

Molly & John's one good reason:
they love animals



Mat's one good reason:
he loves helping out



Angela's one good reason:
she loves reading



VOLUNTEER!

One Good Reason to...

Outcomes and Research Findings of the Unlocking Potential Project 2008-2013



Rosemary & John's one good reason:
they love gardening



Walter's one good reason:
he loves signing



Susan's one good reason:
she loves driving



**Billy's one good reason:
he loves gardening**

Foreword

The power and capacity of volunteers to influence life in our society is considerable. By their commitment and enthusiasm they bring freshness, involvement and purpose to the task of helping others.

One group in society who are particularly well-placed to undertake volunteering are older people, who are likely to have more time on their hands and who may be looking for new interests to enable them to remain productive and useful members of society. The work undertaken through the Unlocking Potential Project has sought to inform and encourage more older people to consider volunteering and it has proved to be a very positive initiative.

It has, moreover, been very timely. With our changing demographics, the pool of older people is expanding. That well-renowned group, the baby boomers, are now swelling the ranks of the newly retired and are bringing new skills and perspectives to bear on volunteering. It is important to connect with these individuals and to help unlock their potential. The project gathered much useful evidence from both formal research and practical initiatives and the outcome was a well-tailored programme to promote the value of, and wealth of opportunities for, volunteering.

The funding provided by The Atlantic Philanthropies supported a wide range of work on the project. One important aspect was the research commissioned to look at the potential health and other social benefits of volunteering. It produced a wealth of material to support the conclusion that volunteering is a very positive experience for those who take part in it. This points up the importance of continuing the work in this area and of building on the progress made to date. Volunteering by older people is something which benefits everyone and we must continue to support and encourage it.

This booklet showcases just some of the work undertaken by the Unlocking Potential Project and provides links to resources that will support organisations to carry on this and develop these methods in the future.

Clive Gowdy

Clive Gowdy CB
Chairman
Unlocking Potential Advisory Group

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**“Volunteering greatly improved my health
by giving me a structured week/year.
Good to keep active and find an outlet
for my many people skills. Keeping active
and meeting people has helped me ease
into retirement.”**

Research Study Participant

Volunteer Now would like to express a note of thanks to the funders of the Unlocking Potential Project, The Atlantic Philanthropies, to the members of the Project Advisory and Research Reference Groups, staff past and present who have worked on the project, and finally the volunteers who have supported the project by participating in the research study, featuring in promotional campaigns or acting as Volunteer Ambassadors by sharing their stories to encourage others to volunteer.



Unlocking Potential Project

Since 2008 Volunteer Now (until 2010 the Volunteer Development Agency) has delivered the Unlocking Potential Project (UP Project) funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies. The Unlocking Potential Project has focused on increasing the likelihood of people from older age groups (including 50+) becoming involved in volunteering.

The UP Project has been staffed by a Project Manager, two Development Officers*, as well as part funding of a Policy and Information Officer, Impact Assessment Officer and Administrative support.

The four overall project objectives have been:-

- To challenge attitudes and raise awareness of the contribution and benefits of volunteering
- To increase the number of older volunteers
- To improve access to and develop volunteer opportunities for older people that meet their expectations and positively impact on communities
- To enhance older peoples quality of life in relation to equality, social inclusion, support and health issues.

The rationale for the UP Project included the projected increases in the number and percentage of older people in our communities and the results of the then most recent report on volunteering activity in Northern Ireland 'It's All About Time' (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007) that people aged 65+ were the least likely group to say they volunteered formally with local organisations (17%) and also 21% of older respondents cited they felt too old to volunteer.

The UP Project has increased awareness of the contribution and benefits of volunteering by older people by showcasing the varied roles played by local older volunteers and championing recognition of the impact made by local volunteers through support given to local councils. It has challenged attitudes of policy makers, the media and older people themselves in relation to older people not simply being viewed as passive recipients of services but productive and active citizens.

All the activities and initiatives piloted and developed by the UP Project have been based on evidence gathered directly from older people across Northern Ireland, volunteer involving organisations as well as expertise from around the world, including that gathered from a project study visit to Washington DC in 2009 that included meetings with Federal Government, age sector and volunteer involving organisations.

Throughout the project UP team members have visited older people groups, where possible accompanied by an existing older volunteer, to promote awareness of volunteering activities available and tried to replicate the person to person ask that is so important when recruiting volunteers. This has allowed for the promotion of taster sessions, available volunteering opportunities and initiatives such as the One Good Reason Action Day. These visits allowed for general education as to the variety of volunteering roles available and the promotion of the desire by organisations to tap into the wealth of skills, knowledge and experience possessed by people from this age group.

"Volunteering makes you get out and about so you are benefiting physically by it...."

Research Study Participant

In 2009 the Project undertook a marketing campaign showcasing local older volunteers who carried out a wide range of volunteer roles, the look and feel of this 'One Good Reason' campaign was tested with focus groups of older people. These images of local real life volunteers are interspersed through this booklet.

Market research - key findings

The UP Project has directly consulted with older people themselves to develop recruitment methods and techniques that are most likely to overcome barriers preventing older people from volunteering. This consultation included market research in the form of two telephone surveys (2008, 2010) of 350 older people across Northern Ireland as well as focus groups of older people (volunteers and non-volunteers), across age, gender, socio economic status and location. Findings from the research are contained in two reports *Making the Connection 1* (2009) and *2* (2010).

Key findings of this research include:-

Organisations should be mindful of the need to find a fit between the skills, time availability and task preferences of volunteers on the one hand and the needs and requirements of the organisation on the other. Flexibility is increasingly important to the older age group as societal norms change. **Volunteer opportunities that accommodate flexibility are likely to be more appealing and encourage greater retention.**

Participants identified a wide range of barriers to volunteering, these included fear of the unknown, fear of not having skills that an organisation would value, fear of over-committing their time and skills, fear of a lack of flexibility in roles and a fear of being taken for granted or disrespected by paid staff. **In order to attract the 50+ age group, organisations should make efforts to remove these barriers.**

Being 'taken for granted' and being 'asked to do too much' were experiences of volunteers in this study. They are also common issues found in other research. These are issues that volunteer involving organisations would need to be aware of in their volunteer management practice.

The research suggests that the further people move beyond retirement, the more likely they are to have become settled into a rigid pattern of day to day life and therefore become less likely to choose to introduce new activities in to their lives. **The Life Stage Model identified by the research suggests that a 'window of opportunity' exists between the ages of 60-67 for people to get involved in volunteering.**

This survey found that older people are involved in a substantial amount of volunteering, whether that be at neighbourhood level (informal volunteering - 59%) or through an organisation (formal volunteering - 36%). Patterns of volunteering tended to change with age; as people's age increased they were more likely to be involved in informal volunteering. **This information challenges the view that older people are not actively engaged in their communities.**

Just over half of respondents claimed to use the internet (55%). There was a sharp decline in internet usage with age, 68% of people in their 50s said that they used the internet compared to 28% of those in their 70s. **This tells us that it is important to use both traditional and more technology based mediums to communicate with the 50+ age group.**

Historically, research shows that older people and volunteers are the more likely groups to be civically engaged, i.e. to vote, to sign petitions and this research supported this view. Well over half of respondents felt that elected

representatives did not understand older people's issues (58%); this supports other research in this area. **It is clear that there is a need for all sectors of society to adjust to cultural and population changes i.e. older people becoming an increasing proportion of the population. Politicians have some way to go in terms of making Northern Ireland a good place to grow older. The voluntary and community sector must also ensure that they are meeting the expectations, motivations and needs of older people as volunteers.**

Overall, irrespective of volunteering background, the people surveyed in this research were satisfied with their life (79%) and described themselves as being active (75%) and considered their health as 'good' or 'very good' (68%). **The majority of respondents stated that getting involved in volunteering had increased their social interaction with people from different age groups (69%).**

Over a quarter of respondents suggested that their health would 'to some extent' prevent them from considering volunteering (28%). However, 88% of those who do not volunteer, but would consider it, stated that their health was not a reason. This suggests that having health problems can be a reason stopping some people from volunteering; however, it is clear that there are other barriers apart from health which are preventing non-volunteering groups from doing so.

This research did explore the types of volunteer management practices that would encourage or discourage people from volunteering. **Giving people the chance to try out volunteering (58%), having a chat with an existing volunteer (49%) or someone from the organisation (48%) were seen as encouragements.** Respondents didn't like the idea of having to register online (47%), complete an application form (38%) or

attend an interview (31%). **However, part of the issue may be the formal language used to describe what can be a much more informal process. For example replacing the word 'interview' with 'informal chat' and the word 'application form' with 'registration sheet' may help.**

Overall, these reports offer a valuable addition to the existing research that is available in Northern Ireland with regards to understanding the attitudes, lifestyle and volunteering activity rates of the 50+ age group in Northern Ireland. This and other research has provided a strong evidence base for activities developed to involve more older people in volunteering and have formed the basis of a training module for volunteer involving organisations.

"Some days when I feel tired, if it is one of my volunteering days, I have to get myself out to the shop or the Mums & Tots or the parishioner whom I am visiting, and when I get there and get on with what I have to do I find that I am no longer tired and then have the satisfaction of having used my time/talents for the benefit of others."

Research Study Participant

Health research

Over the last decade there has been a growth of interest in investigating the relationship between volunteering activities and health. From this growing body of literature the idea that volunteering has beneficial effects for the volunteer, as well as the recipient, is strongly suggested (Musick and Wilson, 2002). Additionally, research findings have shown that it is older people who are benefiting most from the positive effects of volunteering



"The research on volunteering in retirement from the Unlocking Potential Project has been extremely valuable in the delivery of the NICS retirement programme. We use specific research findings on the benefits of volunteering for retirees and they always respond positively to the information. Significant numbers express an interest in volunteering where they had not previously thought of it and many make a written commitment to receive information packs on volunteering from Volunteer Now."

Peter Gay, PG Consulting
delivers Northern Ireland Civil Service retirement programme

(Nazroo and Matthews 2012, Piliavin & Siegl, 2007). There exists a growing bank of international research evidence as well as considerable anecdotal evidence from both voluntary organisations and volunteers themselves that volunteering is good for health (Cassidy, Kinsman, Fisher & Bamba, 2008). Limited evidence has existed from a UK context and little evidence has existed in an Irish context.

In light of this Volunteer Now commissioned a longitudinal study undertaken by the University of Ulster (UU) between 2010 and 2013 to investigate the impact of volunteering on the self-rated health and wellbeing of volunteers aged 50+ across Northern Ireland. This was complimented by focus groups and interviews with study participants as well as non volunteers in a related qualitative study undertaken by the University of Ulster. Volunteer Now are grateful to the UU team of Professor Maurice Stringer, Dr John Mallett and Dr Anne Tracey for their work on these studies.

A partnership approach involved Volunteer Now supporting UU by recruiting the sample and administering questionnaires and coordinating the data collection process.

At baseline, 344 older volunteers aged 50 to 90 (60% female and 40% male) volunteering across 109 organisations were recruited onto the study, directly and through volunteer involving organisations. All 26 district council areas were represented in the sample. The sample comprised of a mix of new (33.7%) and experienced volunteers (64.8%). Participants completed questionnaires over four time points (baseline, six months, twelve months and eighteen months). The longitudinal survey comprised a battery of individual scales which included the World Health Organisation's Quality of Life-

Brief Instrument (WHOQOL-BREF), the Lubben Social Network Scale-6 (LSNS-6), Goldberg's General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) and the Attitudes to Ageing Questionnaire (AAQ) devised by Laidlaw et al. All of these scales had been used in other health related studies with older people. Response attrition over the four data collection points was low with response rates at N=344, N=294 – 85%, N=285- 83% and N=275 – 80% respectively. This in itself highlights the loyalty and dependability of older volunteers as revealed in other Unlocking Potential research with volunteer involving organisations and the public (*Making the Connection Reports 1* (2009) & *Report 2* (2011) and the *Survey of Volunteer Involving Organisations* (2009)).

The current data was analysed at the four times and the full report focuses on three key themes:-

1. A description of the volunteers in terms of demographic variables, health status, perceived functional status and rates of reported disability. This also includes a description of the main activities carried out within the surveyed volunteering organisations and the reasons given by older people for being involved in formal volunteering.
2. Organisational recruitment and support services, volunteer roles and satisfaction levels with volunteering over time.
3. Time trends in physical health, psychological wellbeing, levels of physical activity, body mass index and attitudes to ageing over an 18 month period.

The full report can be downloaded from www.volunteernow.co.uk but selected results are highlighted below:-

For reported physical health, there was a general improvement in scores over time as assessed by the WHOQOL-BREF. The WHOQOL-BREF's mental well being

scores displayed a pattern of maintenance and stability over the time period as did reported levels of social support and self-reported body mass index (BMI).

Scores on the GHQ-12 were also recorded in order to compare the percentages 'at risk' of psychiatric disorders in the older volunteer sample with recent population estimates. **Both male and female volunteers exhibited lower overall risk of psychological disturbance when compared to Northern Irish, Scottish and English population estimates.**

The timeframe covered by this study can be viewed both in terms of the partial effects on health of formal volunteering experiences, as well as the effects of ageing over an 18 month period. **That said, the evidence presented here is that volunteering experiences are associated with realistic improvements in health (i.e. where improvements are possible), and can be instrumental in moderating the natural effects of ageing by supporting health maintenance and reducing rates of decline.**

"I couldn't begin to quantify the benefits (of volunteering) in my personal life, particularly from a mental health point of view."

Research Study Participant

Practice examples: Volunteer Action Days

One of the key pieces of learning from the Unlocking Potential study visit to Washington DC was the potential to increase voluntary participation and gain publicity through Volunteer Days of Action. These Government endorsed initiatives include 9/11 Day of Service, Martin Luther King Day and indeed one of the first actions of a recently inaugurated Barack Obama was to announce a National Day of Volunteering Action. On the back of this, and feedback from Market Research participants, the

Unlocking Potential Project organised the One Good Reason Action Day (2010, 2011 and 2012), connected with the UN Older People's Day as well as a Volunteer Action Day for pre-retirees in 2012. These Action Days enabled people aged 50+ to give time to a range of volunteer involving organisations and charities across Northern Ireland.

During these Action Days a range of local organisations offered opportunities as far afield as Belfast, L'Derry, Bangor, Ballymena, Strabane, Enniskillen, Downpatrick, Antrim, Newry, Lisburn and Dungannon. Opportunities ranged from reading in schools to dog walking, to gardening, to painting and conservation work.

The One Good Reason Action Days performed a number of functions. They gave local people aged 50+ a chance to have a practical experience of volunteering with an organisation of their choosing. Host organisations were able to access some much needed support whilst also promoting the work they do and the volunteering roles they had available.

The coordinated volunteering action of around 200 older people on each occasion also provided a counter argument to the negative perception that older people are passive recipients of services. It also presented, in a practical way, the potential positive community resource offered by Northern Ireland's ageing population.

"I retired recently and realised that I had to get out of the house more. I wasn't always the most confident person, so I have had to give myself a wee push! But once you have done it once it is easier. I am so glad that I said yes to the action day, I enjoyed it so much I have signed up to do more."

One Good Reason Action Day Participant

Volunteer Taster Sessions

Based on the feedback from the market research and learning from an Unlocking Potential Project study visit to Washington DC in October 2009, a taster session model was developed specifically for people aged 50+ whereby local organisations offer opportunities for people to try out volunteering and find out more about the organisation before making a firm commitment. Where possible the volunteering activity was included as part of a 'good day out' with organisations such as Belfast Zoo, the National Trust at Mountstewart, Bay Road Park in L'Derry and the Folk and Transport Museum in Cultra. For example, the Belfast Zoo event included a tour of the old Bellevue Zoo site in addition to the volunteering activity.

This taster session technique has been rolled out with a wide range of organisations taking up support from the Unlocking Potential Project to hold a volunteer taster session for people aged 50+. Where the organisation does not feel a taster session would be suitable for the volunteer roles they offer an information session has been held.

One recent example of a taster session has been with Lissan House Trust in Cookstown. Lissan House Trust is a 17th century stately home. Hazel Dolling established The Trust before she died to carry on the work of revitalizing the estate as a place to visit, work and live. Following extensive redevelopment the house opened its doors to the public in spring 2012 so that it could be shared with the community and visitors from all over the world. It is a largely volunteer led and run organisation, there is one paid member of staff. The Trust has been keen to involve people in new and different ways, however, the Unlocking Potential Project Team has helped the Trust Team to develop those ideas into reality - this has included

attracting volunteers to archive everything in the house. They have enjoyed applying the taster session model to their work, they feel it is a package that can work for them.

The Director of Lissan House, stated, **"We were glad of the expertise and guidance. They (Volunteer Now) helped us to find the right people with the right skills. There was a lot of positivity to it all. They showed us patterns of how things happen; they offered us a process that we could hang things on, structures we can follow."**

One volunteer who became involved in Lissan House in the longer term following of the taster session said, **"(The taster session) was crucial in my decision to involve myself in Lissan's progress at this stage. At my age (mid-80s) I needed to feel that involvement, without much physical activity, would be possible. Having been a school librarian, I was convinced that this would be my niche, when I heard from Eliza her vision of what would be possible in the library area. Four of us work well together... and we feel we have made a difference, a contribution to history even. The fabric of the house seems increasingly welcoming us - and we anticipate our sessions with pleasure."**

Over half (51%) of the older people who took part in volunteer taster sessions through the Unlocking Potential Project had never volunteered before, and 97% of participants said they would recommend this sort of event to a friend. On a scale of 1 meaning not likely to volunteer and 5 meaning very likely the average score was 3 before participation in the session which increased to 4 after the session.



"We are very aware that retirement is a major event in our members lives, the support from the Unlocking Potential Project has helped us to better inform these members so they feel equipped to make choices that will help them to have a happy and healthy next stage of their lives."

Cath Friel, Regional Education Officer UNISON

Mobile Volunteering Session

When team members visited residential homes and supported housing schemes to promote volunteering taster sessions and volunteering in general, they regularly received feedback from residents that they felt too old to go out and volunteer, or their health and mobility prohibited them from doing so. Equality of opportunity to volunteer irrespective of health, age or circumstances is part of the ethos of Volunteer Now and the Unlocking Potential Project. Based on this feedback Mobile Volunteering Sessions were then developed that have allowed volunteering opportunities to be taken to group and residential settings. This has involved the Unlocking Potential Project team linking with local organisations to identify volunteering opportunities that are portable and can be undertaken by a group.

A range of these mobile sessions have been organised with residents and group members have supported organisations such as Cancer Focus NI, Tidy NI, Conservation Volunteers and RNIB. Voluntary tasks performed include folding donation bags, filling information packs, planting seed plugs and painting bird boxes. Feedback from participants has been very positive irrespective of what volunteering activity they were carrying out. Interestingly, after taking part in the group volunteering activity in their group or home setting some of the participants that had professed to be too old or unable to take part in other volunteering activities did then get involved in other volunteer taster sessions outside their home setting. This highlights that a lack of confidence and a fear of the unknown can be barriers when trying to encourage people from older age groups to volunteer.

“Our residents thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to come together and volunteer for local organisations. They really enjoyed the variety of activities and being able to work together as a group to achieve an end result. Some of them already volunteer in the local community but for many of them the mobile volunteering activities provided an opportunity to volunteer for the first time or the first time in a long time.”
Audrey Marks, Scheme Manger,
Ternmann Fold

Organisations that availed of the support of the older volunteers through the Mobile Volunteering Sessions were particularly grateful:-

“Volunteers from Volunteer Now played a crucial role in the BIG Spring Clean 2013. They undertook the mammoth task of preparing all the clean up kits that were distributed to every volunteer, community group and school who registered an event on the BIG Spring Clean website. Since the beginning of March over 500 packs were sent out! Without the support of volunteers, campaigns such as the BIG Spring Clean would not be a success. TIDY Northern Ireland would like to thank all the volunteers for their hard work.”

Dr Ian Humphreys, Chief Executive, Tidy NI

As an organisation Cancer Focus NI relies on the goodwill and support of volunteers and we are particularly grateful to everyone who got involved in helping us fold the donation bags as it was a huge task which we couldn't have completed without their help. We needed to fold 2,500 bags every week for nearly two years and the value of their support was immeasurable. ”
Morag Chambers, Volunteer Coordinator,
Cancer Focus NI



“While I have not been able to commit to paid work due to my physical disability and as I get older, physically I get worse – volunteering has provided me the opportunity to use my mind and my instincts and I believe that without that opportunity, I would have been much worse both physically and mentally. Volunteering, like most things provides an opportunity – what you make of it depends on individuals and how much they are prepared to put into it.”

Research Study Participant

“Volunteering with CAAN and Oxfam since I retired six years ago has provided me with the opportunity to contribute to worthwhile causes and at the same time mitigated any loneliness post retirement. After 40 years employment, socialising with many people during the course of a day, the retirement situation needs to be managed in a positive way through volunteering, leisure courses, exercise etc. to avoid depression and poor health.”

Research Study Participant

Pre-retirement

A key finding from the market research was a ‘Life stage model’ that suggested that those who volunteer throughout their lives, or before retirement are less concerned about retirement, and see it as an opportunity to spend time on their interests outside of work. Those who don’t volunteer however, approach retirement with more uncertainty as to how they will spend their time and define themselves.

After retirement a six to nine month ‘holiday’ period ensues whereby people spent time doing all of the things they had looked forward to in retirement, such as going on holiday, spending time on their garden and spending more time with partners and family. After this holiday period, a period of adjustment then follows whereby people settle into a routine. Those people who volunteered talked about including volunteering in a varied routine, perhaps indicating that those who volunteer are more likely to be active in other areas of their lives. Those who didn’t volunteer talked of settling into a routine that was not particularly stimulating or rewarding, but was one that they were

reluctant to break, as they professed to become less likely to try new activities as their retirement progressed.

This life stage model therefore suggests that people who volunteer before retirement are more likely to carry this on afterwards and those who are aware of volunteering and the reasons to get involved are also more likely to consider it when setting their pattern of behaviour in retirement. A window of opportunity therefore exists to encourage people to volunteer, as they set their pattern of behaviour in retirement. As people progress further in to retirement persuading them to get involved in new activities, such as volunteering, becomes more difficult, however not impossible.

The Unlocking Potential Project has linked with local employers and trade unions to deliver presentations on volunteering to employees who are approaching retirement. Research findings and information on practical opportunities for people to try volunteering has also been passed on through other parties who deliver pre retirement courses.

“Volunteering is a means of keeping the mind and body active, especially as you get older and especially after retirement. It therefore has a positive effect on your health

One Good Reason Action Day Participant

Use of Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit (VIAT) – Summary of process and feedback from survey of organisations

As part of the Unlocking Potential Project, Volunteer Now has been able to produce impact assessment reports for twelve organisations over a two year period. These organisations were identified in part because they involved a high proportion of older volunteers.

The Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit (VIAT) is a specialised tool for measuring the difference that volunteering makes to volunteers, beneficiaries and staff. It applies a framework within which the physical, social, human, economic and culture impact can be captured.

The purpose of the exercise was to help organisations to identify the difference that volunteers make to their organisation and the services it delivers. The organisations were selected to ensure that there was a diversity of groups in terms of size and nature of work. These included groups in sports, befriending, volunteer driving, community development/arts, children and young people, conservation, lobbyists on the rights of older people and those providing older people services. There was also a mix of totally volunteer led and run groups and those that involved both paid staff and volunteers.

Ten organisations provided feedback on their experience. Prior to working with Volunteer Now, one organisation had done similar impact work a lot; five a little, three not much and one not at all. Nine of the organisations rated the report as excellent and one good.

“A very thorough and easily understood report.”

“It was a very important piece of work.”

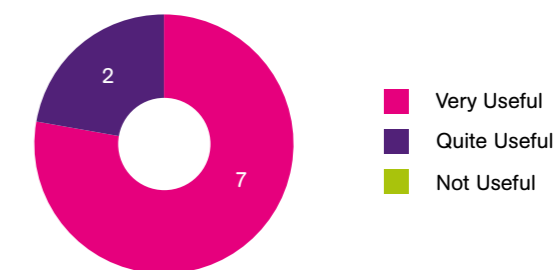
The service involved:

1. Advice on the scale, scope, suitability of data collection tools for the evaluation;
2. Adaptation of customisable tools from VIAT to suit the organisations objectives;
3. Offer of use of Volunteer Now’s online survey (Survey Monkey);
4. Analysis of the data collected through chosen tools;
5. Writing the report with input from organisation.

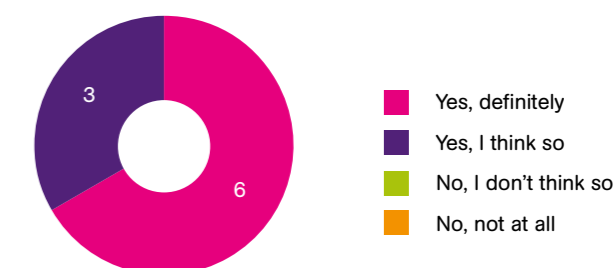
Usefulness and changes made as a result of the VIAT reports

Over half of the organisations that reports were produced for stated that it had been a useful way of highlighting the impact older volunteers made to their organisation, beneficiaries and volunteers.

Overall, how useful has it been to have a report outlining the impact older volunteers make to your organisation, its beneficiaries and the volunteers themselves?



Do you see value in producing a similar piece of work in the future?



“Provides an evidence base for the provision of the volunteer mealtime companions role.”

“Volunteer Now was very helpful and very supportive and produced an excellent document.”

“Sometimes the impact that older volunteers make isn’t noted this shows how much they do”

There was a range of positive change expressed as a result of the reports being written, the most common were that it had demonstrated the contribution that older volunteers make; raised the profile of older volunteers within their organisation; helped organisations to recruit more older volunteers, supported organisations to attract funding and helped them to plan for the future of their projects or programmes that involved volunteers.

“Very useful for recruiting new volunteers and reassuring new service users of the high standards of volunteers and support.”

“Identified intergenerational pathways in the provision of this volunteering project i.e. Volunteer Mealtime Companions in local hospital.”

“Lead to the recruitment of a volunteer manager.”

“Supported the introduction of training to suit older volunteers.”

“Aided in planning for future events.”

“Helped us to focus objectively and subjectively on the implementation of this volunteer project.”

All of the organisations that took part in the project saw value in doing a similar piece of work in the future.

“Overall a very positive and reassuring experience.”

“Highlights the value of partnership working.”

“Home-Start Antrim has always worked very closely with Volunteer Now and found their advice and training invaluable.”

The Impact Assessment report has been very useful to us in many ways, funding being the biggest and most important of those benefits. We have used the reports findings with volunteers and trustees - (it is) a very good source of proof of the worth of the volunteers and the comments from all families that took part and were interviewed have been used in many of our funding applications.”

Links to full reports and best practice resources

Overall, the Unlocking Potential Project has offered very valuable additions to existing research and practice with regards to understanding the attitudes, lifestyle and volunteering activity rates of the 50+ age group in Northern Ireland.

This work has offered information that can stimulate and inform future discussions of practitioners and policymakers, with regards to creating the environment for older people to be fully appreciated and involved in their communities through volunteering. It has also shown the large range of benefits to individuals, organisations and communities that come from increasing the involvement of older people as volunteers.

Further resources to support volunteer involving organisations can be found on the Volunteer Now website:-

www.volunteernow.co.uk

Full copies of all of the reports mentioned in this booklet and further resources on involving older people as volunteers can be found here:-

<http://bit.ly/GALrgc>

Full copies of the Volunteer Impact Assessment reports can be found here:-

<http://bit.ly/1g6rkVi>

Molly & John’s one good reason: they love animals





“Volunteering has helped me greatly at a time when I moved into ‘unknown territory.’ It has allowed me the pleasure of helping others, make new friends and opened up a whole new way of life.”

Research Study Participant

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