



Wellington City Mission and Compassion Soup Kitchen

As we approach Christmas and start thinking about winding down for the summer break, we know that many charities that support the most vulnerable are entering the busiest period of their year. To do this, they rely on a pool of staff and willing volunteers to ensure they can deliver their essential services to the community.

So, when it gets busy, how do you make sure you have the right number of hands on deck, and how do you co-ordinate the extra staff or volunteers so that everyone knows what's going on? We spoke to Olivia Lange, Community Programmes Manager for The Wellington City Mission and Paula Jones, Volunteer Coordinator for the Compassion Soup Kitchen in Te Aro, Wellington to get some insight.

Getting the team number right

For thousands of people, the Christmas period can be a time of anxiety and struggle. Olivia says there can be added pressure for many to provide a typical Christmas for their kids. "The Wellington City Mission notices a real increase for their services around Christmas time, and the colder months of winter. A busy period for us would include the three weeks before Christmas Day. We have approximately 30 regular volunteers who provide support to our Drop-in Centre and Foodbank throughout the year. In the lead up to Christmas, the number of volunteers goes up to 170".

"Volunteers include regulars who are able to help for a few hours, to corporate teams who want to volunteer the whole day. If there are any gaps in our spreadsheet, we'll put a call out asking corporates if they have extra hours", explains Olivia.

For the Soup Kitchen, the activity does not have a seasonal pattern at all, but rather a day to day fluctuation that is accommodated by nine core volunteers. Should they need additional support, they have a list of people who are happy to come in at short notice.

Strong community support means there is no shortage of interest when there is a call out for new team members. Paula Jones says they no longer keep a waiting list. "We simply advertise on social media or our website if we need help in particular fixed roles". In November every year, there is a routine intake of volunteers who will cover permanent volunteers who go on holiday or finish up altogether at the end of the year.

Share the love

Finding volunteers does not appear to be a major problem for The Mission and The Soup Kitchen, especially around Christmas – a time of giving. So what do you do when you find that you have an overflow of good people who want to help out?

Olivia says it's about knowing who else is running charitable activities and having some idea about how many volunteers they might need. "At Christmas, we have a number of campaigns running, for example, our Street Day Collection. We know that the Night Shelter is also running an appeal so we would offer their organisation as a place that might need some volunteers. A lot of people are interested in supporting a Christmas meal on Christmas day – we don't do this - so we'll offer them the option, saying 'these guys do it if you're interested'. Share that volunteer pool around as much as possible - Share the love".





Ensuring volunteers are work ready

Both charities have formal training and processes in place (such as health and safety). As required, the standard screening practice of police vetting for new staff and volunteers is carried out. This is to ensure the safety of all clients, many who may be vulnerable.

Using only permanent staff/volunteers might suit some smaller operations requiring specialist training. The Soup Kitchen, for example, does not employ any temporary volunteers as their training process is in depth and takes some time to complete.



Find out more about The Wellington City Mission on their [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

How to coordinate a big team

Olivia shares some key tips for coordinating an expanded team in busy times.

- Run an induction process – it's very important that new staff know your policies, processes and procedures
- Always have permanent staff working with temps to provide support and guidance. Make sure lead-staff are highly visible – ours wear their Mission T-shirt
- Don't leave anything to chance and be as organised as possible. But, have a little bit of flexibility as things don't always go to plan
- Keep your sense of humour



Find out more about the Soup Kitchen – Te Pūaroa on their [website](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).