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Linda Brewis, HMRC, Volunteering with Sunderland Education Business Partnership

I recently attended an Enterprise volunteer day, which was organised by Civil Service Local (CS Local), and ran by Sunderland City Council (SCC). I thought I would write a little about my experience, and hope that it will encourage others to volunteer their time also.

I was emailed by Susan from SCC, who gave me a brief overview of what the enterprise day involved, and arrangements for the day. I am not going to lie, when I read the email I was a little bit nervous. I wasn't going to know anyone there, nor really what to expect from working with primary school children! The welcome email advised that;

'To give you a little bit of background this enterprise day is called 'Box Clever' and is a whole day event held in the school hall, the aim of the day is for the young people to form their own company so they will have to come up with a company name etc. and to produce a box which will need to be decorated etc. Your role will be to act as a facilitator to a group of students. A full briefing session will be given to you on the morning of the activity.'

I arrived at the school with an open mind, and a mixed sense of excitement and nervousness. I was greeted and signed in (after showing ID for security reasons) and introduced to Susan, who was running the show. I know some will be surprised at this, but I was first there and also early! We sat and had a coffee in a small meeting room, and as more volunteers came in, we were all introduced to each other and explained where we were from etc. Turns out most were from, or connected to 'Connexions' (who run the enterprise) and there were 3 from HMRC, (myself, one from Sunderland Contact Centre and Benton Park View).

We were given an itinerary of the day, and also showed how to make a box, from 2 pieces of card. Now, I will hold my hand up that I am probably the least 'arty' person you are ever likely to meet, even my stick men turn out wonky! So I was actually surprised when it turns out that it is actually quite easy to make a box when you are shown correctly! This was something I would rely on, to show the children how to do it later on.

Once 9am arrived, we went into the hall and the children, all year 6 (so about 10/11 years old) all filtered in, forming groups of 7 or 8 children. (We found out later that the children had been mixed up into groups that they wouldn't normally be used to working in). Susan introduced the event, and all of us individually had to advise a little about the work we did.

We then chose a table to work on, and the fun began.

The children went through a couple of 'ice breaker activities' with me as a facilitator for my team, helping out when they were stuck for an answer, and explaining what needed to be done. Then it was box making time. Some children struggled, and some were fine with it. I found that, as long as I ensured that we were all always at the same point, then we could progress together well.

Next up came the decorating. The children had to elect a member who would become 'materials manager' and only they could approach the teacher for decoration materials. When about 5 children all wanted the job, I had to take the lead and arrange a voting system to elect their manager!

So, decoration began, now I don't have children, and so this may not be new to some parents out there, but I have never seen so much mess created in such a short space of time! They were, however, equally as good as cleaning it up.

When the decorations were on going, I had to explain to the children, that they were to create a company that would sell the boxes, so I had to encourage them to come up with a company name, logo (again another vote on 4 designs). They had to make business cards, letter heads and create an advertising campaign. This would all come together in a presentation to the whole group at the end of the day.

I have to admit, it was challenging at first, but once they got going I was actually astounded by the enthusiasm and commitment the children showed, they were very well behaved and actually engaged in what they were doing.

The presentation at the end of the day was brilliant to see all the children up on the stage talking to the whole year group and teachers and volunteers. I am not ashamed to say I was a bit emotional when my group got up, they did me proud!

I thoroughly enjoyed my day, and I have learned some skills that I could think about using inside and outside of work. It's amazing what you can experience when you step into other people's work shoes.

I would encourage everyone to take a look at volunteer opportunities that are out there, and totally utilise your 3 days a year. It's a rewarding experience, and I loved it. Have a look at the opportunities on the [CS Local Blog](#) and get in touch with the team to get involved.



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