

TRUSTEE Q&A

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Why did you choose to take on a voluntary trusteeship?

As a practising barrister with more than 10 years experience I was hoping to bring my experience within the Irish legal system. I started as a youth leader when I was 16 years old and I remember the joy of working with young people and seeing them develop into amazing individuals. For me volunteering is its own reward much like a hard days work you are grateful for the opportunity to take part.

What have you learnt by being on a board?

That it is important to listen to the views of others and to realise that there is a need for team work. A key function of a Trustee is to raise questions and queries on the board and to think and consider the potential impact of decisions. Often there are long term goals which are part of your time on the board. It is important to be active in taking in and receiving information. I would say also that as a self employed barrister, working on committees and managing the planned schedule and working with others was an important set of skills for me to learn as a facilitator.

What challenges did you encounter whilst being on a board?

I am an independent board member so for me I had to learn about Scouting and the language of scouting was a challenge some items on the agenda I needed to ask what the event was so that has been interesting.

How did you approach conflict resolution on your board?

We talk through issues and then we talk some more. We always go back to our purpose and the objectives of the organisation. There will always be differences in approach but the important thing is to continue working together.

How would you describe time management with respects to your day-job and voluntary board position?

I am a chairperson for the safeguarding sub committee so I have to make time to make sure that the meetings are given sufficient time and that the meetings are recorded and shared so that they can be added to and progressed within work plans. I often make time the week before the Board meeting and some time on the evening before hand to undertaking the read and make notes in advance.

How has your board experience affected you personally?

It has lead to me undertaking a different leadership role which has brought a great deal of satisfaction. I have made many new friends and I have developed experience in shaping policies for the organisation.

What advice would you give to a person with a disability who is thinking of joining a board for the first time?

Being part of a board is a wonderful experience and as a board member there is a focus on your abilities, gifts, talents and experience. There is wonderful support and training available to board members that would assist any person to join and become an active board member. Remember that there is an opportunity to engage in a positive way to contribute to an organisation. A group can benefit from your experiences and skills and that there is the potential for you to learn and develop as a person. I have made so many new friends and engaged in so many interesting policy debates since joining the board which has shaped my views and in many ways has made me a better person.

Why is it important for charity boards to be representative of all people, recruit trustees with disabilities and celebrate diversity?

There is currently no direct State policy to support people with disabilities on State Boards. Therefore I would strongly advocate that the voluntary section could lead the way and show that inclusion and positive support of new board members can bring change. We know that similar to the increase of women on boards and those from different nationalities because diversity is important and strengthens the progression of social inclusion in the community. Many organisations are engaged in provision of services in the community. The voice of a service user on the board is invaluable in providing feedback and perspectives on issues that are relevant to the work of the group. People with disabilities should be celebrated for their abilities.