

I Am a Volunteer and I Do...

Sara Dunn

What activities have you undertaken as part of your volunteering?

I am the Scottish Local Group (SLG) Chair and as such myself and the SLG committee are committed to organising activities for the benefit of any Systems Engineers living, working or interested in SE in Scotland. We have quarterly meetings provided in person in our Glasgow and Edinburgh hubs and also online. We have also worked with the University of Strathclyde to support local Systems Engineering Management students with an appropriate group project.

Whilst the Scottish Local Group is my focus and who I am privileged to represent, I enjoy seeing how the group also fits and interacts within the INCOSE UK environment. I now keep in touch with other Local Group Chairs to facilitate cross-learning. Plus, developing SLG ideas that may benefit/be utilised by other Local Groups and INCOSE UK as a whole.

As SLG Chair, I have also represented our community at Group Chair meetings to understand and contribute to INCOSE UK initiatives and ensure the relevant information is passed back to the SLG.

What originally inspired you to volunteer for INCOSE UK?

In my first job as an Avionic Design Engineer, I was informed by a Consultant that I was actually a Systems Engineer! Not long after that, I joined INCOSE UK to gain more understanding about what I was and how to get better at what I did.

Jumping to 7 years and 2 jobs later back in Scotland, a new teammate mentioned that there was a Scottish Local Group connected to INCOSE UK. I immediately saw the value in attending local meetings to keep learning and improving my



abilities whilst having the opportunity to meet others like me.

When SEs can often feel like the new kid on the engineering block still having to justify their value and contribution on certain projects, the Local Groups are a fantastic community where everyone just gets it! We come from the same mindset, face the same challenges and by sharing our wins and frustrations with our local SE community we end up supporting each other.

We all grow and all win from that community support and this was what inspired me to volunteer to help enhance and strengthen the SE community through the Scottish Local Group.

What do you get out of volunteering?

From a professional point of view, you gain a lot of transferable skills in volunteering and you can also practice skills that perhaps you don't have the opportunity to in your organisation. Your commitment to the betterment of your profession

is always a great discussion point during appraisals and interviews.

However, as someone who has volunteered with a number of different organisations since I first served at a local Coffee Morning as a child, I can say you can get far more out of volunteering than just those professional aspects! The feeling of actively contributing to something far greater than yourself, of doing something that will help an individual(s) to grow, of being there to help support a community's foundations is a feeling that is difficult to describe but warms you to your core!

Do you have any advice or feedback to offer anyone who is considering volunteering?

Don't let your inhibitions stop you from going for it. Not knowing anyone or how to do what needs done will soon change. If there's something you fancy doing, all you need to do is send that first email and you'll soon get swept up in it all!

It needn't be like a second job. You can volunteer as much or as little time as your work/life balance allows. We all have things to be juggled between work and our personal lives but don't let that be an excuse if there's something you'd like to do. Just make sure you're clear on what you can commit to and opportunities can always be found/tailored to match what you can offer.

Make sure you aren't in it only for the thanks or kudos but for the humble pleasure you'll gain by looking at the interactions of those around you that you helped to facilitate.

Volunteering is such an uplifting experience and really is greater than the sum of its parts.