

Background

- Size: 32 members (volunteers)
- Sector: voluntary
- Locations: Bath, Somerset
- Status: First recognised as an Investor in People June 2001.
Successfully reviewed in 2004 and in April 2007.

Overall impact

Investors in People has effectively kept us going from a time when we were struggling – and it's given us the `oomph` to go forward as a volunteer organisation that delivers a professional service to our local community.

Margaret Bartlett, Group Staff Officer

The organisation

St John Ambulance is Britain's leading provider of first aid and is also the UK's third largest youth organisation. Bath St John Ambulance, founded in 1887, is one of the organisation's oldest continuous brigades. Staffed entirely by volunteers, the Bath brigade is proudly professional, both in terms of its vehicles and equipment and in the expertise of its people. In common with St John Ambulance brigades around the country, the Bath organisation has a high profile at public events and sporting and entertainment venues in the city.

"The brigade has, for example, been providing first aid cover at Bath rugby, Bath Theatre Royal and Bath Races from when our organisation first began," Margaret Bartlett says.

Again in common with other brigades, Bath St John Ambulance is part of a national network that trains more than 250,000 first aiders every year to cope with emergencies at work and at home.

Bath has members who are also part of the St John Ambulance Neighbourhood First Responder scheme, where trained volunteers attend emergency calls received by the 999 service and provide care until the ambulance arrives.

At the beginning of 2007, Bath St John Ambulance re-located to a new purpose-built centre on the edge of the city.

"The brigade had occupied the same Grade II listed building in the city centre for more than 80 years - and we had long since outgrown it," Margaret Bartlett says.

"We now have a new headquarters with modern training rooms and plenty of parking for our two ambulances and support car, as well as our own vehicles."

The challenge

Margaret Bartlett was originally appointed as the Divisional Superintendent in Bath in 1998 – and found an organisation greatly in need of fresh impetus.

"We were going nowhere, " she says.

"Membership was declining. People didn't feel supported and there was no continuity for training. Morale was low and the brigade was finding it difficult to meet its commitments within the community.

"It's a problem that can easily happen within any voluntary group and we needed to address it and to go forward again. Flying the flag within the community has always been important to St John volunteers and we didn't want to lose any of that."

The strategy

The first task for Margaret Bartlett and her leadership team was to seek the views of the Bath St John Ambulance membership.

"I wanted to know what they felt about our future direction. Should we keep the ambulances – or should we limit what we do? In fact, the volunteers wanted to continue delivering the same kind of services, covering as many events as possible, with the members that we had available.

"They also felt it important that we kept our two ambulances."

Bath St John Ambulance addressed the issue of training by giving every member an individual portfolio, showing records and schedules for training, certificates and qualifications and records of service at events and venues.

"Once a year, for example, we try to ensure that everyone re-visits the topic of manual handling. Every two years, we try to look at emergency childbirth. It's important that everyone trains, re-trains and re-qualifies, so that things are less likely to be forgotten," Margaret Bartlett says.

"At the beginning of the year, everyone gets a letter, telling them when their re-qualification is due, so they have plenty of time to arrange time off from work or study.

"Committing to Investors in People demonstrated to the volunteers that we were not just going to pull things together for a couple of months and then get tired. We were all going to progress and go on from there."

With the move to the new building, Bath St John Ambulance took the opportunity to install computers and broadband facilities as an additional resource.

In working towards recognition, the brigade also raised the quality of its internal communication by issuing a regular newsletter that details individual achievements and gives reminders of upcoming public events where volunteers will be needed.

"It's all down to listening to our members and asking them how they would like things to be organised," Margaret Bartlett says.

"It's what Investors in People is all about."

The results

Bath St John Ambulance has raised its performance both individually and collectively.

A healthy membership enables the brigade to maintain its regular presence at venues and events and to respond to first aid emergencies – including the treatment of casualties in the recent Gloucestershire floods.

Flourishing youth, cadet and Badger sections help ensure the brigade's future.

The sheer quality and frequency of training has brought a range of tangible benefits. Two members, for example, have achieved the City and Guilds qualification in the delivery of learning to students aged 16 and over.

Two other volunteers have learned signing for deaf people, while three members are training to become full-time paramedics. Another now serves in the Army as a Queen Alexandra Nurse, having started with the brigade as a Badger. Bath's Divisional Surgeon also began service as a Badger.

"We are proud of the professional service that we give," says Margaret Bartlett.

"Very recently, some of our volunteers acted as `Good Samaritans` to help a young man who'd severed an artery in an accident. If they hadn't done that, the young person would have died. Being a successful organisation is all about the many people we've looked after and comforted – as well as looking after our own members."

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