



The volunteering mismatch

Why Good Intentions Need a Better System

Context

Corporate volunteering can look, on paper, like a perfect match: skilled professionals, generous companies, charities that need exactly what they offer. But like any relationship, good intentions aren't enough if the two sides want different things from it. I spent my Leadership-in-Action project with The Childhood Trust, working within their Programmes and Impact team on a skills-based volunteering (SBV) pilot that sits within Thrive Together: the programme that introduces corporate partners to grassroots charity partners across London. My role was effectively the matchmaker's apprentice: researching how similar partnerships work elsewhere, surveying corporate partners about what they actually wanted from the relationship, and then building the practical tools, a handbook, communications, and a funder map, to help both sides stay together once the introduction was made.

Starting out

I came into this pairing knowing very little about how matchmaking like this actually works. Before I could help build anything, I needed to understand what a good introduction looks like elsewhere. Early weeks were spent on desk research into comparable models, studying how other organisations pair corporate and charity partners:

Pilotlight: pairs senior professionals with charity leaders

The Fore: funds small charities with pro bono expertise

Social Business Trust: partners corporates with social enterprises to help them scale.

The Mismatch

Every match needs both people to want the same kind of relationship, and this is where the pairing got complicated. Corporate partners came ready to help, but wanted a light touch: occasional, low-frequency involvement that fits around existing workloads. Charity partners, meanwhile, needed something closer to a steady partner: consistent, ongoing support they could actually plan around. I surfaced this gap through a survey I designed and ran with corporate partners on their engagement preferences. Everyone wanted to make it work, they just weren't picturing the same relationship.

Transforming Spaces

Some partnerships showed what the match could look like at its best. A corporate volunteer team spent a day physically transforming a bedroom for a family supported by one of the charity partners: painting, building furniture, and turning an ordinary room into somewhere a child could feel proud of. It was a small, concrete reminder of what the whole pilot was working toward. When the frequency and the fit are right, the help lands exactly where it's needed.



Finding the beat

Real partnerships need a shared rhythm, not just goodwill.

Good matches don't fail for lack of care. They fail when neither side has a way to check whether their rhythms actually fit, and no one has built the small structures that make a mismatch easy to spot and fix. My work was less about finding good partners and more about building the systems that help any pairing find its rhythm: **surveys** which exposed the frequency mismatch, a **handbook** to guide volunteers and a **pilot guide** for referencing The Childhood Trust's next move.

References: [Pilotlight](#), [The Social Business Trust](#), [The Fore](#), [The Childhood Trust](#)

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