



THE MERCAT
BOOKSHOP

VOLUNTEER WELCOME PACK



THE MERCAT BOOKSHOP

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Come browse
and discover!

NEW
BOOKS



THE MERCAT
BOOKSHOP

WHERE
STORIES &
SERVICE
MEET...

WHERE OUR STORY BEGINS

The Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, as VSA was originally known, was founded on March 10th 1870.

It was established to support the people of Aberdeen who had the least, by people willing to give their time, empathy, and practical support to the city's most vulnerable.

Over 500 volunteers were recruited in the outset to visit families across the city, offering kindness, understanding, and a steady helping hand. Their belief in gentle speech, kindly inquiry and practical advice laid the foundation for VSA's mission today: providing the best of care to enable the best of lives.

From the earliest days, volunteers understood that care is not only financial or practical, but is also emotional, social, and imaginative.

The Flower Mission was VSA's first co-ordinated volunteer drive. Launched in 1874, volunteers brought fresh flowers to those who were ill or isolated in hospitals or their own homes. By 1883 these same volunteers recognised the power of learning and books to lift the spirit and created a hospital library of over 400 books.

Every Tuesday, alongside flowers, volunteers would deliver and exchange books for patients, bringing comfort, inspiration, and a reminder that someone cared.

Since 1870, volunteers have continued to shape VSA, supporting families, helping people into work, and stepping up whenever the city needed them. Their contribution has been so significant that VSA has received two Voluntary Service Awards from HM Queen Elizabeth II.



For generations, VSA has run thrift shops across Aberdeen, offering affordable donated goods and raising vital funds.



Originally located on King Street over 30 years ago, The Mercat Bookshop opened at 38 Castle Street in 2010, to provide access to a wide range of second-hand books, vinyl records, DVDs, and CDs at low prices. Entirely volunteer-run, it is the last remaining VSA thrift shop and plays a vital role in raising funds that support a whole range of VSA services.

As well as offering thousands of readers the chance to discover new adventures on its shelves, the Mercat Bookshop offers a supportive community for its volunteers.

Many speak of the friendships, purpose, and wellbeing the role brings. The shop is a place of belonging, while also affording the opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of others.



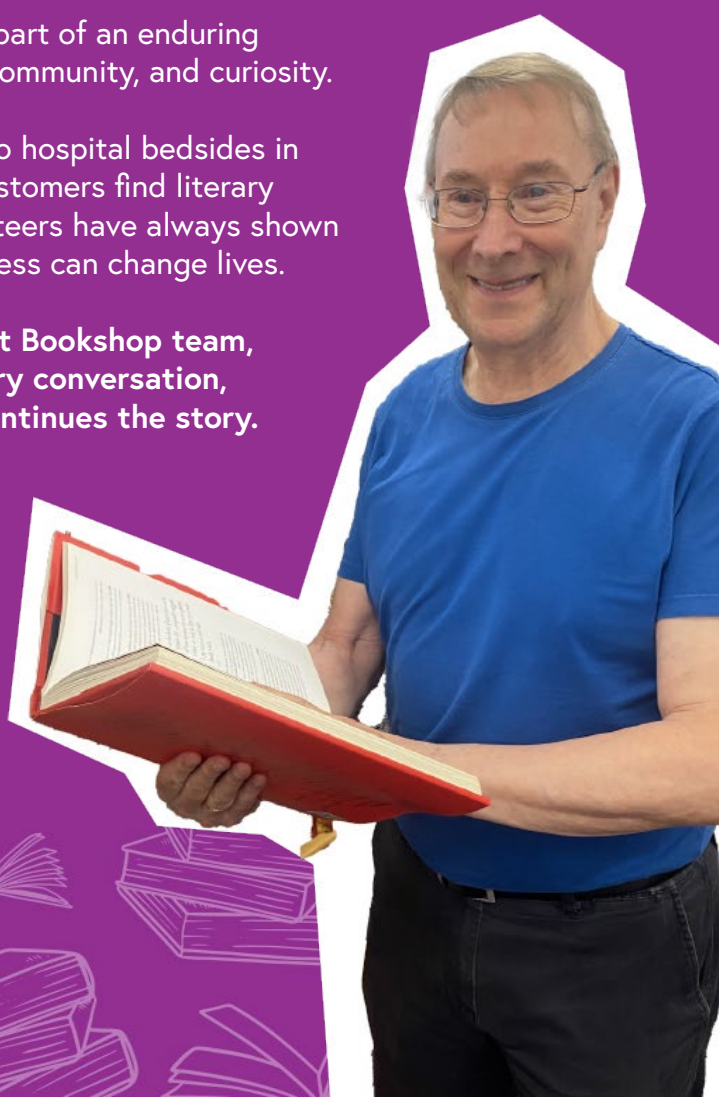


YOUR PLACE IN THE STORY

As a volunteer, you are part of an enduring legacy of compassion, community, and curiosity.

From delivering books to hospital bedsides in the 1880s to helping customers find literary magic today, VSA volunteers have always shown that small acts of kindness can change lives.

Welcome to the Mercat Bookshop team, where every book, every conversation, and every volunteer continues the story.





WELCOME TO THE MERCAT BOOKSHOP TEAM!

Thank you for choosing to volunteer with the VSA Mercat Bookshop.

Your time, energy, and passion for books help us raise vital funds that support VSA's work across Aberdeen and the North-East.

As a volunteer, you help create a warm, inclusive, and community focused environment. This welcome pack will introduce you to our work, your role, and the standards that help us offer every visitor a positive experience.



ABOUT VSA

VSA (Voluntary Service Aberdeen) is one of Scotland's oldest and most respected social care charities.

We support children and adults with mental health needs, learning disabilities, residential care needs, counselling, and other essential wellbeing services.

Every book sold in the Mercat Bookshop helps fund these life-changing programmes. By volunteering, you become a vital part of that impact.





ABOUT THE MERCAT BOOKSHOP

The Mercat Bookshop is more than a charity retail space, it's a welcoming community hub where people can browse, discover books, relax, and connect.

Our aims are to...

- Provide friendly, supportive customer service
- Create an inclusive and welcoming environment
- Raise funds to support VSA's essential work
- Celebrate a shared love of reading

The bookshop relies heavily on volunteers, and **your** contribution truly makes a difference.



YOUNG CHILDREN
SICKY CORNER

The Wizard of Oz

THE SNOWMAN
Father Christmas

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

THE SNOWMAN
FATHER CHRISTMAS
THE CHRISTMAS STORY
c. 2.00

TEENAGE

DO YOU HAVE
KHOUSES
SWARTS

THE WIZARD OF OZ
THE SNOWMAN
THE CHRISTMAS STORY

THE SNOWMAN
FATHER CHRISTMAS
THE CHRISTMAS STORY

DILE

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to



WHY THE MERCAT BOOKSHOP IS SUPPORTED BY THE VSA FUNDRAISING TEAM

The bookshop plays a significant role in VSA's overall fundraising strategy. For this reason, the shop operates as part of VSA's wider Fundraising Team.

What the Fundraising Team Does:

The Fundraising Team ensures that the bookshop's income is maximised, well-managed, and aligned with VSA's mission.

Their support includes:

- **Strategic Planning:**

Helping the shop contribute effectively to VSA's overall fundraising goals.

- **Marketing & Promotion:**

Developing campaigns and communications to increase footfall and awareness.

- **Donation Enrichment:**

Supporting stock donation drives and community partnerships.

- **Compliance & Good Practice:**

Ensuring the shop follows charity retail standards, financial procedures, and reporting guidelines.

- **Volunteer Support:**

Providing resources, training, and guidance so volunteers can thrive.



Why This Matters...

Being part of the Fundraising Team ensures that:

- The shop remains sustainable and well-supported
- Every pound raised goes as far as possible
- We maintain clear links to VSA's mission and activities
- We have access to specialist support in fundraising, branding, and community engagement

What This Means for Volunteers...

Your role directly supports VSA's ability to provide:

- Mental health support
- Residential and respite care
- Learning disability services
- Counselling and wellbeing programmes
- Family and children's services

**BY HELPING RUN THE SHOP,
YOU ARE HELPING TO CHANGE LIVES.**



VOLUNTEER ROLES

Volunteers contribute in a variety of ways.

You can choose which tasks suit your interests and comfort level...

- **Customer Service**
- **Greeting customers**
- **Assisting with enquiries**
- **Providing a positive, patient, and welcoming presence**
- **Sorting and categorising donations**
- **Pricing and shelving books**
- **Refreshing displays**
- **Shop Operations**
- **Assisting with sales and till use**
- **Keeping the shop tidy**
- **Supporting events or themed promotions**

Training is provided for all tasks.





YOUR VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT

We ask that you...

- Arrive on time for your shift
- Let the Manager know as early as possible if you cannot attend
- Take responsibility for agreed tasks
- Ask for help whenever needed
- Treat customers, volunteers, and staff with kindness and respect
- Complete the VSA Corporate Induction, which all new volunteers are required to undertake

This is the same induction completed by newly recruited staff and helps ensure everyone understands VSA's values, safeguarding standards, and organisational policies.

The induction can be completed online (preferred) or in person on scheduled dates at the Broomhill Activity Centre.





WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM US

We aim to ensure your volunteering experience is enjoyable, meaningful, and well-supported.

You will receive...

- **A warm welcome and supportive environment**
- **Full induction and ongoing guidance**
- **Clear communication**
- **Flexibility around your availability**
- **Opportunities to gain skills, confidence, and experience**





CODE OF CONDUCT

To ensure the bookshop remains a safe, professional, and welcoming environment for everyone, all volunteers follow the **VSA Code of Conduct**.

RESPECT & INCLUSIVITY

- Treat everyone with dignity and courtesy
- Promote an inclusive environment free from discrimination or harassment
- Value different backgrounds and perspectives

RESPONSIBILITY & INTEGRITY

- Represent VSA positively
- Follow purchasing and stock procedures properly
- Avoid conflicts of interest
- Stay up to date by checking emails and volunteer notices



CUSTOMER CARE

- Greet visitors warmly
- Offer help when needed
- Stay patient and approachable
- Respect customer, volunteer, and operational privacy
- Never share sensitive information outside appropriate channels

HEALTH & SAFETY

- Follow guidance and report hazards or incidents immediately
- Help keep the shop tidy and safe
- Handle items carefully
- Follow procedures for the till, donations, and stock
- Avoid eating, phone use, or unrelated activities on the shop floor
- Dress appropriately for customer-facing work

**THESE STANDARDS ENSURE
A POSITIVE AND PROFESSIONAL
ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL.**



PRACTICAL DAY-TO-DAY INFORMATION

ARRIVAL

- Sign in at the start of your shift
- Store personal items in the designated area

DRESS CODE

- Neat, comfortable clothing
- Closed-toe shoes recommended
- VSA lanyard or ID badge provided if applicable

BREAKS

- Take breaks as needed
- Tea and coffee are available

USING THE TILL

- Full training is provided
- Always follow standard retail procedures



COMMUNICATION & SUPPORT

We encourage open, supportive communication.

Please feel free to:

- **Ask questions**
- **Share ideas**
- **Raise concerns**
- **Suggest improvements**

Your main contacts are the Bookshop Manager and the Customer Service Team Lead, who are always happy to help.

BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

At the Mercat Bookshop, you will...

- **Support vital community services**
- **Gain experience in retail and customer service**
- **Meet new people**
- **Learn new skills**
- **Build confidence**
- **Enjoy being surrounded by books**



GETTING STARTED

New volunteers receive...

- A tour of the shop
- Health & safety induction
- Training in donations, sorting, shelving, and till use
- A supported shadow shift

In addition, all volunteers are required to complete the VSA Corporate Induction.

This induction is the same programme provided to new staff across VSA and ensures that every team member, paid or volunteer, has a clear understanding of:

- VSA's mission, values, and organisational structure
- Safeguarding responsibilities
- Policies on confidentiality, equality, diversity, and inclusion
- Health & safety principles
- Professional standards expected across the organisation

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of white line-art illustrations of books. Some books are shown as closed stacks, while others are open, displaying their pages. The books are scattered across the page, creating a textured, literary atmosphere.

How to complete the induction

Online completion is preferred. You'll be sent a link to complete the induction in your own time before (or soon after) your first shift.

In-person inductions are also available at the Broomhill Activity Centre on specific scheduled dates for those who cannot complete it online or who prefer a face-to-face format.

The Manager or Volunteer Coordinator will help you book your induction and provide instructions.

THE ME

www.vsa.org.uk



NEW SPACES
NEW SOUNDS
QUEEN

CLOSED

OPENING HOURS
!
♿

www.vsa.org.uk



THANK YOU!

Thank you for joining the VSA Mercat Bookshop team.
Your contribution helps improve the lives of people across
Aberdeen and the North-East.

We're delighted to have you with us!

