- Sector: Hospice
- Number of staff: 400+
- Number of volunteers: 1000
- Location: Scotland-wide
- Website: www.chas.org.uk

Background and context

CHAS (Children's Hospices Across Scotland) supports babies, children and young people with life-shortening conditions, and their families, across Scotland. Volunteers are a vital part of how we deliver that support. They contribute in many different ways, including in our hospices, retail shops, fundraising activity, events, family support, administration and community engagement. Across CHAS, we involve around 1,000 volunteers, and our aim is to make volunteering feel accessible, meaningful and well matched to people's skills, interests and availability.

Before we changed our approach, some of our recruitment activity was still quite broad. For example, we used to advertise opportunities for retail roles without information about the specific shifts that were available. While this was well intentioned, it was not always the best use of time for volunteers or staff. People could complete an application only to find that the available shifts or location did not match what they were able or hoping to do. It also meant that staff sometimes spent time following up with people who were interested in CHAS, but not necessarily in the specific opportunities we had available at that time. Introducing Assemble, our volunteer management system, was key to changing this. It allowed us to be much more specific in how we advertised roles, adapt the application process for each opportunity, and create a smoother journey for volunteers from the point of interest through to application.

At the same time, we were seeing changes in how people wanted to volunteer. Some people were looking for regular, ongoing roles, but others wanted more flexible ways to contribute when they had time. This was particularly relevant for event-based volunteering, where people could support CHAS on an ad-hoc basis without committing to a regular pattern. Because Assemble integrates seamlessly with our website, we were also able to take greater control of how opportunities were presented online, making it easier to publish, update and promote roles in response to the needs of teams across CHAS. We recognised an opportunity to be clearer and more specific about what we needed, while also creating routes into volunteering that felt flexible and realistic for people with busy lives.

This became especially important as CHAS launched recruitment activity linked to the More Than a Hospice appeal, our £20 million appeal to rebuild Rachel House and further develop care at home and in hospitals. We needed volunteers who could help raise awareness and support for the appeal in communities across Scotland.

The opportunity was to test whether more specific, clearly described roles would help people see where they could make a difference, and whether this would lead to better engagement and stronger recruitment outcomes.

Change(s) made

The first change we made was to become much more specific in how we advertised volunteer opportunities. We started with retail recruitment, where we moved away from general adverts and began including the exact shifts, locations and roles where shops most needed support. This meant potential volunteers could see from the start whether the opportunity fitted with their availability, rather than applying and only discovering later that the role was not right for them.

We then used the same information in our social media advertising, particularly paid Facebook ads, so that the role, time commitment and location were clear before someone clicked through to apply. This approach made the recruitment process more transparent for volunteers and more efficient for staff. It became easier and less time consuming to fill roles because applicants were already better matched to the opportunities available.

This was supported by work we had already done to better understand our volunteer audience. We had researched our current volunteer base and developed volunteer personas, which helped us think more carefully about where and how to reach people. We knew that many of our existing volunteers were within the demographic most likely to use Facebook, so we chose to use paid Facebook advertising as a targeted way of promoting opportunities to people who were more likely to be interested in volunteering with CHAS.

After learning from several retail recruitment campaigns, we applied the same approach to the recruitment campaign for the More Than a Hospice appeal in January 2026. The appeal is raising £20 million to rebuild Rachel House, renew Robin House and develop more care at home and in hospitals, and we needed volunteers who could support the campaign in different ways. Rather than relying on one broad opportunity, we advertised three routes into volunteering: a general appeal volunteer role, a volunteer speaker role, and a collecting can representative role.

The speaker role was deliberately clear and specific. It focused on building awareness and support for the appeal by speaking to groups in local communities, with a clear training programme and defined ways to get involved. The collecting can representative role was also specific but focused on supporting cash collection activity. The general role allowed people to tell us about their skills and interests so that we could explore the best way for them to support the appeal.

The data showed that more specific advertising helped generate stronger engagement. From January to July 2026, CHAS received 420 volunteer applications,

with applications increasing from 47 in January to 72 in February, 71 in March and 104 in April, when appeal promotion was at its height.

Challenges and lessons learned

One of the main challenges was internal. As the Volunteering Team, we had done the research to better understand our volunteer audience and we were beginning to see that more specific advertising was likely to be more effective. However, there was still a natural pull towards a more generic approach, especially for a large campaign where there were several different ways volunteers could potentially get involved. We had to test the balance between keeping opportunities flexible and making them clear enough for people to recognise where they could make a meaningful contribution.

Timing was also a challenge. The recruitment activity for the More Than a Hospice appeal came at a particularly busy point for the team. At the same time, we were also recruiting event volunteers through our CHASfest microvolunteering programme to support the launch of the appeal. This meant we were, in some ways, competing with ourselves for volunteer attention, because several attractive opportunities were being promoted at once.

In practice, this overlap worked out well, but it reinforced the importance of planning recruitment activity carefully and thinking about the whole volunteer journey across the organisation. In April 2026 when the appeal officially launched, we received 104 volunteer applications overall. Applications to take part in our CHASfest events and join the mailing list accounted for 64 applications in April alone. This was a strong result and showed that clear, event-based opportunities could attract significant interest alongside more campaign-specific roles.

The key lesson was that specificity does not have to remove flexibility. By describing roles clearly, including what volunteers would do, where they would be needed and how often they could get involved, we made it easier for people to make an informed choice. We also learned that while a generic opportunity might be useful in some settings, more defined options work best, so that people who already know how they want to contribute can see themselves in a role straight away.

Impact

The clearest impact was that our recruitment became more effective, more transparent and better matched to the opportunities we had available. By being specific about roles, locations, shifts and expectations, we made it easier for people to decide whether an opportunity was right for them before they applied. This reduced wasted time for both volunteers and staff and helped us focus follow-up conversations on people who were genuinely able and interested to get involved. The data suggests that this more targeted approach increased engagement.

The most striking learning came from the More Than a Hospice appeal roles. The more clearly defined volunteer speaker opportunity was by far the most successful of the three appeal roles advertised, attracting around 30 new volunteers. This was a huge contrast to the previous 2 years when we had recruited just 9 new volunteer speakers. The numbers suggested that people were more likely to apply when they could easily picture themselves in the role, understand what was expected, and connect their existing skills to the opportunity. Many of the people who applied had relevant transferable skills or personal motivations, including lecturers who were comfortable speaking to groups, journalists with a connection to Rachel House, and healthcare professionals who understood the importance of CHAS services.

The approach also helped us offer flexibility in a clearer way. CHASfest showed that ad-hoc, event-based volunteering can be attractive when it is easy to understand and low-pressure. In April, CHAS received 104 volunteer applications overall, with 64 applications for the CHASfest programme. This showed that volunteers responded positively to opportunities where they could join a mailing list, hear about upcoming events, and choose the activities that fitted their availability.

The changes also aligned with what volunteers tell us matters to them. In our 2025 Volunteer Survey, 99% of volunteers said they enjoy volunteering, 97% said they feel proud to volunteer with CHAS, 97% said they would recommend volunteering with CHAS to a friend or family member, and 94% said they feel they are making an impact on children and families through their volunteering. These results gave us confidence that when people find the right role, the volunteer experience is highly positive.

The qualitative feedback from volunteers reinforces why clear recruitment matters. Volunteers often describe wanting to use their time and skills for a purpose they can connect with. One volunteer said, “It is a very fulfilling experience to be able to give time to a great cause,” while another said they enjoyed “meeting people and spreading the CHAS message.” This is particularly relevant to roles such as volunteer speakers, where the opportunity is not just to help with a task, but to share the story of CHAS in local communities.

Overall, the impact was not just an increase in applications. It was a better quality of match between the volunteer, the role and the organisation’s needs. Being specific helped volunteers make confident decisions, helped teams recruit more efficiently, and helped CHAS build a stronger pipeline of people who could contribute in ways that were meaningful to them and valuable to the organisation.

Key takeaway(s)

- **Be specific about what you need:** Clear information about the role, location, shifts, time commitment and expectations helps people decide quickly whether an opportunity is right for them.
- **Use audience insight to choose the right channels:** CHAS used research into its existing volunteer base and personas to make more informed choices about where to advertise, including paid Facebook ads.

- **Specificity does not remove flexibility:** You can still offer flexible or ad-hoc volunteering, but it works best when volunteers understand what they are signing up to and how they can get involved.
- **Test different types of opportunities alongside each other:** Advertising a broad role alongside more defined roles helped CHAS see which approach worked best and showed that volunteers were more likely to apply when they could picture themselves in the role.
- **Make the process easier for volunteers and staff:** A clear advert and tailored application process reduces wasted time, improves the quality of applications, and helps teams follow up with people who are already well matched to the opportunity.



Figure 2: A volunteer helping out behind the till at the CHAS shop.



This case study was submitted by:



Children's Hospices Across Scotland



7 Times
liV Achiever

The Knowledge Gateway is created
and led by **Volunteer Scotland**



This is a regularly reviewed resource. If you have any suggested updates,
please email Volunteer Scotland at hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk