

# #STOKE-ON-TRENTTOGETHER

## **Vintage Volunteers**

### **Journey Makers**

Journey Makers was a project that emerged in Autumn 2020 following a directive from the Department of Transport around encouraging and supporting the public to use public transport once more. The effect of prolonged lockdowns had left many feeling nervous, uncertain about the rules and uncomfortable, and so project's aims were to recruit volunteers to reassure passengers, remind them about social distancing and face coverings and to offer a friendly face.

Hanley Bus Station had already been identified as a busy local site that would benefit from the scheme. Manager, Chris, explained that their busiest periods were the rush hour commute however those passengers didn't tend to need assistance. The passenger numbers he had noticed that remained low tended to be the daytime shoppers between around 10:00 am until 3:00 pm. We therefore recruited volunteers to operate in two shifts, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm and 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

Working in partnership with the Dougie Mac, we identified and recruited 16 volunteers. Many had been volunteering in charity shops but were unable to return to their roles yet and wanted something to do. We gave each an induction and training session either online or over the telephone.

Regular telephone and internet contact was maintained and all volunteers were aware of what to do in the event of a problem, which were thankfully few. The role proved to be enjoyable and well-received by both the volunteers and the passengers they were supporting. On a couple of occasions there was resistance to the reminder of face covering, which on one occasion became an argument, but this was swiftly resolved.

Feedback from the volunteers was that they enjoyed being out and about, meeting people and having friendly conversations with strangers. They reported that there were sometimes long stretches without anyone passing through, and so we tried to ensure there was always more than one volunteer per shift for company and support.

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One of the successes of this role was its flexibility. Volunteers were able to drop in and drop out as it suited them, providing they were able to let the Volunteer Coordinator know within a reasonable timeframe. There was no obligation to commit to the same day or even more than once – although most volunteers did stick at it. One of the volunteers enjoyed it so much he continued beyond the end of the project and became a regular fixture at the bus station.

Another reason for the success of the project was the idea that volunteers were doing ‘their bit’ in the fight against Covid. In the same way that the vaccination volunteer roles have proven popular, volunteers like to feel they are part of the ‘National effort’ and report a sense of pride.

*“The high point was seeing how enthusiastic the volunteers could be when faced with a situation which at best might be seen as menial, and at worst potentially confrontational. The low point was discovering how antagonistic certain members of the public could be when asked, politely, to comply – something particularly noticeable among a few of those people who claim exemption from the requirement to wear a face covering. It has freed up station staff to go about their normal daily tasks.”*

Chris Salmon, Manager, Hanley Bus Station

