

It's Volunteers' Week and we catch up with Clare who works full time and still finds the hours to donate to Cobalt and has done for over 11 years.

What made you volunteer for Cobalt?

It was shortly after my nan died. She had breast cancer which was diagnosed at Cobalt. She died a ripe old 80 years old and was very mobile right to the end. At her funeral we had collections for Cobalt because she had done a lot of fundraising for some of the original equipment. She did a lot of knitting and volunteering and introduced me to you. When she died and we had the collection I felt I had the time and the capacity to volunteer. I had just finished being the chair of my children's primary school Parent Teacher Association. I'd spent a lot of time volunteering and working for the school and I had all of that time to spare.

What was the first event you volunteered at?

The first event I went to was a snowdrops garden and I just loved it. I loved the atmosphere and the people were fab.

Is it mainly the open gardens you volunteer at and what sorts of things do you do?

Yes. I like a bit of car parking. I love the high vis vest! I like being outside, all weathers. I steward the car park, directing the cars in and out, work in the café serving cake, taking money, doing the washing up, all sorts. You get to do lots of things and you can choose what you prefer to do. It's not just a job. If you like something then you can just do that task. There's as much variety as you wish. Gardens are great though.

Is it totally different to your day job?

My day job is a sales director of a specialist recruitment business in Cheltenham. I recruit accounting and finance staff. I have to meet lots of people. I have to go out and meet lots of businesses and it's a very sales driven role. I wanted to utilise my people skills in an environment where I was doing something good and interesting.

What advice would you give to someone who is working full time and thinks they can't possibly find the time to volunteer for a charity?

I would say you can! You can make it fit, especially if its weekend events. Not all of them take hours and hours. You can dip in and out. You can do it for an hour on a Saturday afternoon. You can fit it round taking your kids to football on a Saturday morning or doing the weekly shop. It's not as onerous as people think. It can be flexible. It can part of your weekend. You get so much out of it. It's the best thing, the feeling that you get when you know you've helped raise money for a charity. Cobalt are very good at giving feedback about events and how much has been made. If I have done an open garden on a Saturday, by the Monday I would know how much money had been raised.

Would you say that volunteering is a good opportunity for people to develop their skills?

Definitely. It can help you develop yourself in your current role or get ready for a new challenge. It can help you become better at communicating with people, liaising with all sorts of people you wouldn't normally come into contact with. It can help you in your career as much as you are helping by giving something back. You could become a better team player as it's all about teams of volunteers. It can complement what you do in your day job. You use and develop a lot of skills by volunteering.

What's the craziest thing you have been asked to do as a volunteer?

The highlight of my 11 years working with Cobalt was being the Easter Bunny at the Great Easter Egg Trail. It was a spur of the moment thing. I was in a full-blown costume for an hour and I absolutely loved it. My kids thought it was hilarious as well as being horrified!

It's great fun being a volunteer for Cobalt.