

Interns with Impact – Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action Volunteer Impact Officer Elana Alatalo (Summer 2023)



Elana



Elana graduated with an MA Economics degree from the University of Aberdeen in June 2024.

In her second year at University, she undertook a Student Experience Intern role within the Business School. At the feedback session at the end of the internship she was alerted to the range of 'Interns with Impact' summer internships for 2023 in the third sector. Coming from Finland this really interested Elana as there are limited opportunities to work for charities there. The internship that appealed to her the most was with Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action as it was related to economics, with the initial plan being to undertake a cost-benefit analysis.



The actual internship focused on researching and presenting content for ten case studies on Aberdeenshire based voluntary organisations. Her main focus was to capture the sense of community within the groups as well as the value of volunteers. She travelled around Aberdeenshire to gain a personal view from those involved and to understand the impact they had on their communities. One example was with The Vinery in Banff, 'a vibrant space offering opportunities to learn, grow and flourish'. The role was hybrid so involved her working at home between visits and included regular meetings with Emma Christie, Development Officer – Volunteering.



"Elana joined us to help with storytelling, allowing us to document what the organisations we support do and how they do it. It was great to see Elana's passion for the third sector grow with each organisation she visited"

The impact she made on AVA was to capture this significant current data. AVA had previously undertaken case studies but not of this 'every day in life' picture which have been used in presentations to inspire new volunteers and in work with third sector organisations.



The impact on those she interviewed was very positive as Elana noted "...volunteers were extremely happy to share their story and would have had me there every week as they enjoyed having someone there to share their story; someone who wanted to see, wanted to share".

For Elana the internship developed her time management, how to be patient and how to advocate for herself. The opportunity affirmed a "desire to work longer term for a charity as I can see the impact the work can have on people by doing something meaningful"

Following the internship when Elana returned to her fourth year at university, she was delighted to focus her honours dissertation research on the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing fund that AVA administers. The aim of this fund is to allow local communities to respond to local need, she enjoyed this commitment to understanding and addressing real-world issues and the result of this was to be invited to contribute further to AVA in November 2024.



Emma commented that: "Elana's research provided an interesting insight as someone looking at the work without being involved, we invited Elana to be part of the panel of people with different experiences to assess the applications".

Meantime, Elana has worked since April 2024 as Assistant Manager at a premium tea blend shop, Bird and Blend in York. She was drawn to this position due to the positive qualities of the business in that they are a natural B-Corp and have a huge focus on charities, donating:

£39,786.74
in 2023



Elana manages a team of three staff, motivating them and encouraging sales, whilst she also works on the shop floor and deals with customers.



A key part of the role she enjoys is working with charities and integrating the business as part of the local community, running group events e.g. tea-tasting sessions and providing tea for raffle prizes. She is delighted this is the case as 'my passion for charity work stayed with me' after the Interns with Impact experience and she hopes longer term to work directly within a third sector organisation.