

# Volunteering by the over 50's in Northern Ireland

## Making the Connection

*“once you get the taste of volunteering, hard to get away from”; “(it’s a) free choice addiction”*

*“The ‘have to’, is taken out of it”*

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## Summary

Current trends show that the older age groups are less likely to volunteer. The 65+ age group are the least likely to volunteer (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). Due to the increasing proportion of older people in the Northern Ireland population and the fact that older volunteers tend to give more time, it is important to understand this group better. This report has produced one of the most comprehensive pictures of the lifestyle, attitudes and experiences of volunteering for the 50+ age group in Northern Ireland. A mixed method approach using both a telephone survey (n=350) and six focus groups were used to investigate the under researched area of older people volunteering, with both volunteers and non volunteers. The breadth and depth of information gained has been valuable in shaping practical advice for organisations interested in involving older volunteers.

### Voluntary Activity and Participation

One in five of the people surveyed did not currently volunteer but would consider it.

Three quarters of 'volunteers' were involved in three main voluntary activities i.e. raising and handling money, helping in a church or religious organisation or leading a group or being a member of a committee. Volunteering within a religious organisation was more common for the older age group.

The most common motivation to volunteer was the desire to improve things or to help others (4 out of 10 respondents agreed). Having spare time was not the most powerful motivation by the 'older' respondents in this study.

The most common personal benefit of volunteering was the satisfaction from seeing the results (72%). The social aspect of volunteering was a perceived benefit for 3 out of 10 respondents. The benefit on physical and mental health was not raised in the survey. However, they were raised by volunteers in the focus groups.

Personal contact and word of mouth were identified as the most likely methods used to recruit volunteers, as well as being the most likely ways of finding out about opportunities. This was followed by local newspapers.

Those not formally volunteering said they would be most likely to use the internet (27%) to find out about volunteering. This was followed by the local newspaper and asking a friend who already did it.

The 70-79 age group followed by the 50-59 age group were most likely to state that they has previously been involved in formal volunteering.

The amount of commitment and flexibility were the two most important considerations when thinking about volunteering.

**Lifestyle and Availability of Free Time**

Watching TV, socialising with friends and gardening / DIY are the three most common regular hobbies / activities across the age groups. Participating in community activities decreased across the age categories whereas participation in church activities and sporting activity increased.

Approximately 4 out of 5 respondents said that they had some free time which was not committed to other activities. Respondents were more likely to say they could give short bursts of time, 'a few hours everyday' than day blocks per week.

Newspapers were, by far, the most common sources used for finding out information on local activities / events. This was followed by word of mouth (24%) and internet (24%)

The Internet, weekly newspapers and asking a friend were identified as the most likely ways that those respondents currently not involved in formal volunteering, would use to source information on it.

The 60-69 age group was most likely to be active in terms of both physical exercise and to have a social life involving both friends and family. The 70-79 yr old age group was the most likely group to say that their social circle of friends had reduced and that they didn't get out much. The 50-59 age group was likely to spend their time around their family and less around friends.

The Life Stage Model suggests that a 'window of opportunity' exists between the ages of 60-67 for people to get involved in volunteering. It suggests that the further people move beyond 65, 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 into their lives.

**Caring Responsibilities**

Those people not involved in any form of volunteering were the least likely to have caring responsibilities (36%).

50% of the non-volunteers who would consider volunteering had caring responsibilities for their own children.

## Volunteering Imagery

### *The Image of Volunteering*

- Respondents were most likely to associate volunteering with charity shops and fundraising.
- There were both gender and socio-demographic differences shown in the areas of interest.
- Respondents chose vulnerable people as the group that they would be most interested in working with.
- Having fun, gaining new skills and opening up new opportunities were motivations of older people to volunteer.
- The barriers to volunteering are general to all volunteers i.e. Fear of over-commitment and fear of inflexibility. However, others were more age specific i.e. fear that physical restrictions would not be accommodated for.

### *The Volunteer Perspective*

- The two way exchange of giving time to help others as well as receiving personal benefits, in terms of increased self worth etc. were key ways of describing volunteering.
- Respondents had experienced a wide range of volunteering activities, with varied levels of time commitment and responsibility.
- Those still working, were positive about retirement and had plans to increase the amount of voluntary work they were doing.
- For the most part, volunteering was not perceived as a 'duty'. Being taken for granted by an organisation was a fear and unfortunately had been the experience for some respondents.

### *The Non-Volunteer Perspective*

- Lack of understanding, unchallenged preconceptions and fears were major barriers to recognising volunteering as a consideration or choice.
- The non-volunteer groups found it most difficult to think of the skills they could offer through a volunteering role. Day to day skills such as listening or gardening were not perceived to be something that organisations would see as being valuable.
- There were demographic differences (gender and socio-economic) in the type of skills / volunteering roles that respondents thought they could offer.

## Marketing and Advertising

Participants liked the idea of a taster sessions and finding out about opportunities with a friend. Most participants preferred opportunities which focused on their 'community'. Community was a few streets for some while for others this was 30 miles from their home.

Participants preferred the words 'experienced', 'older' and 'over 50'. 'Baby boomer' or 'third ager' was not understood and a clear dislike was shown for the term 'old people'.

The attitude and experiences of life and volunteering (The Life Stage Model) helped to formulate specific types of marketing messages that would be most appropriate in attracting non-volunteers.

The report has concluded by outlining the practical implications of the findings on the selection and management of volunteers who are 50+ years old.

### **Practical Implications of the Learning from this Study**

It is more likely that groups will attract a larger and more diverse range of people if they use a varied range of recruitment methods.

Organisations are more likely to have successful recruitment campaigns if they target older people in the areas which they are more likely to go in their normal day to day life.

Non-volunteer participants showed a lack of understanding of the scope of volunteering. PR, advertising, open days and outreach work which has a specific focus on this group could help to combat this.

Organisations should consider focusing recruitment events or volunteer opportunities in localised areas, as the perception of being 'too far away from home' may be a particular barrier for some people.

New recruitment methods such as 'taster session' and 'turn up and try' which encourage you to 'bring a friend along' should be considered. It can act as a non-committal / non-threatening way of finding out more.

It is important that recruitment messages are made relevant to individual interests, motivations and fears. It is also important that these messages are carried through to the reality of a role.

Volunteering can have a wide range of benefits i.e. health, social, to older people. There is evidence of the need to create more awareness around these, particularly to those who have no previous experience of volunteering.

Organisations which offer roles to the 50+ age group which have varying levels of commitment i.e. occasional as well as regular volunteering opportunities and those which provide alternative options, such as volunteering from ones home, are in a strong position to attract and retain people with busy lifestyles.

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 their organisations on the other. Flexibility is increasingly important to the older age group as societal norms change. Volunteer opportunities which accommodate for flexibility are likely to be more appealing and encourage greater retention.

Participants identified a wide range of reasons against volunteering, these included fear of the unknown, fear of not having skills that an organisation would value, 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 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 which volunteer involving organisations would need to be aware of in their volunteer management practice.

Northern Ireland (The Volunteer Development Agency and the Volunteer Centre Network) has an important role to play in ensuring that organisations are supported to apply specific best practice in the recruitment of volunteers who are 50+. The Northern Ireland Government are also key to ensuring that volunteering champions i.e. Volunteer Involving Organisations, Volunteer Development Agency and Volunteer Networks are supported and encouraged to help carry through priorities made in older people focused policies, such as 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society', 'Life Time Opportunities Strategy' and the 'A Healthier Future Strategy'.

In conclusion, as a society we have a responsibility to ensure that older people are valued and given the opportunity to actively participate in their communities. Volunteering as a form of civic engagement has a role in tapping into the potential of this group. In order to do this a refreshed understanding of the interests, motivations and fears of the current older age groups is required. The key over-arching message from this report is the benefit of organisations reviewing their volunteer management for the 50+ age group. This research has been used to inform a range of practical ways in which organisations can start to do this.

# Introduction

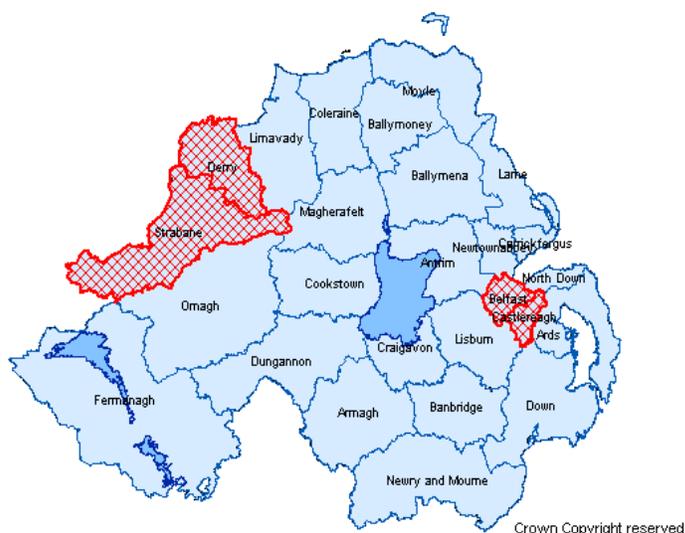
## 1.0 Introduction

The impetus to carry out this piece of research came from objectives set within the 'Unlocking Potential Project', which is a five year initiative, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and managed by the Volunteer Development Agency (The Agency). The overall aim of the project is to encourage and support healthier ageing and civic engagement in Northern Ireland, by enabling and empowering older people to take part in volunteering. It is planned that over the course of the 5 years, the project will be informed by ongoing pieces of primary and secondary research, which will be used to inform the shape and direction it takes.

### 1.1 The Unlocking Potential Project

The project has a number of specific objectives which are listed below:-

- To challenge attitudes and raise awareness of the contribution and benefits of volunteering;
- To increase the number of older volunteers over the next five years (*50-64 year olds by 5% and the number of 65+ years olds by 10%*). In numeric terms this equates to an expected increase of 7,650 volunteers);
- To improve access to and develop volunteer opportunities for older people that meet their expectations and positively impact on communities; and
- To enhance, older people's quality of life in relation to equality, social inclusion, support and health issues.



In operational terms the project has a regional focus, the co-ordination and management of which is provided by the Volunteer Development Agency. In addition there are two delivery partners, VSB and Northwest Volunteer Centre which provide local delivery of the project in Belfast / Castlereagh and Londonderry / Strabane respectively.

### *Research Aims*

An initial scoping exercise of research related to older people volunteering highlighted a small body of international work. Unfortunately, little information was available within the Northern Ireland context (Volunteer Development Agency 2009). The specific objectives of this piece of research was to gain an understanding of the 55+ age group in terms of their lifestyle, their attitudes to and experience of volunteering and to identify the age groups with the strongest propensity to volunteer. It was hoped that through exploring these questions, the project would have information to produce training materials and good practice guides that could be promoted to volunteer involving organisations. This phase of the research was also important for informing a multi-phased marketing strategy which would run alongside the operational part of the project.

## **1.2 Older People in Northern Ireland**

### *Changes in Population Profile*

This is a particularly pertinent time to be addressing the nature of volunteering for the 'older' age group. Population projections are showing a trend towards an increasingly ageing society; currently about a third of Northern Ireland's total population is aged over 50 years old (n=535,000), 14% (n=239,347) are aged 65+ years and 6% (n=109, 775) are aged 75+ years. Statisticians forecast a 70% increase in people aged 50+ years old between 2007 and 2030 and a 73% increase in people aged 65+ years (NISRA 2006). These figures signify the increasing power this group will have as consumers, which includes the 'buying into' volunteering as a use of 'free time'. The growth in the proportion of older people may also lead to them having an increasing influence on the political agenda (Timonen 2008). In addition, research is identifying societal changes in terms of family responsibilities. A survey from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) found that the 73% of 55-64 year olds and 56% of 65+ year olds have at least once weekly contact with their grandchildren. They also found that 15% of 55-64 age group had cut down or given up work to look after grandchildren. In addition, 71% of 55-64 year olds and 67% of the 65+ age group stated that they had put themselves out to look after their grandchildren (Evason et al. 2005). Major public policy changes, such as the planned increase in state pension age also have an impact on the public and private life as well as the individual and collective lifestyle of people in Northern Ireland.

### *Numeric Definitions of the Word 'Older'*

There is no standard numeric age which is associated with the word 'older'. In the research papers use of the word 'older' can range between 50 years old to 85+ years old. For the purposes of the fieldwork of this piece of research 50+ was the target for the survey and 55+ for the focus groups. The parameter of the focus group was narrowed slightly due to the smaller number of people that it would be able to involve. This age banding was chosen for the study as both the pre and post retiree groups are of interest to this research, in terms of finding out if, how and in what way volunteering could fit into their lifestyle and pattern of living.

### *Attitudes towards Older People*

Unfortunately the label 'old' is associated with negative cultural stereotypes, such as frailty and dependency. Society is slowly changing its attitudes to 'ageing', however, much more needs to be done. It is important that older people are encouraged to feel proud of their maturity and life experience. Alongside this, society must be encouraged to discard negative stereotypes; this would be most effective if led by government policy and practice. There are a number of dedicated events to celebrate older people in Northern Ireland. These include Age Awareness Week which has been celebrated in Northern Ireland since 2006 and recognises the value of older people and highlights the challenges for this group. Organisations such as Age Concern (ACNI) and Help the Aged, (now known as Age Concern Help the Aged NI), are well established organisations in Northern Ireland which champion the rights of older people. More recently there has been an emergence of groups such as Changing Ageing Partnership (CAP) and Age Sector Platform which are also working for the rights and interests of older people. The Workers Education Authority has a role in empowering and skilling older groups to be able to advocate for themselves and their peers.

### *The 'New Old' Generation*

The current 50-59 age group in Northern Ireland has been labeled, 'The Angry Generation' due to their dissatisfaction with society's negative attitudes to ageing. They are the most likely group to state that older people are treated worse than other age group, that one gets less respect with age (44%) and to be least satisfied with provision for older people (77%) (Evason 2004). Evason states that this attitude is not surprising if seen in context; this generation of people grew up in the post second world war period (1945- 1965), which saw a significant transformation in the world of work, pensions and the welfare state. The ensuing revolution in the cultural and social environment provided a different set of opportunities and challenges than was experienced by the generation before them. As a consequence this has also led to a generation with better health,

wealth and education which has also led to higher expectations, motivations and needs (Johnston et al. 2004). For these reasons the terms 'new old' or 'baby boomer' have been coined to distinguish this group of 55+ year olds from previous generations of the same age. Due to increasing life expectancy, this 'sandwich generation' is also under increasing pressure to care for their children, as well elderly parents and grandchildren (Roots 1998).

For all these reasons, it is expected that this 'new old' group will require different things from volunteering, as they do from other aspects of their life, which will continue into retirement. As this group begin re-defining what it means to be 'old' and 'retired', volunteer involving organisations will be required to meet the expectations and needs of this group, in terms of volunteer roles. Organisations which meet these expectations will be in the best position to 'tap into the immense potential and resources of this group' (Stolworth et al. 2007).

### *The Retiree Group*

As the 'new old' generation moves into retirement it is expected that they will have more time to do other things. Indeed, the usual reported motive for the over 65's to volunteer, is to fill the extra time after they leave the labour market. There is a range of literature which has focused on retirement and includes the relationship between retirement and volunteering. One theory suggests that retirees go through a period 'social adjustment' due to moving into a new chapter of their life, which no longer involves their role identity as a paid worker (Knapp et al. 1995). Analysis of the patterns of volunteering for people moving into retirement have identified three groups based on their history of volunteering over time i.e. lifelong volunteers, serial volunteers and trigger volunteers. 'Lifelong Volunteers' are described as those who have volunteered throughout their life. 'Serial Volunteers' are those who have dipped in and out of volunteering throughout their life and the 'Trigger Volunteers' are those who have never volunteered before retirement (Davis Smith & Gay 2005).

The stereotypical perceptions, behaviors and attitudes towards people, particularly as they move into retirement is also reflected in how volunteer involving organisations engage with this group. There is existing UK based research which has found that there is a tendency for organisations to restrict the type of voluntary work given to the post retirement group, due to perceptions of it being too physical or mentally demanding, rather than making a decision on a case by case basis which involves consulting with the older volunteers (Davis Smith & Gay 2005). As the most under utilised and least valued group in society it is important that volunteer involving organisations are prepared for the 535,000 'new old' volunteers who will be reaching 65 yrs old in 10-15

years. The 'Unlocking Potential Project' has already identified a large number of organisations in its delivery areas which are keen to be supported to develop best practice in the recruitment and management of older volunteers (Volunteer Development Agency 2009:1).

### 1.3 The Public Policy Context

The Northern Ireland government has shown a real commitment to both volunteering and older people issues in recent years. In 2007, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister announced their intention to establish an Office of the Commissioner for Older People. Up to this point there had been no one department or office with sole responsibility for older people's issues. It is hoped that the new Commissioner's role will involve championing the rights and interests of older people in a more cohesive way. Whilst the function of the Commissioner is finalised, an advocate post was established at the end of 2008. This role although with limited powers, involves being a focal point for the issues of older people and to advise government on what a Commissioner role should look like. The year 2007 saw the return of devolution in Northern Ireland after a four and a half year suspension. This change has resulted in local ministers having the power to take a greater lead on developing policies to meet the needs of the Northern Ireland population. In particular, Northern Ireland is set to have its first 'Volunteering Strategy'. The draft strategy will be available for public consultation during the summer 2009. Once finalised it will provide a framework to help 'foster an environment in which organisations can be adequately resourced and supported to adopt more flexible and innovative ways of tapping into the large pool of potential volunteers.' The strategy is also included in the Programme for Government in relation to its target to increase volunteering and active citizenship by 10% by 2012 (OFMDFM 2008). At an international level the value and commitment of volunteers has also been recognised through the European Commission decision to officially make 2011 the 'Year of the Volunteer'. It has been 10 years since volunteering has been recognised at this level (i.e. UN Year of Volunteering 2001).

A major focus of public policies which relate to older people has focused on their needs or perceived dependency on the state. Less focus has been given to the fact that generally people in the UK are living longer, in better health and wealth than previous generations (Evason et al. 2005). In addition, this perception of dependency is in contrast to the significant contribution of this group to the social economy of Northern Ireland, which is not measured by the market economy. It has been estimated that the economic value<sup>1</sup> generated through the voluntary activities of the 50+ age group in Northern Ireland equates to £428 million per year, £202 million of which is from Formal

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<sup>1</sup> Economic value was estimated using the average hours per month by the average hourly wage in 2006 (Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings)

Volunteering and £226 million is from Informal Volunteering (Volunteer Development Agency 2007).

### *Volunteering and Public Policy*

Volunteering is an extremely flexible and adaptable form of active citizenship and it has a role to play in addressing some key government priorities which are relevant to older people, such as active ageing, health, social inclusion, caring for carers, promoting equality, promoting citizenship and regenerating neighbourhoods. The linkages between the outcomes from volunteering and Northern Ireland public policy objectives are extensive. Some of the strongest linkages are made in the following policy documents- 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society- A Strategy for Promoting the Social Inclusion of Older People' (OFMDFM 2005), it has prioritised the issues of social inclusion for those people who are 50+ years old. The 'Lifetime Opportunities Strategy' is the government's anti-poverty and social inclusion document, the goal of which is to 'ensure that older people are valued and respected, remain independent, participate as active citizens and enjoy a good quality of life in a safe and shared community' (OFMDFM 2006). 'Investing for Health' is the main public policy for health in Northern Ireland, which has an overarching aim to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and well being of all citizens in Northern Ireland (DHSSPSNI 2002). Also, 'A Healthier Future', is the regional strategy for health and well being. It provides a twenty year vision (2005- 2025), for health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland, which intends to give direction for health and social services. Older people, along with carers and disabled people have been identified as a particular resource of this work (DHSSPSNI 2004).

Public policy also has an impact on volunteering and volunteer involving organisations. For example, the state pension age is to increase steadily over the next 38 years, by 2020 the state pensionable age will be 65 for both men and women and by 2046 it will be 68 [www.thepensionservice.gov.uk/state-pension/home.asp](http://www.thepensionservice.gov.uk/state-pension/home.asp). As this particular policy has yet to be put into practice, it is uncertain how this policy change will affect the pattern of volunteering of this group. The current economic difficulties in Northern Ireland can provide both challenges and opportunities for volunteering. A recent survey of volunteering patterns within volunteer involving organisations in Northern Ireland has shown an increase in people who are motivated to volunteer to increase their employability skills. However, organisations are also finding that other people are volunteering less in order to work longer hours or to take on extra jobs. A similar picture is being seen across the UK (Volunteer Development Agency 2009:1; IVR 2009).

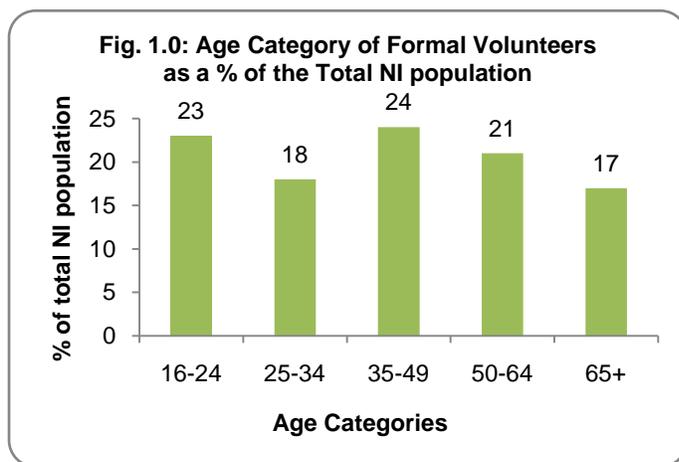
Overall, older people should have a proactive role in maintaining and improving their own health. The Northern Ireland government has an important role in this by ensuring that public policy objectives are carried through. Local communities and organisations

should also provide facilities, social outlets and support systems for older people and ensure that older people have a role in both the shaping and delivering of them. Volunteering is one of the ways in which the potential of this group can be fully realised by themselves, their communities and the wider Northern Ireland society.

### 1.4 Volunteering In Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has a vibrant volunteering base; 21% of the population is involved in 'Formal Volunteering' and 35% in 'Informal Volunteering'. In terms of gender, women (22% of total population) are more likely to volunteer than men (19% of the total population). It has also been estimated that in 2007 the economic value of volunteering was equivalent to £937 million. Almost 50% of which is due to the contribution of the 50+ age group. There is additional evidence which demonstrates the important role that volunteers have in the sustainability and capacity building of many organisations; especially those in the voluntary and community sector, in which the most volunteering occurs<sup>2</sup>. Almost 8 out of 10 organisations questioned in 'Its All About Time' stated that they could not operate without the support of volunteers (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). Also, half of the organisations questioned in the 'State of the Sector V' survey, which provides a snap shot of the conditions within which the voluntary and community sector operates, stated that they were intending to increase volunteer numbers over the 12 months, 2009-2010 (NICVA 2009).

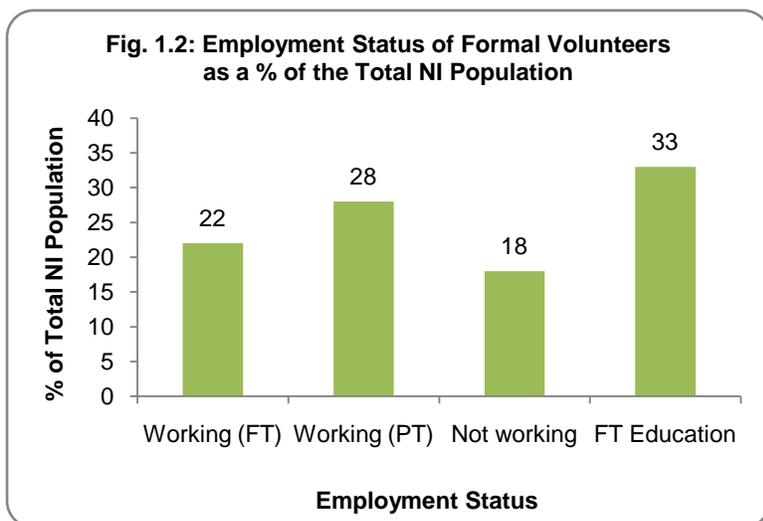
There are some key patterns within 'Formal Volunteering' in Northern Ireland which have been highlighted below.<sup>3</sup>



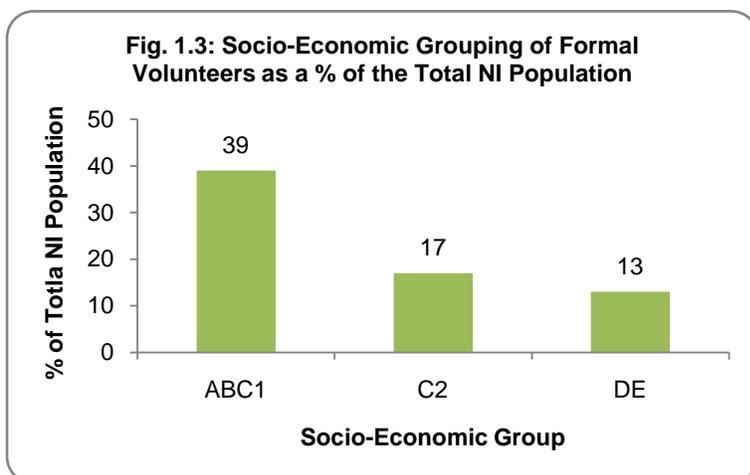
Individuals aged between 16-24 and 35-49 are the most likely to volunteer (Figure 1.0). 1 in 5 individuals from the 50-64 age group volunteer, which is the average across NI. Interestingly, volunteering activity drops off after the age of 65+, with 17% of this age group volunteering. Overall, the 65+ age group is the least likely to volunteer either formally or informally.

<sup>2</sup> 37% of all volunteering occurs in the voluntary and community sector (75,000 volunteers).

<sup>3</sup> A comprehensive overview of Formal and Informal volunteering can be gained from the 'Its All about Time' report, the most recent representative survey of volunteering activity in Northern Ireland (Volunteer Development Agency 2007).



People who are not in employment are least likely to volunteer (Figure 1.2). Logic would suggest that time pressure should be less of a barrier for the economically inactive, than for those in employment or education. The misperception that volunteering could jeopardise benefits and the trend for retirees not to be involved in volunteering, may be reasons for this pattern.



People from the ABC1 socio-economic group<sup>4</sup> are much more likely to formally volunteer than those from the C2 or DE group (Figure 1.3). Interestingly, people from C2 socio-economic group are as likely to volunteer informally as those from the ABC1 group. Overall, the DE group are least likely to volunteer either formally or informally.

In Northern Ireland the most common types of formal voluntary roles involve raising or handling money or organising to run an activity or an event. However, of all age groups the over 65's are the most likely to help out in a church or a religious organisation.

### Definitions of Volunteering

The following definition refers to both volunteering through organisations and volunteering carried out in more informal ways, often at neighbourhood level but outside the family.

<sup>4</sup> The population can be divided into 6 socio-economic groups or social grades, which are based on the occupation, or job, of the head of a household. A=Upper Middle Class, B= Middle Class, C1= Lower Middle Class, C2=Skilled Working Class, D=Working Class and E= Under Class (those at the lowest level of subsistence).

*“Volunteers and volunteering refers to individuals and the work or action they undertake for the benefit of others or the community (outside of immediate family), undertaken by free choice and not directly in return for wages”.*

The definitions of both types of volunteering which are recognised in Northern Ireland are as follows:

**‘Formal Volunteering’** is defined as *“unpaid voluntary work carried out with or under the auspices of an organisation”.*

**‘Informal Volunteering’** is *“work carried out outside organisations, often at the neighbourhood level, but outside of one’s immediate family”.*

## 1.5 The Volunteering Experience for Older People

As stated at the beginning of this report, there is an existing gap in research carried out with older people in Northern Ireland, regarding their lifestyle, experience and attitudes towards volunteering. Therefore, before leading into the findings of this report, an overview of the main discussions and debates from existing literature on older people volunteering will be made.

### *The Attitudes and Motivations of Volunteering for Older People*

All volunteers bring their own value to the voluntary work they carry out. Older volunteers, specifically, have been recognised across the world for their particular set of skills and wisdom which only comes with life experience (Volunteer Development Agency 2009:1; Hoffman 2008; Hill 2006; Rochester & Thomas 2006; Gill 2006).

In ‘Its All About Time’, 21% of non-volunteers stated that they felt ‘too old’ to volunteer, this was compared to 7% of formal volunteers and 11% of informal volunteers. In terms of age, the 65+ age group were the most likely group to agree with this statement, this is also the least likely group to volunteer (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). As a consequence of this demographic shift, older people are becoming an increasingly untapped resource for volunteering. As already discussed, although the 50+ age group are not the most likely age group to volunteer, those that do, give more time than any other group. 35% of all formal volunteers who give between 21 and 40 hours per month are aged 65+ which is significantly more than any other age group (Volunteer

Development 2007). Volunteer involving organisations will be in a better position to fully engage older people as volunteers, if they provide more variety in their roles, to meet the diversity of skills and interests of this group.

In essence, volunteer involving organisations are competing with the wide range of other things that the 50+ age group can spend their time doing. Organisations may also be fighting against certain perceptions of volunteering i.e. feeling too old to volunteer, believing that they have nothing to offer. Hopefully, the findings from this report will provide greater understanding of the lifestyle, attitudes and experiences of both volunteers and non –volunteers from these groups. This process will also hope to highlight some of the main issues which organisations need to be aware of when attracting and managing these groups. In some circumstances organisations will also be competing against each other to attract the attention of the pool of potential older volunteers. Therefore, organisations which carry out targeted campaigns and create new non-traditional opportunities and suitable age appropriate model programs, which hook onto the interests and motivations of this group, will be more appealing (Johnston et al 2004). Some organisations are reluctant to think about recruiting volunteers, as a marketing exercise, however, volunteer management practice recommends a marketing model approach as an effective way of attracting specific groups (Volunteer Development Agency 2001). Research in the UK has shown that organisations whose mission or purpose is to promote the well-being of older people have a considerable advantage in involving them as volunteer (Rochester et al. 2002). There are some innovative programs which are modeling themselves around the changing lifestyles. The list below details some of the initiatives which are being run in America and which are gaining attention by the 50+ age group. Similar types of volunteering are happening in the UK and in Northern Ireland, albeit on a much smaller scale and at a more localised level. There remains a need for a greater range of initiatives which have marketability for the 50+ age group and which gain a national focus.

- Family Volunteering \*     Volunteering with children, grandchildren and other family members. Spending quality time with family, while giving something back to their communities.
- Singles Volunteering \*     Connecting people to new social circles and addressing the desire of single adults to form friendships.
- Foster Grandparents \*     A role model / mentor/ befriending service for 60+ year olds to be matched with children.
- Senior Companions\*     Being a companion for a frail elderly person
- Peer Volunteering     Older people befriending / mentoring other older people i.e. Senior Help Line in Eire provides a listening service by older volunteers, for other older people, who are lonely and isolated (O’Shea 2009).

\*Source: <http://www.seniorcorps.gov/about/programs/sc.asp>; <http://www.PointsofLight.org>

### *The Benefits of Volunteering*

The documented evidence on the benefits of volunteering for older people are multiple and varied and cross physical, mental, social and economic boundaries (Volunteer Development Agency 2008). Two of the areas which have gained most interest are that of the health and social benefits of volunteering. This includes improved physical health, mental health, life satisfaction and role identity (Volunteering England 2008, Herbert 2008, Lum & Lightfoot 2005). Declining health and decreasing social circles is the experience of ageing for many (Help the Aged 2008). Therefore any intervention which is shown to slow age related problems should be encouraged.

### *The Health Impact of Volunteering for Older People*

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a leading organisation for the development of volunteering in America, which includes a dedicated program for older volunteers- [Senior Corp](#). They have published a series of research reports on older people volunteering, within which they argue that people who engage in volunteer activities, are less likely to suffer ill health later in life. There is also longitudinal research which claims to have found evidence that individuals who volunteer have lower mortality rates than those who don't (Rogers, 1996; Corporation of National & Community Service 2007). Recent research has added to this theory, by stating that this relationship exists over and above what can be accounted for by demographic, physical health, social support and integration (Harris & Thoresen 2009). There is also the argument that irrespective of whether healthier people are more likely to volunteer (direction of causation debate), the volunteer activity introduces people into a positive 'reinforcing cycle' of good health and future volunteering (Corporation of National & Community Service 2007). Indeed, other research carried out with those aged 70+ has shown that volunteering does not influence the onset of medical conditions, rather it helps people to cope better with illness, due to providing social and psychological resources (Lum and Lightfoot 2005). There are studies which have argued that volunteering is associated with reduced depression levels. One particular study found that voluntary work had positive effects on the depression scores of people who were 65+ years (Wilson & Musick 1999).

*The Social Impact of Volunteering for Older People*

There are many changes which can occur as people move into older age i.e. leave employment, death of a partner, children leave the family home. These life events do reduce the amount of major role identities that people have. There are research findings which indicate that major role identity absences constitute risk factors for older adult’s poor psychological well-being (Greenfield & Marks 2004). A recent paper in the International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry suggests that later retirement can delay the early onset of Alzheimer’s disease (Lupton et al. 2009). Later retirement is not always the preference or within the control of individuals. Poor health can often force people into early retirement. In today’s weakened economy, voluntary and compulsory redundancies are much more likely. It is therefore important to have alternative activities, like volunteering, which can provide a protective factor against the poor psychological well being that can come from a reduced sense of purpose in life that accompanies greater number of role identity absences (Greenfield & Marks 2004).

**1.6 Structure of the Report**

A mixed method design was used to carry out this research. This involved a telephone survey using a random sample of 350 individuals. There were also 6 focus groups carried out. The aims of the 2 research methods are explained in table 1.0. A comprehensive description of the methodology used can be found in Appendix 1.

**Table 1.0: Research Aims for the Two methods**

Aims of the Telephone Survey	Aims of Focus Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To understand the life style and availability of free time</li> <li>• To understand the extent of caring responsibilities</li> <li>• To explore perceptions of volunteering</li> <li>• To identify the level of voluntary activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To identify the barriers to volunteering</li> <li>• To understand the benefits of volunteering</li> <li>• To assess the potential to volunteer</li> <li>• To assess the potential for advertising</li> </ul>

In order to maximise on the analytical strengths of a multi-method approach, information gained from the telephone survey and focus groups will be described and discussed together.

During the recruitment stage of both the telephone survey and focus groups respondents were given the following definitions of volunteering and asked to use these to describe their current activity:-

*Informal Volunteering-* i.e. activities outside of ones family such as shopping for a neighbour, cutting someone’s grass, regularly giving someone a lift or even bringing someone’s bin in.

*Formal Volunteering*- i.e. activities such as collecting or working for a charity or helping in a church, community or sports group.

This report forms part of a series of focused pieces of research, which will be undertaken over the course of the 'Unlocking Potential' project, to inform public policy and best practice in the recruitment, management and support of older volunteers. Key informants in this research have been older people (both volunteers and non-volunteers). It is the aim of the project to regularly engage with older people as well as volunteer involving organisations. To date the 'Unlocking Potential Project' has produced a review of older people volunteering literature, as well as, an organisational survey which provided a snap-shot of the opinions and practices of organisations within the geographic parameters of the project. Both reports can be accessed from the [Agency website](#).

The findings from the research have been split into five main sections, as listed below. Each section will begin with a summary of the key findings.

1. Volunteer Activity and Participation
2. Lifestyle and Availability of Free Time
3. Caring Responsibilities
4. Volunteering Imagery
5. Marketing and Advertising

The final Conclusion and Recommendations section will provide a summary of the practical implications of the findings (Best Practice Points) for Volunteer Involving Organisations.

# **Volunteer Activity and Participation**

## 2.0 Volunteer Activity and Participation

This section of the report will focus on the level of voluntary activity and participation within the study sample. The majority of the findings have come from the telephone survey.

### Main Findings

One in five of the people surveyed did not currently volunteer but would consider it.

Three quarters of 'volunteers' were involved in three main voluntary activities i.e. raising and handling money, helping in a church or religious organisation or leading a group or being a member of a committee. Volunteering within a religious organisation was more common for the older age group.

The most common motivation to volunteer was the desire to improve things or to help others (4 out of 10 respondents agreed). Having spare time was not the most powerful motivation by the 'older' respondents in this study.

The most common personal benefit of volunteering was the satisfaction from seeing the results (72%). The social aspect of volunteering was a perceived benefit for 3 out of 10 respondents. The benefit on physical and mental health was not raised in the survey. However, they were raised by volunteers in the focus groups.

Personal contact and word of mouth were identified as the most likely methods used to recruit volunteers, as well as being the most likely ways of finding out about opportunities. This was followed by local newspapers.

Those not formally volunteering said they would be most likely to use the internet (27%) to find out about volunteering. This was followed by the local newspaper and asking a friend who already did it.

The 70-79 age group followed by the 50-59 age group were most likely to state that they has previously been involved in formal volunteering.

The amount of commitment and flexibility were the two most important considerations when thinking about volunteering.

### 2.1 Profile of Volunteering

As illustrated in Table 2.0, 58% of respondents were involved in either 'Informal', 'Formal' or both 'Informal and Formal' volunteering. An additional 20% did not volunteer and would not consider it and 22% did not currently volunteer but would consider it.

Comparison of volunteer profiling with the 'Its All about Time' survey is not possible due to methodological differences.

*Those who did not Currently Volunteer and Would Consider it*

The 22% of survey respondents, who stated that they were not currently volunteering, but would consider it, are of particular interest to the project. In terms of age breakdown, this equated to 25% of the 50-59 year olds who said they did not volunteer but would consider it, followed by 22% of 60-69 yr olds and 15% of 70-79 yr olds. Interestingly, in terms of social class, the DE group were the second highest group in favour of considering volunteering, after the C1 age group (27%).

**Table 2.0: Showing a Description of Current Volunteering Activity** (All Respondents n=350)

	SEX		AGE			CLASS			
	Male 168 %	Female 182 %	50-59 150 %	60-69 119 %	70-79 81 %	AB 59 %	C1 102 %	C2 81 %	DE 108 %
Informal Volunteering	26%	24%	27%	24%	22%	24%	28%	25%	23%
Formal Volunteering,	15%	18%	17%	18%	14%	27%	16%	16%	13%
Both formally and informally	14%	18%	11%	22%	19%	22%	13%	14%	19%
Don't volunteer and would not consider it	23%	17%	19%	13%	31%	14%	16%	26%	23%
Don't volunteer but would consider it	21%	23%	25%	22%	15%	14%	27%	20%	22%

\*Each group above is exclusive of each other.

## 2.2 Voluntary Activities That Volunteers Had Taken Part In

Figure 2.0 Showing Voluntary Activities that Volunteers had taken Part in (Base: Formal or Informal Volunteering n=116)



Table 2.1 Comparing the Most Common Voluntary Activities between the 55+ and the 16+ Age Groups

Top 5 Most Common Voluntary Activities	55-79 yrs old	16+ yrs old
Raising or handling money	1=	1
Helping in church or religious organisation	1=	5=
Leading the group or member of a committee or trustee	2	3
Organising or helping to run an activity or event	3	2
Visiting people	4	6
Working with young people	5	4
Helping in a sports club or organisation	6	5=

= activities which held equal weight

This Research                      It's All About Time<sup>5</sup>

Three quarters of the respondents who stated that they were informally or formally volunteering said that they were involved in three main voluntary activities, these were raising and handling money, helping in a church or religious organisation or leading a group or being a member of a committee (Figure 2.0). As illustrated in Table 2.1, volunteering within a religious organisation was much more common for the older age group (30%) when compared against the average activities of volunteers in Northern Ireland (13%) (Volunteer Development Agency 2007).

<sup>5</sup> 'It's All About Time' (2007), the most recent representative survey of (16+) volunteering activity in Northern Ireland.

Motivations for Volunteering

Figure 2.1 Showing Motivations for Volunteering (Base: Formally or Informally Volunteering n= 116)

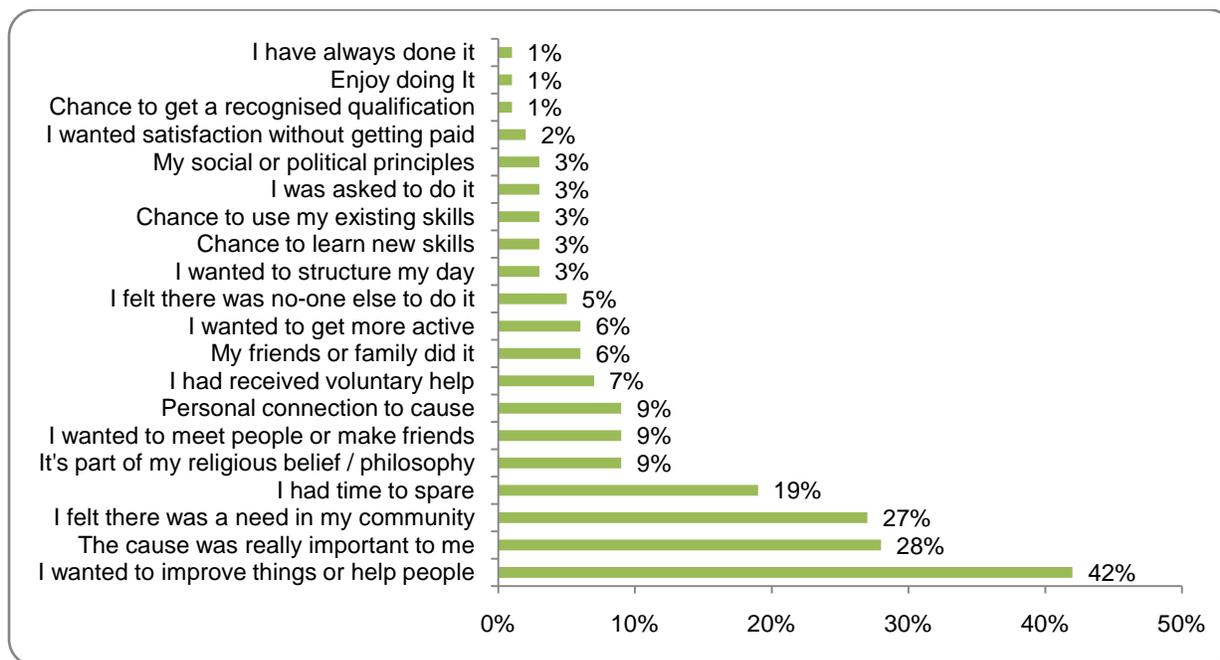


Table 2.2 Showing the Most Common Motivations for Volunteering

Most Common Motivations	55-79 Age Group	16+ Age Group
I wanted to improve things or help people	1	1
The cause was really important to me	2	2
I felt there was a need in my community	3	4
I had time to spare	4	3

This Research

It's All About Time

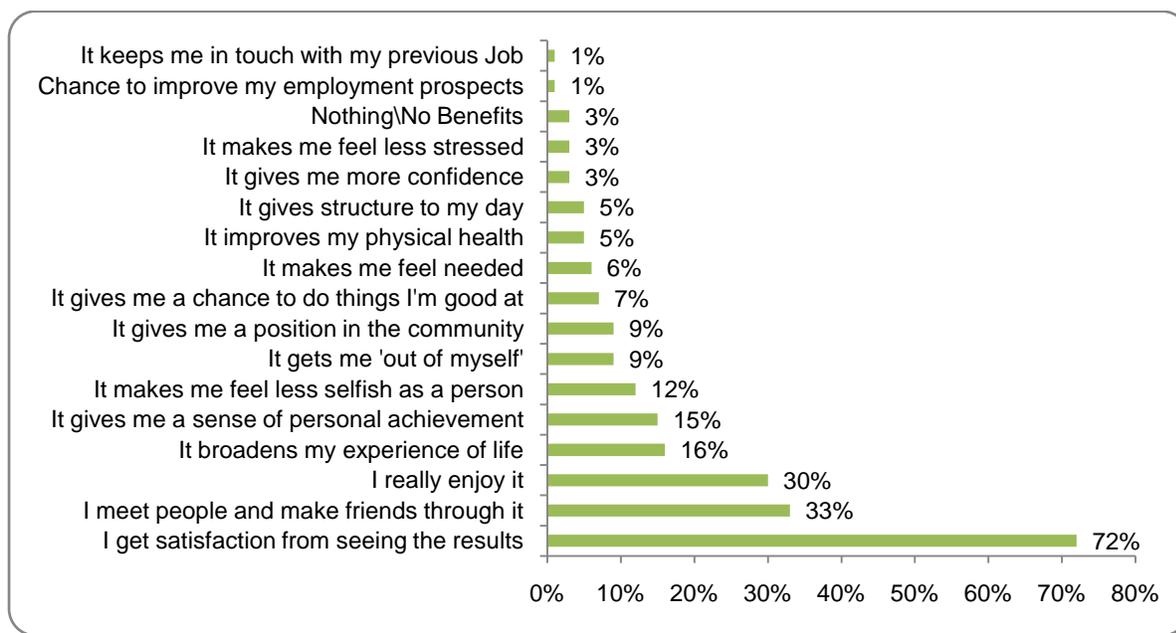
A wide range of motivations were given by respondents for becoming involved in volunteering (Figure 2.1). The most common motivation, in which 4 out of 10 respondents agreed, was ‘the desire to improve things’ or ‘to help others’. This was followed by the desire to help a cause which was important to them or to meet a need within their community (approximately 3 out of 10 respondents agreed with these statements). This has been a trend found from other research carried out across the UK (Hill 2006).

An interesting comparison (Table 2.2) has been shown between this research, in which 17% of respondents (55+ years old) stated they had time to spare and the ‘Its All About Time’ research, in which 24% of respondents (16+ year olds) gave this as a motivation. One could therefore suggest that although people in retirement may be perceived to

have more time, having spare time was not seen as the most powerful motivation by the 'older' respondents in this study.

*Personal Benefits of Volunteering*

**Figure 2.2 Showing the Personal Benefits of Volunteering** (Base: Formally or Informally Volunteering *n*=116)

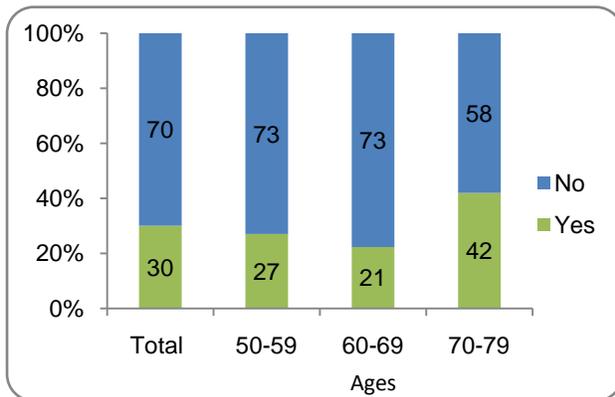


As illustrated in Figure 2.2, the most common personal benefit from volunteering was the satisfaction from seeing the results (72%). This has also been the most common response from previous NI and UK based representative surveys (Volunteer Development Agency 2007; IVR 2008). The social benefit of volunteering was the second most common answer, meeting new people and making friends was chosen by 33% of respondents. Hill (2006) also found the desire to keep physically and mentally active as a motivation to volunteer, however this was not a significant finding in this study. Only 6% agreed that volunteering 'improves my physical health' and 3% agreed that 'it makes me feel less stressed'. However, the health benefits of volunteering were raised naturally in the focus groups.

**2.3 Informal Volunteering / No Volunteering**

This section of the findings has focused on those people who were not involved in formal volunteering i.e. described themselves as being involved in informal volunteering or no volunteering.

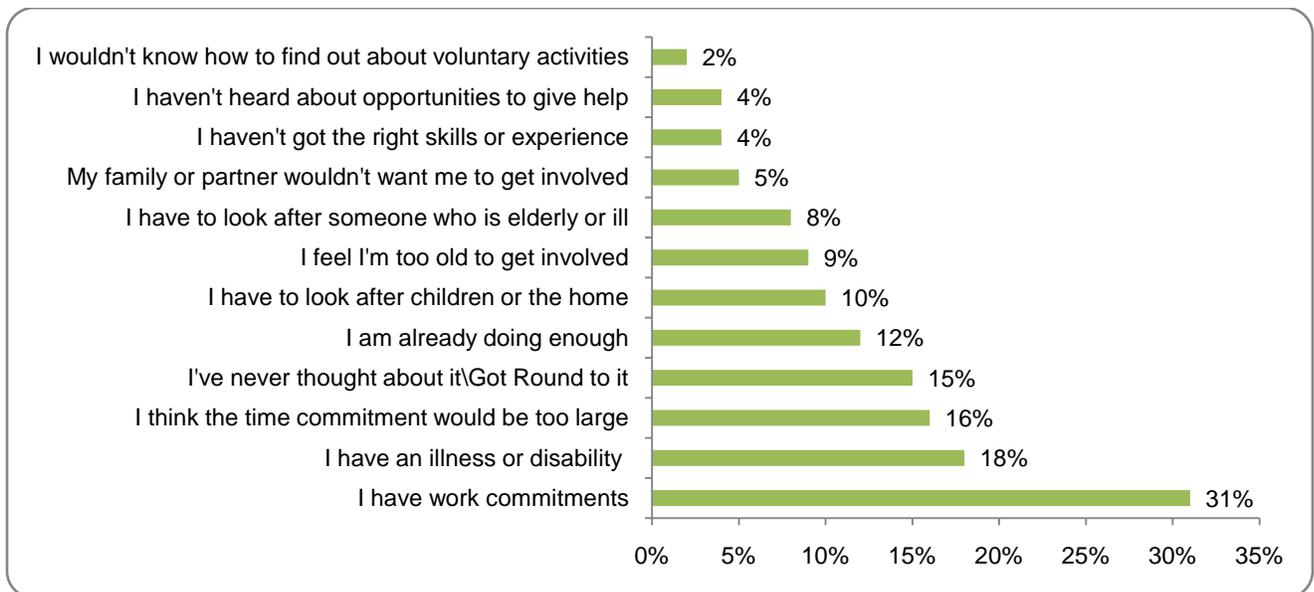
**Figure 2.3 Showing those People who had Volunteered Formally, in the Past** (Base: Informal Volunteers and Non Volunteers n=234)



On average, 30% of respondents, who stated that they no longer formally volunteered, said that they had in the past (Figure 2.3). An above average percentage of those in the 70-79 age group, gave a 'yes' to this question, than the other age categories (42%). The 60-69 age group were the least likely to say that they had formally volunteered in the past (21%).

*Reasons Given for Not Volunteering Formally*

**Figure 2.4: Reasons Given for Not Volunteering Formally** (Base: Informal Volunteers and Non Volunteers n=234)

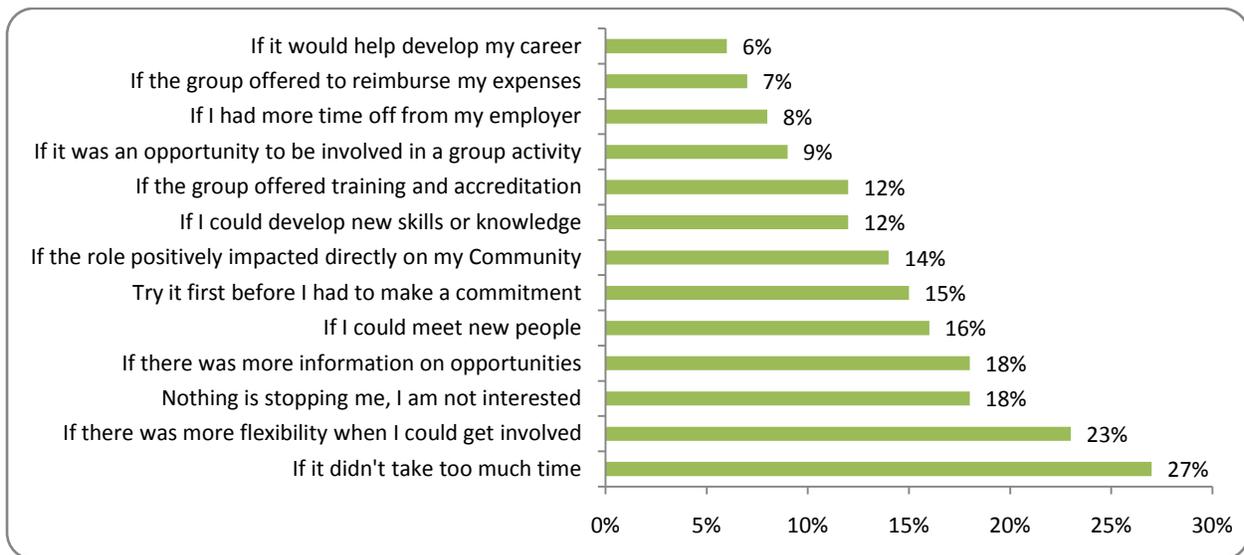


As illustrated in Figure 2.4, work commitments were the overriding reason for people not getting involved or becoming more involved in formal volunteering (31%). Having an illness or disability was identified as a barrier for 18% of respondents. A perception that the time commitment would be too large was also one of the more common barriers (16%). Interestingly, 15% said that they had never thought about volunteering or got around to doing it. A small % also stated that they felt too old to volunteer (9%) or didn't think that they had the right skills or experience (4%).

*Things that Would Make People Consider Formally Volunteering*

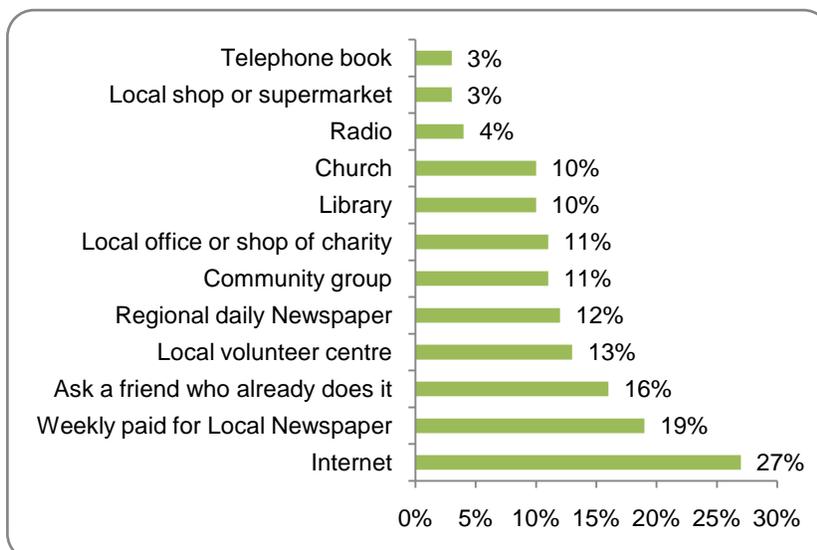
Volunteers not currently involved in formal volunteering were asked to indicate the type of things would make them reconsider (Figure 2.5). The two most common answers were the need for it to not take up too much time (27%) and the need for flexibility in when they could get involved (23%). Some of the other more common issues raised were the need for more information about opportunities (18%), to be able to meet new people (16%) and to be able to try volunteering before committing to it (15%).

**Figure 2.5 Showing Things that Would Make People Consider Formally Volunteering** (Base: Informal and Non Volunteers n=234)



*Sources That People Would Use To Find Out About Volunteering*

**Figure 2.6 Showing Sources would use for Finding out about Volunteering** (Base: Informal and Non Volunteers n=234)



Respondents who were not currently formally volunteering stated that if they were considering volunteering they would be most likely to use the internet to find out about opportunities (27%), this was followed by weekly local newspapers (19%) and asking a friend who

already volunteers (16%). A range of other sources were also identified, including a volunteer centre, regional daily newspapers, community groups, local charity/ shop, library or church (Figure 2.6).

*How People Found out about Volunteering*

Focus group participants were most likely to say that they had become involved with volunteering through information being directed at them or being asked directly i.e. finding out about opportunities through word-of-mouth or through someone personally recommending it. Generally, word of mouth / personal contact is the most common method of finding out about volunteering opportunities. These are also the most likely methods used by volunteering involving organisations to recruit volunteers (Volunteer Development Agency 2007; Volunteer Development Agency 2009:1).

“The school asked me if I would help out”

“My friend asked me if I would help out at the centre”

# Lifestyle and Availability of Free Time

### 3.0 Lifestyle and Availability of Free Time

This section of the report will focus on the lifestyle and availability of free time of respondents. The findings have been grouped so that comparisons across age categories can be made i.e. 50-59, 60-69 and 70-79. Finally, respondent motivation / interest in volunteering based on their life style and attitudes will be presented.

#### Main Findings

Watching TV, socialising with friends and gardening / DIY are the three most common regular hobbies / activities across the age groups. Participating in community activities decreased across the age categories whereas participation in church activities and sporting activity increased.

Approximately 4 out of 5 respondents said that they had some free time which was not committed to other activities. Respondents were more likely to say they could give short bursts of time, 'a few hours everyday' than day blocks per week.

Newspapers were, by far, the most common sources used for finding out information on local activities / events. This was followed by word of mouth (24%) and internet (24%)

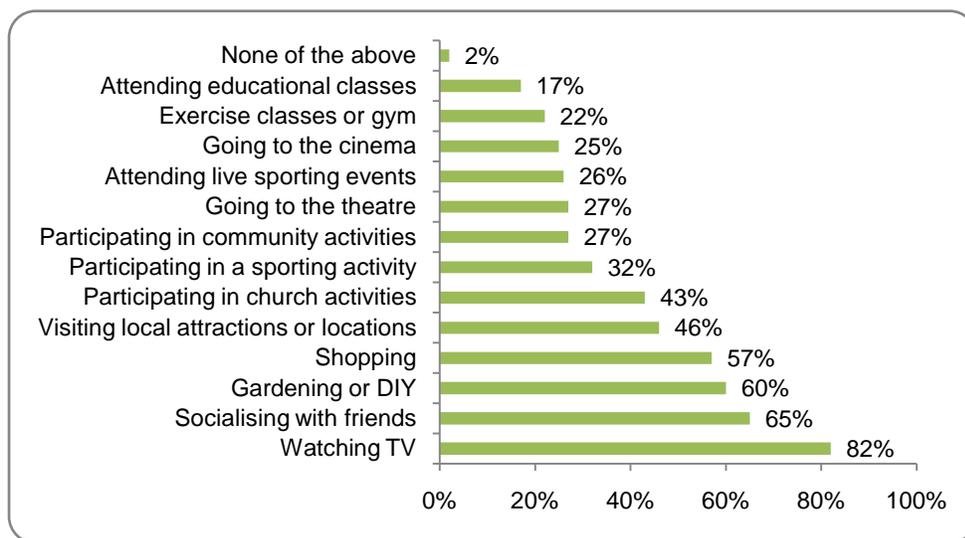
The Internet, weekly newspapers and asking a friend were identified as the most likely ways that those respondents currently not involved in formal volunteering, would use to source information on it.

The 60-69 age group was most likely to be active in terms of both physical exercise and to have a social life involving both friends and family. The 70-79 yr old age group was the most likely group to say that their social circle of friends had reduced and that they don't get out much. The 50-59 age group was likely to spend their time around their family and less around friends.

The Life Stage Model suggests that a 'window of opportunity' exists between the ages of 60-67 for people to get involved in volunteering. It suggests that the further people move beyond 65, 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 into their lives.

### 3.1 Regular Hobbies and Interests of Respondents

Figure 3.0 Showing Regular Hobbies and Interests (Base: All Respondents n=350)



Respondents stated that they were involved in a range of different hobbies and interests (Figure 3.0). The most common activity was watching TV (82%), followed by socialising with friends

(65%) and gardening or DIY (60%). Participating in church activities was an interest of less than half of respondents (43%) and participating in community activities was a regular hobby for only 27%.

Table 3.0 Showing the Regular Hobbies and Interests by Age Category (Base: All Respondents n=350)

	Average 350	AGE		
		50-59 150	60-69 119	70-79 81
		%		
Watching TV	82	81	82	83
Socialising with friends	65	66	66	60
Gardening or DIY	60	55	66	59
Shopping	57	60	55	56
Visiting local attractions or locations	46	49	48	40
Participating in church activities	43	37	47	49
Participating in a sporting activity	32	29	33	35
Participating in other community activities	27	27	33	19
Going to the theatre	27	22	34	25
Attending live sporting events	26	25	22	33
Going to the cinema	25	34	20	14
Exercise classes or gym	22	29	22	11
Attending educational classes	17	21	17	11
None of the above	2	1	1	4

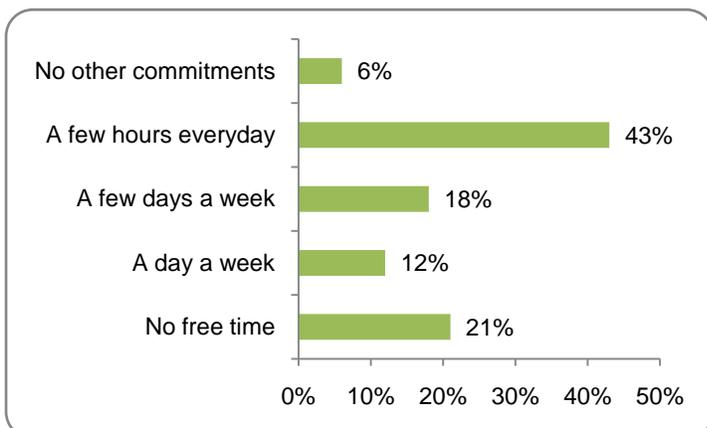
Table 3.0 compares hobbies and interests across three age categories (50-59, 60-69 and 70-79). The majority of respondents across all age categories were regularly watching TV, this was followed by

socialising with friends. The 60-69 age group were more likely to do DIY and gardening as a regular hobby. The amount of participation in community activities decreased within the older age categories. Also, the 50-59 year olds were less likely to be involved in church activities than the older age groups. The 70-79 age group were more likely to

be involved in sporting activity and attending sporting events than the younger age groups.

### 3.2 Free Time Not Committed to Other Activities

Figure 3.1 Showing Free Time not Committed to Other Activities (Base: All Respondents n=350)



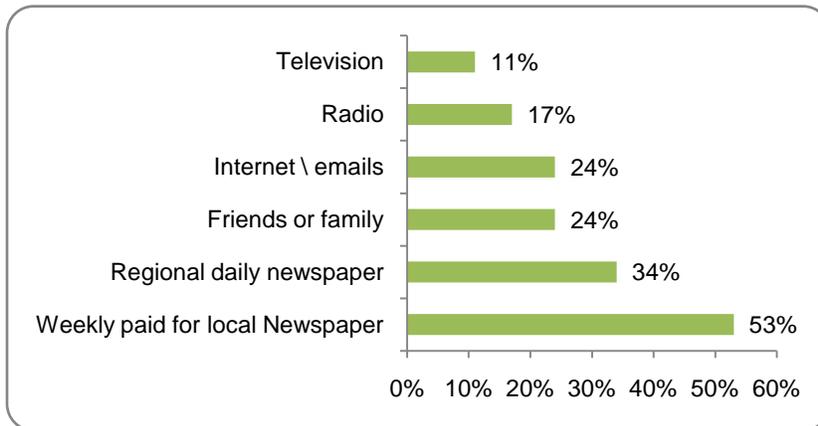
Approximately 8 out of 10 respondents said that they had some free time which was not committed to other activities. This was supported by the focus groups, in which a common pattern from volunteers and non-volunteers was that they had some ‘free time’. As Figure 3.1 shows the amount of

time available ranged from one day per week to a number of hours every day. The majority of respondents (43%) had a few hours per day that was not committed to other activities. As illustrated in Table 3.1, the same picture emerged for those non-volunteers and volunteers who stated that they had an interest in voluntary work. It is also interesting that more respondents were interested in the pattern of giving a few hours every day than blocking their time commitment to a day or few days per week. This again raises the importance of the need for flexibility in the time commitment.

Table 3.1 Showing Free Time not Committed to Other Activities by Age (Base: All Respondents n=350)

	AGE				Interest in voluntary work
	Average	50-59	60-69	70-79	
	350	150	119	81	162
			%		
<b>No other commitments</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>A few hours everyday</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>A few days a week</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>A day a week</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>No free time</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>22</b>

**Figure 3.2 Showing the Sources used for Information on Local Activities or Events** (Base: All Respondents *n*=350)



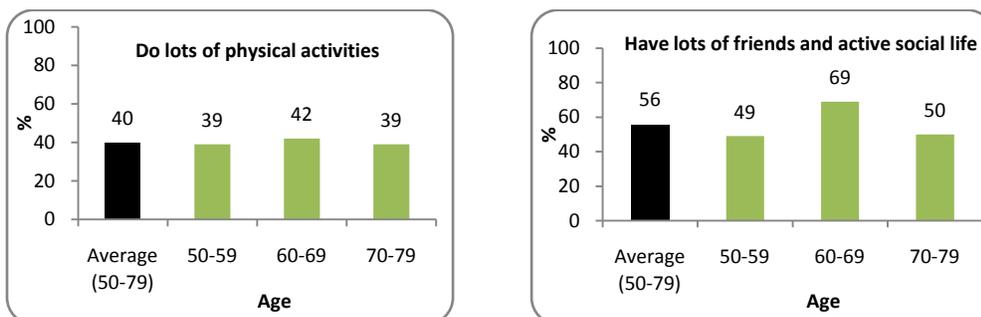
Respondents stated that the most common sources they would use for information on local activities or events were daily or weekly local and regional newspapers (Figure 3.2). They were also likely to find out information through the

word of mouth of friends or family (24%). Although the internet is not commonly used as a leisure activity (3%), respondents did state that they used it for sourcing information (24%)<sup>6</sup>. Radio and TV were the least likely to be used. Other sources for information which were not stated as being used were church or community groups, local shops or supermarkets, local brochures \ leaflets \ flyers, libraries and magazines.

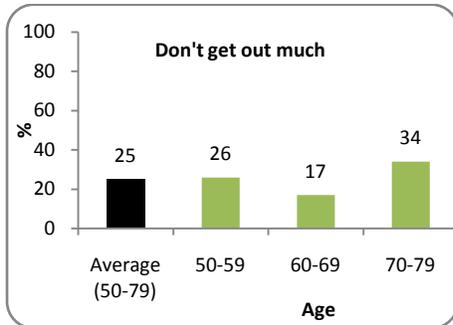
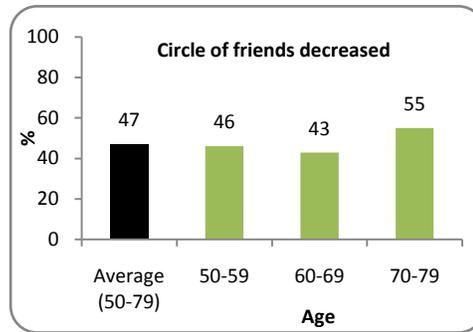
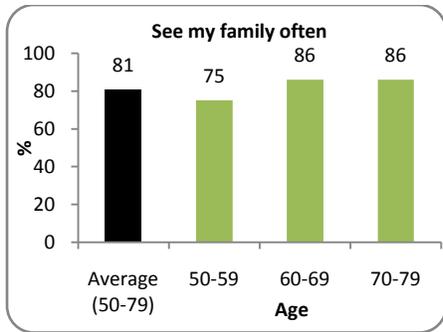
### 3.3 Frequency of Lifestyle / Social Activities

Respondents were asked about the frequency of lifestyle or social activities that they were involved in. A number of patterns emerged as illustrated from Figure 3.3. The 50-59 age group was more likely to spend their time around their family and less around a circle of friends. The 60-69 age group was likely to be active in terms of both physical exercise and social life with friends and family. The 70-79 yr old age group was the most likely group to say that their social circle of friends had reduced and centred around their family. They were also most likely to say that they didn't get out much. Interestingly, the 50-59 age group was less likely to do physical activities or to have an active social life than the 60-69 age group.

**Figure 3.3 Showing Frequency of Lifestyle / Social Activities** (Base: All Respondents *n*=350)



<sup>6</sup> See Figure 2.6



### 3.4 Propensity to Volunteering Based on Life Stage

Based on the information gathered from both the survey and the focus groups, the following life stage model (Table 3.2) was produced on both volunteers and non-volunteers. It has provided useful information about the propensity certain age groupings have towards volunteering, based on their lifestyle and attitudes. It could be suggested from this matrix that a window of opportunity exists between the ages of 60-67. The further that people move beyond 65, the more likely they are to have become settled into a rigid pattern of day to day life. The respondents who were 70+ years old expressed opinions that they felt they were no longer valuable to society, one person stated that they felt like they were the ‘forgotten generation’.

This model also highlighted a stark contrast in the experience of retirement of volunteers and non-volunteers. Volunteers at both ends of the age spectrum were more likely to feel fulfilled with their lifestyle and to have positive feelings about themselves and their value within society.

Window of opportunity  
60-67yrs old



Table 3.2 Life Stage Model

	55 – 59	60 – 65	66 – 69	70+
<b>NON-VOLUNTEERS</b>	<p>A few years off retirement</p> <p>Potential to feel un-needed skills redundant</p> <p>“Passed their sell-by date”</p> <p>“Thrown on scrapheap of life”</p> <p>Children not so demanding</p> <p>Some concern as to what life will be like – how to fill their day</p>	<p>Have retired</p> <p>Not what expected</p> <p>A little unsure of their direction and meaning of their lives</p> <p>Unsettled</p> <p>Have ‘too much’ time on their hands</p>	<p>Become settled in a rut / daily structure</p> <p>Content with their routine</p> <p>But feeling undervalued</p>	<p>Constrained by physical ability “feel younger generation shoot us down”</p> <p>“The forgotten generation”</p> <p>Family-centric</p>
<b>VOLUNTEERS</b>	<p>Feel fulfilled, can’t wait to retire to do more volunteering in areas of their interest, without daily working pressures</p>		<p>Well-settled in their volunteering routine, great satisfaction, sense of self-worth and contributed to society</p>	

# Caring Responsibilities

## 4.0 Caring Responsibilities

This section of the report has aimed to gain a better understanding of the extent of both volunteer and non-volunteer caring responsibilities. In 2007, a survey carried out across Northern Ireland found that 31% of carers were aged 55+ years old. This research also suggested that the boundaries of caring were narrowing around immediate family, particularly children and partners (Eavson 2007). This shifting lifestyle pattern may explain the fall in rates of 'Informal Volunteering' from 56% in 1995 to 35% in 2007. As 'Informal Volunteering' is defined as volunteering outside of one's immediate family, often at neighbourhood level (Volunteer Development Agency 2007).

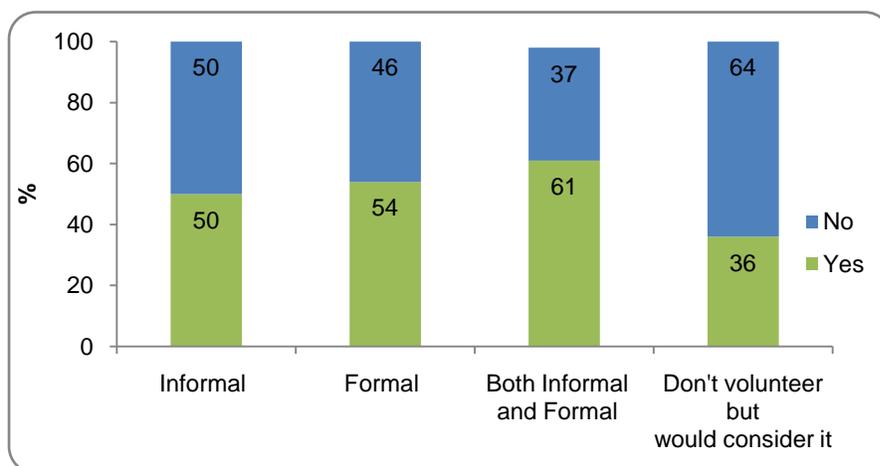
### Main Findings

Those people not involved in any form of volunteering were the least likely to have caring responsibilities (36%).

50% of the non-volunteers who would consider volunteering had caring responsibilities for their own children.

### 4.1 The Extent and Pattern of Caring Responsibilities

Figure 4.0 Showing Respondents Caring Responsibilities by Volunteering Status (Base: All Respondents n=350)

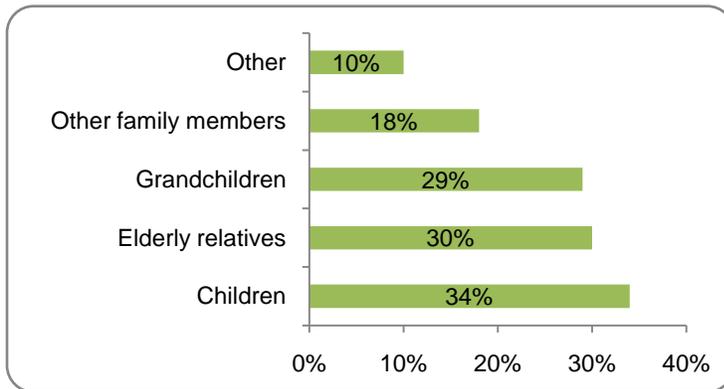


Overall, those people who volunteered were more likely to have caring responsibilities (Figure 4.0).

Volunteers who were involved in both formal and informal volunteering were most likely to have

caring responsibilities (61%). Approximately half of those involved in formal or informal volunteering also had caring responsibilities. In contrast, those people who stated that they were not involved in any form of volunteering were the least likely to have caring responsibilities (36%).

**Figure 4.1 Showing Recipients of Caring Responsibilities** (Base: All Respondents with Caring Responsibilities n=126)



As Figure 4.1 illustrates, the majority of respondents had caring responsibilities for children (34%), elderly relatives (30%) and grandchildren (29%). Also, 50% of the non-volunteers who would consider volunteering had caring responsibilities for their own children.

Half of those who described themselves as informal volunteers were caring for elderly relatives; this was followed by 31% of formal volunteers. Caring for elderly relatives reduced to 20% for those who were involved in both informal and formal volunteering. Other research has also highlighted the significant part that the retired age group plays in family life through their role as grandparents. Approximately half of the grandparents surveyed in the 2004 'Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey' were retired. Of the retired grandparents more than half saw their grand children once a week or more (56%) (Evason et al. 2005)

# Volunteering Imagery

## 5.0 Volunteering Imagery

This section of the report has aimed to explore the perception of volunteering from both a volunteer and a non-volunteers perspective. This includes the 'image' of volunteering and reasons for and against getting involved. As this section has relevance to a large number of the research aims, both survey and focus group findings have been described.

### Main Findings

#### The Image of Volunteering

- Respondents were most likely to associate volunteering with charity shops and fundraising.
- There were both gender and socio-demographic differences shown in the areas of volunteering that participants were interested in.
- Respondents chose vulnerable people as the group that they would be most interested in working with.
- Having fun, gaining new skills and opening up new opportunities were motivations for respondents to volunteer.
- The majority of the barriers to volunteering were not age specific i.e. fear of over-commitment and fear of inflexibility. However, others were more age specific i.e. fear that physical restrictions would not be accommodated for.

#### The Volunteer Perspective

- The two way exchange of giving time to help others as well as receiving personal benefits i.e. increased self worth, were key ways of describing volunteering.
- Respondents had experienced a wide range of volunteering activities with varied levels of time commitment and responsibility.
- Those still working were positive about retirement and had plans to increase the amount of voluntary work they were doing.
- For the majority of respondents volunteering was not perceived as a 'duty'. Being taken for granted by an organisation was a fear and unfortunately had been the experience for some respondents.

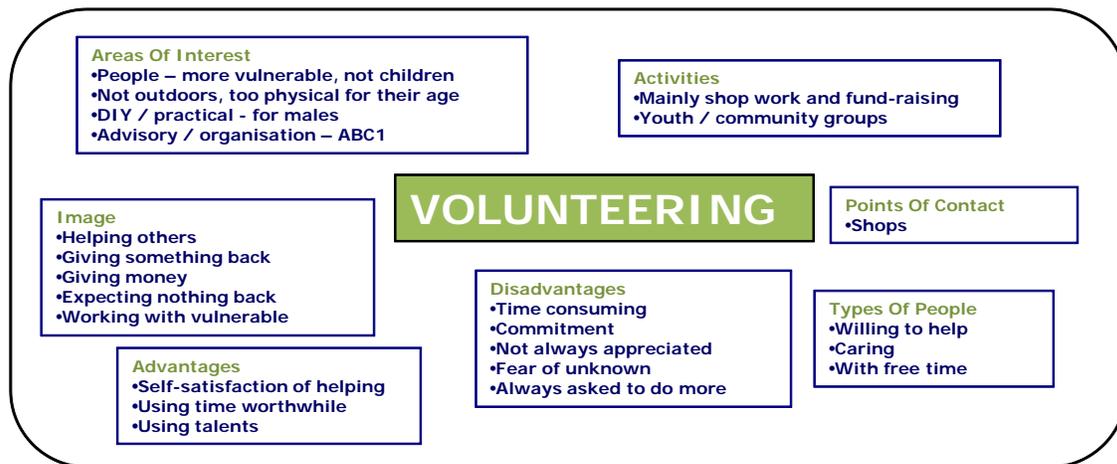
#### The Non-Volunteer Perspective

- Lack of understanding, unchallenged preconceptions and fears were major barriers to recognising volunteering as a consideration or choice.
- The non-volunteer groups found it most difficult to think of the skills they could offer through a volunteering role. Day to day skills such as listening or gardening were not perceived to be something that organisations would see as being valuable.
- There were demographic differences (gender and socio-economic) in the type of skills / volunteering roles that respondents thought they could offer.

### 5.1 Understanding People’s Perception of Volunteering

The following table has mapped the comments made by volunteers from the focus groups when they heard the word ‘volunteering’. Participants were encouraged to think about a number of key aspects of volunteering i.e. areas of interest, images of volunteering, the advantages and disadvantages, perceptions of the type of people that volunteer, types of volunteer activities and points of contact for volunteering. A number of patterns emerged from this process which has been mapped in Table 5.0.

Table 5.0 Mind Map of Volunteering (All Focus Groups)



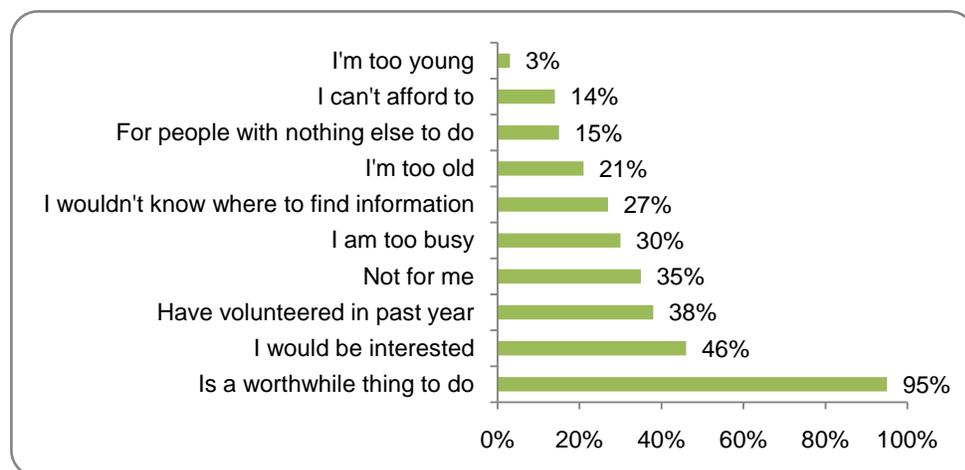
It was not surprising that participants chose working with vulnerable people as the type of group they would be most interested in working with. Children were the group they were least interested in working with. When asked to clarify this point, participants explained that the main barrier was the risk attached to working with children. Participants were also less keen to get involved in outdoor work due to fear of having heavy tasks to do.

There were both gender and socio-demographic differences shown in the areas of interest. The men in the non-volunteer focus groups were most likely to say that they would be interested in DIY and practical tasks. This was related to the fact that these were skills they felt they would be confident in using to help others. The more professional groups (ABC1) were more likely to be interested in higher skilled roles such as advisory or committee roles.

Participants were most likely to associate volunteering with charity shops and fundraising. Youth and community groups were also mentioned. Participants associated volunteering with caring / helpful people and those with free time.

The advantages and disadvantages of volunteering given by participants are similar to those identified by other research (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). The satisfaction of helping others, using time in a productive way and using talents were mentioned as advantages. Perceived disadvantages were the fear of over-committing to a role, not being appreciated or fearing what the volunteering role would be like.

**Graph 5.0 Showing Those who Agreed with Statements Related to Volunteering** (Base: Informal Volunteers and Non-Volunteers *n*=234)



Almost all of those surveyed (95%) stated that they thought 'formal volunteering' was a worthwhile thing to do. Almost half agreed that they would be interested. Other agreement were for the statements, 'it's not for me', 'I'm too busy', 'I wouldn't know where to find information' and 'I'm too old'.

## 5.2 Reasons for and Against Volunteering

Both Volunteer and Non-Volunteer focus groups provided a wide range of reasons for and against volunteering. These have been categorised in Table 5.1 under a number of key themes. The main reasons against volunteering were fear of the unknown, of not being appreciated / being taken for granted and bureaucracy i.e. form filling, police checks and being out of pocket. The reasons for volunteering were self fulfilment, being involved in meaningful activities, health benefits and the fact that they would be helping others. Overall, the range of reasons for and against volunteering are common issues raised by all volunteers and are not specific to the older age group. However, fear of the unknown, fear of over-commitment and fear of inflexibility in roles were the overarching barriers raised by respondents in this study. Non-volunteers showed limited knowledge about volunteering and the range of opportunities that were available for them, this lack of knowledge created a fear which may be related to other barriers such as a fear of not being capable of carrying out a role or being refused a role.

Having fun, gaining new skills and opening up new opportunities may not be perceived by others as the most likely motivation for an older person to volunteer, however, these were highlighted as important by the older people involved in this study. Participants also raised the benefit for their physical and mental health as a reason for volunteering. The health benefits of volunteering came out as a more important benefit of volunteering through the focus group work than was shown through the survey results.

**Table 5.1 Showing the Reasons for and Against Volunteering** (Focus Group: Volunteers and Non Volunteers)

Reasons Against Volunteering	Reasons For Volunteering
<p><b>Fear</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of unknown</li> <li>• Of failure</li> <li>• Of over-promising time and skills</li> <li>• Of being refused (lack of self confidence)</li> <li>• Of having no flexibility in role</li> <li>• Of litigation / responsibility</li> </ul> <p><b>Ignorance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of range of activities</li> <li>• Of level of commitment</li> <li>• First point of contact</li> </ul> <p><b>Attitude</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Of paid staff</li> <li>• Not appreciated</li> <li>• Suspicion from family of volunteer recipient</li> <li>• Taken for granted / Feeling like cheap labour</li> </ul> <p><b>Bureaucracy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police checks / Form filling</li> <li>• Faceless organisation</li> </ul> <p><b>Finance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out of Pocket</li> </ul>	<p><b>Self Fulfilment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self worth / Self esteem</li> <li>• Self satisfaction</li> <li>• Having fun</li> </ul> <p><b>Meaningful Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Filling the day in a constructive way</li> <li>• Sociable- meeting people</li> <li>• Learning new skills</li> <li>• Using ones skills / talents</li> <li>• Opening up to new opportunities</li> </ul> <p><b>Health Benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep you physically active</li> <li>• Mentally active- 'if you don't use it, you lose it'</li> </ul> <p><b>Helping Others</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving back to the community</li> <li>• Helping others who are more vulnerable</li> <li>• Appreciation from those you help</li> </ul>

### 5.3 The Volunteer Perspective of Volunteering

Overall, the over arching message provided by volunteers in the focus groups was of having a very positive, fulfilling experience of volunteering. Participants described volunteering as being addictive, the more involved they were, the more they wanted to be.

*“once you get the taste of volunteering, hard to get away from”; “(it’s a) free choice addiction”*

The focus group discussions with volunteers produced a range of positive words to describe the experience of volunteering. In particular, a strong sense of positive self worth and personal benefit from volunteering were mentioned by participants-

*Self -satisfaction, usefulness, purpose, keeping active physically and mentally, being sociable, passing on skills / knowledge, gaining an appreciation of others.*

In addition to the personal benefit of volunteering, a sense of wanting to do something for the benefit of others also came out strongly in the focus groups, as the following quotes demonstrate-

*“See end product of what you have done”*

*“You will get so much, and the person you help gets so much”*

*“If I can give someone a few hours and it makes them happy, it makes me even happier”*

### *Examples of volunteering*

People in the focus groups had experienced a wide range of volunteering activities, with varied levels of time commitment and responsibility. The types of volunteering activities included a receptionist role in a community centre, knitting for neo-natal unit, fundraising, selling ballots, bus escort, driving, meals on wheels, chairperson / Advisory role, Marie Curie ward volunteer, sports coach, helper at Boys Brigade and a leader of an after schools club.

The following case study demonstrates the benefits that a volunteer driver gained from their role-

A volunteer drives two sisters to a day centre twice per week; one of the sisters has a mild learning disability, so would find it difficult making the journey without help. The Volunteer driver describes how this role makes them feel,

*“..Just to see her face light up when I pull up in the car. I open the door and say “hello my lady and she says let’s go partner”, it gives you that buzz.”*

(Volunteer Driver, Belfast 55-59 year old)

Some other interesting information was gained from the volunteer groups, including the fact that those still working were positive about retirement and had plans to increase the amount of voluntary work they were doing. For the most part, volunteering was seen as a 'free choice' activity and not a duty.

*"The 'have to', is taken out of it"*

*"Doing it of your own free will"*

*"Doing it because you like it"*

*"It's not a duty that is a job"*

Over-committing ones time or being taken for granted by an organisation were perceived fears / barriers to volunteering and unfortunately these fears had been the experience for some of the participants. The following example describes a negative experience by a volunteer due to feeling taken for granted by an organisation and disrespected.

Respondent had a volunteer with an organisation for 18 years. He decided to leave due to being asked to do too much and also not feeling respected. The final straw came on one occasion when he felt a member of staff spoke to him like he was a '12 or 14 year old'.

**"Some organisations do not respect you for what you do for them"**

(Helper in a community organisation- Derry, 65-69 year old)

#### 5.4 The Non-Volunteer Perspective of Volunteering

A number of key findings emerged from the focus groups with the non-volunteers. These were the fact that there was a lack of understanding about what volunteering was. Due to this lack of understanding, unchallenged preconceptions and fears were acting as major barriers to recognising it as a consideration or choice.

During the focus group discussions with those people who identified themselves as a 'non- volunteers' at recruitment stage, it became apparent that some people were in fact doing voluntary activities. In addition, they had a common perception that charity collection / fundraising on an 'occasional' or 'one off' basis was not seen as

volunteering. Volunteering was perceived as a more structured, 'regular' role in which people committed a specific day or number of hours to an organisation.

A man described himself as a non-volunteer at recruitment stage. During the focus group it was discovered that he was an unpaid child protection officer at his local bowls club and therefore he was by definition a 'volunteer'.

### *Main Concerns with Regards to Volunteering*

The non-volunteer groups were asked to identify their main concerns with regards to volunteering (Table 5.1, page 45). An extensive range of barriers emerged which included a fear of over commitment, of tasks being beyond their capabilities, of feeling guilt if they had to let others down, concerns about the attitudes of paid staff, fear that they would be burdened by requests for help, concern that physical restrictions would not be accommodated for and the perception that the only opportunity that would be available to them would be fundraising / asking for money. Lastly, a fear of limited flexibility in a role was also raised as a barrier. The perception was that organisations required a structured commitment i.e. a set time, date per week / month.

**Facilitator:** "Would you be interested, if there was flexibility in the role, so you could pop in say on a Thursday and say 'I have a few hours now'?"

**Respondent:** "That's no good to the organisation. They need to know how long you are available, so they can tell the next person when they should come in and so forth."

The focus group participants were asked about the skills they had which they felt they could bring to volunteering. Initially the groups found this exercise difficult as they stated that they couldn't think of anything they could offer. However, with probing by the facilitator the following list of qualities and skills were identified. On observation this exercise seemed to have a therapeutic outcome, particularly for the non-volunteer groups, as the completed list showed them that they had a wide range of skills and qualities to offer. Differences emerged across gender as well as social-economic groupings. Women were more likely to mention skills such as listening, talking, baking or knitting whereas men were more likely to mention practical skills, such as driving and DIY. As expected there were also differences by socio-economic groups, those in the ABC1 group were more likely to choose advisory / committee roles, whereas those in the C2DE group were more likely to choose practical hands on tasks. Some participants

also mentioned the fact that they would prefer to help at an individual level (person or family) rather than at an organisational level.

**Table 5.2 Showing Perceived Skills & Qualities Useful to Volunteering** (Focus Group: Volunteers and Non Volunteers)

SKILLS	
<b>Female</b>	<b>Listening</b> <b>Patience</b> <b>Understanding</b> <b>Talking / Conversation</b> <b>Passing on knowledge of life</b> <b>Personal experience</b> <b>Common sense</b> <b>Baking</b> <b>Knitting</b> <b>Organisational skills</b> <b>Calm / less likely to panic</b>
<b>Males</b>	<b>Practical</b> <b>Driving</b> <b>DIY</b> <b>Using trade skills</b>
<b>ABC1's</b>	<b>Advisory roles, committees, mental health skills</b>
<b>C2DE's</b>	<b>More practically hands-ons, visiting, driving</b>

# Marketing and Advertising

## 6.0 Marketing and Advertising

This section of the report is focused on the issue of how best to market / advertise volunteering to the older age group. By directly asking the target group questions about their preferences and behaviours towards advertising, a better understanding of how to market volunteering will be gained.

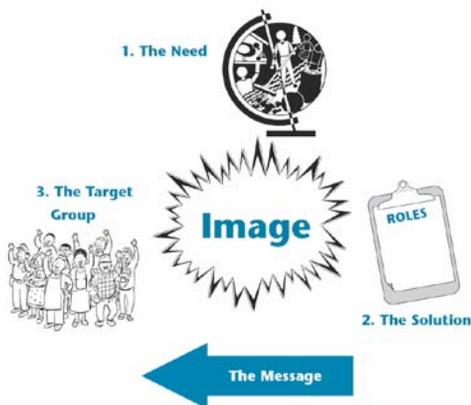
### Main Findings

Participants liked the idea of a taster sessions and finding out about opportunities with a friend i.e. bring a friend along. Most participants preferred opportunities which focused on their 'community'. Community was a few streets for some while for others this was 30 miles from their home.

Participants preferred the words experienced older and over 50's. 'Baby boomer' or 'third ager' was not understood by participants and a clear dislike was shown for the term 'old people'.

The attitude and experiences of life and volunteering (The Life Stage Model) helped to formulate specific types of marketing messages that would be most appropriate in attracting non- volunteers.

The main reason to explore the marketing of volunteering to older people was to inform the development of the campaign / public relations strand of the 'Unlocking Potential' project. Therefore, it was important to ask participants some question regarding their opinions on different marketing approaches.



Overall, in terms of an advertising campaign, a well thought through recruitment campaign is important (Volunteer Development Agency 2001:2). The basic marketing model approach (Figure 6.0) states that the image and message are both central to a campaign. This theory recommends that the message addresses the need, the solution, and the 'target group' that it will be directed at.

Figure 6.0

### 6.1 Encouraging Interest in Finding out More about Volunteering

A section of the focus groups was aimed at finding out about how older people would prefer to be approached about volunteering. Participants were asked about their interest in finding out about volunteering through use of a taster session, the idea of going along with a friend and the distance they would travel to volunteer. Participants felt that taster sessions were a good idea, as it provided the opportunity to find out more without the fear / pressure of committing to something. They were also interested in finding out about opportunities with a friend rather than going on their own. Most participants preferred opportunities which focused on their ‘community’. When the meaning of ‘community’ was explored, it was shown to indicate different spatial distances. For some, it was a few streets from their home, for others this was a 30 miles distance from their home. It has been said that factors such as individual’s activities, networks and travel patterns shape an individual’s concept of neighbourhood and community; this theory was supported by the discussion from the focus groups (Massey 1994).

### 6.2 Language used in Marketing Campaigns

Focus group participants were provided with a range of different terms that have been used to refer to people over the age of 50. These terms ‘experienced’, ‘older’, ‘over 50’s’, ‘old people’, ‘baby boomer’, ‘third ager’, ‘senior’, ‘prime’, ‘retired’ and ‘pensioner’. As Table 6.0 shows participants preferred the words ‘experienced’ ‘older’ and ‘over 50’s’. The majority disliked the phrase ‘old people’ and did not understand the terms ‘baby boomer’ or ‘third ager’. Participants had mixed feelings about ‘senior’, ‘prime’, ‘retired’ and ‘pensioner’. A number of people did not identify with the terms retired or pensioners because they had not reached this stage of their life or the words have a negative connotation. The term ‘senior’ was associated with people in their 80’s which none of the participants identified with.

**Table 6.0 Showing Opinion on Word to Describe the Over 50’s**

Like	Mixed Feelings	Disliked
Experienced	Senior	Old people
Older	Prime	Baby Boomer
Over 50’s	Retired	Third Ager
	Pensioner	

The participants were asked about the key messages or issues that should be addressed in an advertising campaign, which would encourage the 50+ age group to think about volunteering. Table 6.1 lists the key messages participants said they would like to see on an advertisement campaign.

**Table 6.1 Showing Key Messages Participants would like to See on an Advertising Campaign**

Putting your talents to use	Feeling valued
Getting out of the house	"In my time and on my terms"
Social aspect	Over 60's still wanted
Someone really needs your help	You are capable of doing it
Enjoyment 'something in it for me'	

### 6.3 Target Market for the 'Unlocking Potential' Project

From the information gained in this research, four different age groupings emerged based on their attitude and experiences of life and volunteering (The Life Stage Model). The research showed that based on the characteristics drawn from the Life Stage Model, specific types of marketing messages would be most appropriate in attracting those non- volunteering groups. As can be seen in Table 6.2, the 57-59 year olds who were a few years off retirement, were showing concerns about what retirement would be like and how they would fill their day. Some of the key messages for this group would be to let them know that they are 'not past their sell by date' and that volunteering can provide 'a structure to their day. The 60-65 year olds were characterised by being in retirement, those people that had been in retirement for a while had said that they were feeling a little unsettled and unsure of what retirement meant. The key messages for this group would therefore be that their skills / experience are still in demand and that volunteering could be rewarding for them. The 66-69 age group had been in retirement for some time and had become settled into a routine, however, they also voiced that they felt under-valued. The key messages of an advertising campaign for this group would be that they have valuable skills to offer to society. In general, the 70+ age group were feeling marginalised by society and feeling constrained by their physical health. The key marketing messages for this group would be that they can still be useful to society and that volunteering opportunities can be adapted to meet their needs i.e. non-physical, in short burst. Based on lifestyle and attitudes the 60-67 age group was chosen to be the group most easily influenced to volunteer by way of an advertising campaign.

Table 6.2 Showing Key Marketing Messages to Address Barriers

55-59	60-65	66-69	70+
Not past their sell-by date	Now time for you	Stuck in a rut	Still useful to society / sociable
Fill your time	Skills/experience very much in demand	Can still be of use – have skills	Not physical / standing address transport concerns
Structure but not pressured	Rewarding / satisfying / sense of worth / fun / sociable	 <p>Makes us feel useful and wanted.</p>	Short bursts
			Something you can do with a friend
			Provide examples of calm activities

# Conclusions & Recommendations

## 7.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The final section of this report has outlined the practical implications of the findings on the selection and management of volunteers who are 50+ years old.

### **Practical Implications of the Learning from this Study**

It is more likely that groups will attract a larger and more diverse range of people if they use a varied range of recruitment methods.

Organisations are more likely to have successful recruitment campaigns if they target older people in the areas which they are more likely to go in their normal day to day life.

Non volunteer participants showed a lack of understanding of the scope of volunteering. PR, advertising, open days and outreach work which has a specific focus on this group could help to combat this.

Organisations should consider focusing recruitment events or volunteer opportunities in localised areas, as the perception of being 'too far away from home' may be a particular barrier for some people.

New recruitment methods such as 'taster session' and 'turn up and try' which encourage people to 'bring a friend along' should be considered. It can act as a casual, non-committal / non-threatening way of finding out more.

It is important that recruitment messages are made relevant to individual interests, motivations and fears. It is also important that these messages are carried through to the reality of a role.

Volunteering can have a wide range of benefit (health, social) to older people. There is evidence of the need to create more awareness around these, particularly to those who have no previous experience of volunteering.

Organisations which offer roles to the 50+ age group which have varying levels of commitment i.e. occasional as well as regular volunteering opportunities and those which provide alternative options, such as volunteering from ones home, are in a strong position to attract and retain people with busy lifestyles.

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 their organisations on the other.

Flexibility is increasingly important to the older age group as societal norms change. Volunteer opportunities which accommodate for flexibility are likely to be more appealing and encourage greater retention.

Participants identified a wide range of reasons against volunteering, these included fear of the unknown, fear of not having skills that an organisation would value, 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 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 which volunteer involving organisations would need to be aware of in their volunteer management practice.

The population profile of Northern Ireland, like the rest of the western world, is forecast to move towards an increasingly ageing population. Therefore, older people are going to have increasing power as the main consumers of goods, facilities and services. For this reason, there is a need for greater understanding of the needs, expectations, interests and motivations of the older age group. The Northern Ireland government has raised the priority of active citizenship, health and well being of older people through key policy decisions, such as the introduction of an Office of the Commissioner for Older People and age focused policy documents such as 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society', 'Life Time Opportunities Strategy' and the 'A Healthier Future Strategy'. This report has added strength to the argument that volunteering can have a wide range of benefit to older people, all of which link into the governments plans for older people's social inclusion, health and well being.

As a society we have a responsibility to ensure that older people are valued and given the opportunity to actively participate in their communities. Volunteering as a form of civic engagement has a role in tapping into the potential of this group. In order to do this a refreshed understanding of the needs and motivations of the current older age group is required.

The initial review of existing older people volunteering research identified a large amount of international research on different aspects of older people volunteering. An overarching message from this work was of a new generation of older people 'the new old', who are re-defining what it means to be 'older' and also what it meant to be 'retired'. This group has been described as being in better health and wealth than previous generations of the same age. They are also described as having much more complex life styles and higher expectation from all aspects of their life. A recent scoping

exercise of literature on older people volunteering identified a considerable gap in research from a Northern Ireland context (Volunteer Development Agency 2008). It was for these reasons that a piece of research which explored these areas was so important.

This report has produced one of the most comprehensive pictures of the lifestyle, attitudes and experiences of volunteering for the 50+ age group in Northern Ireland. This work complements the existing 'Its All About Time' report which provided an overview of all voluntary activity that was happening here. It was the 'It's All About Time' report, which highlighted the under-representation of the older age groups in volunteering and the fact that older volunteers were highly valuable, in that they provided above average time and commitment (Volunteer Development Agency 2007).

Both a survey and focus group technique was used to investigate the under researched area of older people volunteering. The mixed method design of the study has been successful as both the survey and focus groups have complemented each other, to produce a breadth of information which has also allowed a depth of understanding.

Respondents in this research, 17% were involved in formal volunteering, although an additional 16% were involved in both formal and informal volunteering. A further 20% were not currently volunteering but would consider it. Also, approximately four out of five respondents said that they had free time which was not committed to other things. Of those that had an interest in volunteering, nearly half (43%) said that they had a few hours per day that was not committed to other things. This research alone has identified a significant sized target group for volunteering within the 50+ age group.

One of the initial challenges for an organisation is to attract a person to read an advertisement or engage in talking about volunteering. As 20% of the study respondents stated that they were not disinterested in volunteering, it is possible that these people have either not been exposed to or been attracted to previous recruitment campaigns. It is important that organisations are supported to try new ways of engaging with this group. The 'Unlocking Potential' Program will be carrying out training and other information sessions to equip organisations with information that organisations could use in their practice.

Previous research has found that volunteer involving organisations are most likely to use word of mouth and personal contact to attract volunteers (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). A weakness of personal contact as an information source about volunteering is that one needs to be part of a social circle in which volunteering has been experienced, in order to hear about it. This technique is a successful cost effective way of advertising for organisations which require small numbers of volunteers; it becomes more difficult for organisations in more urbanised areas which require larger

numbers of volunteers and which are competing with a larger number of other organisations. It is more likely that groups will attract a more diverse range of people if they use a varied range of recruitment methods (Volunteer Development Agency 2001). This research found that the 50+ target group was using a wide range of information sources, the most common sources of information on local activities or events were the weekly or regional newspapers followed by friends and family, radio and internet. In comparison, the most common sources for seeking out volunteering opportunities were the internet or the newspapers. It is still a common presumption that older groups do not use the internet; however people in their 50's may have experience of using it in the workplace. Although, current statistics tell us that internet usage decreases for the 65+ age group (OFCOM 2006). This pattern may change as the current 50+ age group of 'surfers' move into their 60's. Therefore organisations should consider this as a communication tool for this group.

This research has provided some useful tips in terms of the terminology and key messages that may be most amenable to the 50+ age group. It is important that messages are made relevant to individual interests, motivations and fears. Some innovative ways of encouraging people to think about volunteering as a choice and to link into individual motivations and barriers, is the use of 'taster session' and 'turn up and try' forms of recruitment. The respondents in this research were interested in this idea as it was a non-committal / non-threatening way of finding out more. This research found that one of the overarching reasons for not volunteering was the fear of the unknown, which were related to a much wider range of barriers i.e. fear of failure, over commitment and of being taken for granted. From an organisational point of view dispelling these fears within one advertisement or leaflet is difficult. Therefore the idea of 'taster sessions' and 'turn up and try' events which involves real volunteers to describe their experience, may be an effective style of engagement. The review of the Home Office Older Volunteer Initiative found that successful recruitment was dependent on someone making a direct suggestion or request to the potential volunteer. It suggested that publicity or recruitment strategies were unlikely to succeed unless they were accompanied by vigorous efforts to make personal contact with both potential volunteers and with staff or leaders of other organisations (Rochester et al. 2002). Overall, the volunteering infrastructure in Northern Ireland (The Volunteer Development Agency and the Volunteer Centre Network) has an important role to play in ensuring that organisations are supported to apply specific best practice in the recruitment of volunteers who are 50+.

Respondents identified a wide range of reasons against volunteering, these included fear of the unknown, fear of not having skills that an organisation would value, 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,

barriers need to be addressed at recruitment stage, in order to attract and retain volunteers. This requires an organisation which values the complementary role of volunteers and which has policies and procedures in place which are based on best practice. Although respondents in this study stated that they had some free time not committed to other things, they also highlighted the fact that they would require flexibility in a volunteering role. There are also signs that older people have increasing childcare responsibilities, therefore organisations should consider the need for flexibility for this reason and also the reimbursement for childcare costs. Organisations which offer roles to the 50+ age group which have varying levels of commitment i.e. occasional as well as regular volunteering opportunities and those which provide alternative options, such as volunteering from ones home, are in a strong position to attract and retain people with busy lifestyles. The volunteer respondents from the focus groups were involved in a wide range of volunteering roles, which demonstrates that organisations are providing challenging and motivating roles for this age group. It is important that this happens in all volunteer involving organisations.

‘Giving back to the community’ and ‘wanting to improve things for others’ are two of the most common motivations for volunteering made by the 50+ age group, as is the case for all age groups across Northern Ireland. ‘Having fun’, ‘meeting new people’, ‘gaining new skills’ and ‘opening up new opportunities’ may not be perceived as the most likely motivation for an older person to volunteer, however, these were highlighted as important factors by the older people in this study. Organisations which provide volunteer opportunities which meet the expectations of this age group are in the best position to both recruit and retain them. Respondents showed an interest in helping people within their own ‘community’. Some mentioned their preference for working with local charities rather than large ‘faceless’ organisations. It is important that organisations are able to communicate the local impact of the work of their organisation in order to gain the interest of volunteers.

Generally, the non volunteer respondents showed a lack of understanding of the scope of volunteering, this may have contributed to the fact that they believed that fundraising would be the only role offered, that they would have to commit regular set times and that there were no roles that they would be skilled to do. It was clear from this research that a general awareness raising exercise is required, within the 50+ age group, who are not currently volunteering. Important messages would include the availability of varied roles which have flexibility and that can be matched up to their skills / interests.

This lack of understanding of what volunteering was may also have contributed to a range of other perceived barriers which included the fear of being ‘asked to do too much’. This is a concern expressed by volunteers generally (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). However, some of the barriers were more age specific, for example, tasks being beyond ones capability, concerns about ones physical restriction being

accommodated for. It is important that organisations ensure that these barriers are not a reality for those who become volunteers, if they wish to retain them and create a positive public image.

Generally, volunteers were satisfied with their volunteering experience. However, being 'taken for granted' and being 'asked to do too much' were two negative experiences noted by some. These are issues which volunteer involving organisations should be aware of in their volunteer management practice. Relying too heavily on a small number of volunteers can lead to them feeling duty bound and pressurised. It is well recognised that this is not conducive to a positive volunteer experience and may encourage low retention rates and poor recruitment.

The health and social benefits of volunteering were highlighted by respondents in this research. This was more likely to be mentioned by the volunteers than the non-volunteers. The non-volunteers, particularly the older respondents (65+), were more likely to use health concerns as a reason for not volunteering. This finding has been suggested in other research (Mellor et al. 2008). Furthermore, research has also identified the fact that volunteering can be seen by some older volunteers as a risk factor for poor health rather than having an enhancement role (Lum & Lightfoot 2005). This research found differences between the volunteers and non volunteers in terms of 'life satisfaction' which included their attitude to ageing and moving into retirement. There is evidence of the need to create more awareness around the health benefits of volunteering, particularly to those who have no previous experience of volunteering.

Current trends show that the propensity to formally volunteer falls considerably from 65 years of age (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). This study found an interesting contrast in the attitude and life satisfaction of the volunteers and non-volunteers who were over 65. The volunteers described feeling like they were making a useful contribution to society, having great satisfaction and a sense of self worth whereas the non-volunteers described feeling under-valued and stuck in a routine of day to day life. Research has also found that those who volunteer in their early retirement years tend to do so more often than during their working years (Harvard 2004). Harris suggests that some of the young retired and early retired, who are relatively reluctant to volunteer, may become more inclined, if their disposable income is restricted due to the current recession (Margaret Harris 2009). Organisations may wish to consider how they could attract the 65 age group as well as evaluating the reasons why older volunteers may stop volunteering with them after 65. There are some examples of successful employer supported volunteering in Northern Ireland. However, employers could play a larger role by taking the lead in promoting volunteering to its employees, pre and post retirement.

In this study, attendance at church and sporting activities increased with the age of respondents. Organisations which have a remit in these areas may wish to consider

how they could engage with this group with regards to volunteering. In general, organisations are more likely to have successful recruitment campaigns if they target older people in the areas which they are more likely to go in their normal day to day life. This will become more difficult as people move beyond 65, as their social circles narrow around their own home.

The idea of social circles and social connections is an important point to consider. Respondents in this study had varying personal views on how far connections with their community stretched. For some people 'community' was a small number of streets from their home, whereas for other this was 30 miles away. In terms of volunteer recruitment and management, organisations should consider focusing recruitment events or volunteer opportunities in localised areas, as the perception of being 'too far away from home' may be a particular barrier for some people. The Life Stage Model from this research has suggests that a 'window of opportunity' exists between the ages of 60-67 for people to get involved in volunteering. Based on life style i.e. attitude to volunteering, time availability, current level of social / civic engagement, it was this age range that seemed to have the greatest propensity to volunteer. This is not to say that those outside of this age group would not be interested in volunteering.

The best practice suggestions outlined in this section of the report are based on the issues raised by all respondents. Indeed many for the suggestions can be used as general good practice for recruiting across all age ranges. However, it has also raised some specific advice, which will help organisations to 'age proof' their volunteer management practices. Overall, it has been shown that when volunteer management is carried out effectively with consideration for individual needs, organisations gain maximum benefits from their involvement of volunteers and volunteers gain maximum satisfaction (Volunteer Development Agency 2001). The challenge for volunteer managers will be to spot new organisational needs as well as the new opportunities for the recruitment of older volunteers and to find ways of making appropriate approaches to them. Based on the findings from this report, organisations will need to be flexible in providing a range of possible routes to voluntary involvement and be mindful of the fact that direct contact remains the most usual route to volunteer recruitment. They must also 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 their organisations on the other.

Through the engagement of volunteer involving organisations with the 'Unlocking Potential project' there are many case studies of involvement of older volunteers in organisations. To date these have tended to be of a small, localised nature. The project is hoping to be the conduit of best practice, particularly to those organisations which are not currently involving / attracting older volunteers. It is hoped that successfully piloted

models of good practice for involving older volunteers can be spread out regionally, as has been successfully done in America.

Overall, the Northern Ireland volunteering infrastructure (The Volunteer Development Agency and the Volunteer Centre Network) has an important role to play in ensuring that organisations are supported to apply specific best practice in the recruitment and management of volunteers who are 50+. The Northern Ireland Government are also key to ensuring that volunteering champions i.e. Volunteer Involving Organisations, Volunteer Development Agency and Volunteer Networks are supported and encouraged to help carry through priorities made in older people focuses polices, such as 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society', 'Life Time Opportunities Strategy' and the 'A Healthier Future Strategy'.

## Appendix 1: Methodology

The fieldwork for this report was carried out in November and December 2008 by Millward Brown Ulster. There were 2 data collection methods used, a telephone survey of 350 individuals and 6 focus groups. The Volunteer Development Agency provided Millward Brown with the main topic areas and also worked closely with them on the survey design. The scoping exercise of existing older people literature assisted the project in identifying the main issues or research gaps which this research would address (Volunteer Development Agency 2008).

A mixed method approach was used for the research in order to benefit from the strengths of the two techniques. The survey was used to gain a breadth to key questions. The focus groups were used to add depth to the understanding of the research questions and to help clarify any points raised in the survey.

### Telephone Survey

The telephone survey involved randomly selecting 350 individuals. The geographical spread was assured by randomly selecting by area telephone codes from across NI. Representativeness was quota controlled for sex, age and socio-economic grouping. The key areas explored through the survey were lifestyle choices and availability of free time, caring responsibilities, perceptions of volunteering and experience of voluntary activities. The survey was conducted using Computer Aided Telephone Interview software.

		Sample Size	%
Sex	Male		
	Female		
Age	50-59	150	43
	60-69	119	34
	70-79	81	23
Socio-Economic Group	ABC1	161	46
	C2	81	23
	DE	108	31
Employment Status	Working Full Time	93	27
	Working Part Time	39	11
	Not Working- Seeking Employment	13	4
	Retired	185	53
	Semi- Retired	5	1
	Other	14	4

*Percentage figures were rounded up or down to their nearest whole number*

### Focus Groups

The demographic profile of the focus groups are outlined in the table above. There were 6 mixed sex focus groups undertaken which were quota controlled for sex, age and class. During the recruitment process individuals were asked to identify themselves as a

volunteer or non-volunteer. To ensure the accuracy of the responses to this question individuals’ were given a clear definition of both formal and informal volunteering (refer to section: ‘Volunteer Activity and Participation’). Each focus group lasted between 1-1 ½ hours and had between 6- 8 participants in each. The participants were given an incentive of £25 for taking part in the focus group.

Group	Sex	Age	Class	Criteria	Location
1	Male /Female	55-59	ABC1	Volunteers	Greater Belfast
2	Male /Female	55-59	C2DE	Non	Derry City
3	Male /Female	60-65	ABC1	Non	Newry
4	Male /Female	65-69	C2DE	Volunteers	Rural Derry
5	Male /Female	60-69	ABC1	Non	Cookstown
6	Male / Female	70-75	C2DE	Non	Belfast City

**Analysis of Results**

Both the telephone survey and focus groups were analysed by Millward Brown Ulster.

**Report Writing**

The responsibility for producing the written report was taken by the Volunteer Development Agency with the guidance of the Research Reference Group and Overall Advisory Group of the Unlocking Potential Project.

**Limitations**

Due to the relatively small sample size used within the telephone survey, generalisations cannot be made to the Northern Ireland population. However, information from the two data collection methods did largely support each other. Both non-volunteering and informal volunteering was combined together in some of the results. In hindsight it would have been better to have separated these in order to gain a clearer understanding of attitudes of each of these groups. Also, having the volunteer status, ‘Formal and Informal volunteering’ represented as a subset rather than an exclusive group would have provided a clearer understanding of volunteering activity. These two latter points would be useful to consider if future research was to be undertaken with this group.

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