Northern Ireland Public Policy for Older People and Volunteering

November 2009

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Volunteer Development Agency 2009

1.0 Introduction

This report will provide an outline of the overall objectives of the 'Unlocking Potential' Project and how it links strategically with other public policy agendas. There are a plethora of public policies which link to volunteering at some level, from public health to equality to community relations. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the main public policies regarding volunteering and older people. In order to prevent diluting the strength of the most salient strategic links this report has focused on those policies in which the strongest linkages can be found.

1.1 Objectives of this Report

- Carry out a mapping exercise of Northern Ireland public policy for older people and for volunteering.
- Cross reference the 'Unlocking Potential' project objectives with those of existing public policy.

1.2 Background to the 'Unlocking Potential' Project

The 'Unlocking Potential' project is a five year project, funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies and managed by the Volunteer Development Agency (The Agency). 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 the NorthWest Volunteer Centre which currently provides local delivery of the project in Belfast / Castlereagh and Londonderry / Strabane respectively. It is the intention to commence rolling the project out across the whole of NI in 2010. 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.

1.3 The Objectives of the 'Unlocking Potential' Project

• To challenge attitudes and raise awareness of the contribution and benefits of volunteering;

• To increase the number of older volunteers *(65+ years old by 10% over the next five years and the number of 50-64 year olds by 5%).* 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.

The most recent representative survey of volunteering in Northern Ireland found that on average 21% of the Northern Ireland population volunteer formally. Formal volunteering is when a person volunteers under the auspices of an organisation. The levels of formal volunteering begin to decline for those who are 50 years old onwards, with the 65+ age group being the least likely of all age groups to volunteer (17%). Although the 50+ age group are the least likely group to volunteer, they are the most likely group to volunteer on a consistently regular basis. The 65+ age group are the most likely group to provide between 21-40 hours per month to formal volunteering (Volunteer Development Agency 2007).

This is a particularly pertinent time to be addressing the nature of volunteering for the 'older' age group. Currently about a third of Northern Ireland's total population is aged 50 years old and over (n=535,000). This is set to increase to 38% of the total population by 2029 (NISRA 2006; Age Concern Help the Aged NI (2009b). A major focus of the debate on the changing population profile of Northern Ireland has been on the expected increasing need or dependency on the state by those of pensionable age. However, there is now a growing army of groups both within and connected to the Age Sector which are raising the point that older people contribute a significant amount to the social economy during their life which continues into retirement. This includes older people's commitment to caring for the young, sick or elderly in their own family (Evason et al. 2005; Evason 2007). In addition, it has been estimated that the economic value generated by the 50+ age group through voluntary activities, outside of their immediate family equates to £428 million per year in Northern Ireland. This is 46% of the overall contribution of formal and informal volunteering (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). From a wider societal point of view this group is becoming an increasing consumer of all goods, facilities and services. This includes 'buying into' volunteering as an alternative use of their time (Volunteer Development Agency 2009). Therefore as a consequence of their increasing power and also recognition of their contribution to society consideration of the attitudes, motivations and lifestyle choices of the older generation are of increasing importance.

It should be celebrated that life expectancy is increasing for people that live in Northern Ireland. However, the quality of life attached to those additional years is often very poor. Older people continue to experience neglect, isolation, poverty and discrimination (Age Concern Help the Aged NI (2009b). In reality it is impossible for older people who are facing basic standard of living issues to take advantage of the opportunities to become fully involved in civic life. It is important that a wide range of initiatives are put into place to ensure that improvements are made in terms of the opportunities that are provided to older people who are healthy and willing as well as the services and care that are provided to the elderly and vulnerable. It is vital that the government as well as those who have an interest in the rights and welfare of older people work together on common goals such as inclusion, quality of life and health. The 'Unlocking Potential' Project will continue to actively engage with Government policy, the Age Sector and the voluntary and community sector in supporting a society where quality living prevails into older age.

2.0   Overview of Strategic Linkages between Volunteering and Policy

The following table provides a list of the main public policy documents which have linkages with the overall objectives of the 'Unlocking Potential' Project, which have been listed in section 1.3. This report has been structured under three themes which are older people, health and volunteering.

Older People

- The Northern Ireland Programme for Government (2008)

- Ageing in an Inclusive Society (2005)

- Lifetime Opportunities: Towards and Anti-Poverty Strategy (2005)

- The Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland (out for public consultation until 7 January 2010)

- Safer Ageing: A Strategy and Action Plan for Ensuring the Safety of Older People (2009)

- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (2008)

Health

- A Healthier Future: A 20 Year Vision (2005)

- Investing For Health (2002)

Volunteering

- The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (closed for consultation on 7 November 2009, final report due early 2010)

- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007 in Northern Ireland.

2.1   Strategic Linkages with a focus on Older People

This section of the report will outline current public policies which have a focus on older people and will draw out what strategic linkages exist with the 'Unlocking Potential' Project. Where information is available an update on progress of the relevant policy objectives will be highlighted.

2.1.1 The Northern Ireland Programme for Government

This document sets out in detail the Executive's strategic priorities and key plans from 2008 to 2011(OFMDFM 2008). The Programme for Government has been used in determining the Budget and Investment Strategy, which has been published at the same time. Together, they demonstrate how Government will allocate resources and capital investment in support of policy priorities.

Linkages

An overarching aim of the Programme for Government is to promote strong, integrated, and sustainable communities where people want to live, work and socialise. One of the key aims under 'PSA 12 housing, urban regeneration and community development' is to develop a new strategy to promote active citizenship and sustain volunteering in Northern Ireland. The report states that by 2012, it wishes to increase volunteering and active citizenship by 10% as compared against the baseline measure of volunteering in Northern Ireland (Volunteer Development Agency 2007).

Progress Made

One of the key aims of the Programme for Government is to produce a strategy for volunteering. During July 2009 - November 2009, the draft Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland was out for public consultation. The final strategy document will be available during 2010. A follow-up representative survey to the baseline one carried out in 2007 will not be available until 2012. The most recent large scale Continuous Household Survey was carried out in 2008/09, it included the prevalence of formal volunteering (volunteering which is carried out under the auspices of an organisation). It found that 24% of respondents had volunteered in this way (Continuous Household Survey Bulletin- http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/survey.asp31.htm). This is compared to 21% of the population which were said to formally volunteer in 2007 through a comparable survey (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). As the methodology used within each survey was slightly different, it is still unclear to what extent figures have changed in real terms.

2.1.2 Ageing in an Inclusive Society (2005)

This is the strategy which sets out the approach to be taken by government in Northern Ireland to promote and support the inclusion of older people. It is currently in the process of being reviewed by OFMDFM (OFMDFM 2005).

Volunteer Development Agency 2009

Linkages

The 'Unlocking Potential' Project links strongly with objective 5 of the Ageing in an Inclusive Society strategy which is 'to promote equality of opportunity for older people and their full participation in civic life and challenging ageism wherever it is found' OFMDFM (2005). The 'Unlocking Potential' Project is committed to challenging ageist attitudes by highlighting the valuable contribution that older people make to society through volunteering. In addition, it will continue to work to encourage older people, particularly the 60+ age group to get involved in volunteering.

Progress Made

Age Concern Help the Aged NI[1] launched the 'Positive Ageing' report this year in line with the review of the 'Ageing in An Inclusive Society'. It highlights the lack of progress made by the Northern Ireland Government on improving the lives of older people here; and urges them to take urgent action to address the failings of the Strategy. The report highlights that the areas of progress that have been persistently poor were poverty, fuel poverty, winter deaths and the provision of social care (ACHANI 2009a). In terms of progress on objective 5 which is related to promoting equality and participation in civic life this report used two indictors of accessing further education courses and societal perception of ageing to suggest that progress had not been made. It could also be argued that prevalence of formal and informal volunteering are useful indicators of the social mobility of this age group.

2.1.3 Lifetime Opportunities: Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy (2005)

The 'Lifetime Opportunities Strategy' is the government's life cycle approach to combating poverty and social exclusion. It includes specific goals and objectives for older people (OFMDFM 2006).

Linkages

The 'Unlocking Potential' Project links with this strategy in that it also aims to address the problem of social isolation of older people by supporting and encouraging organisations to consider targeting this age group, to review their management practices and volunteering opportunities that they promote to the older age group. Research carried out by the Age Sector and also the Volunteer Development Agency has shown that a significant number of older people are spending many hours home alone without having any meaningful form of social interaction (Volunteer Development Agency 2009; Help the Aged 2008). By strengthening the volunteer base of Northern Ireland, the project is supporting the voluntary and community sector who provide a substantial and varied service for the elderly and older vulnerable groups (Volunteer Development Agency 2007).

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[1] From April 2009 Age Concern and Help the Aged became one organisation. From Spring 2010, they will be rebranded as Age UK, until that time they will be called Age Concern Help the Aged NI.

2.1.4 The Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland (pending)

The Older People's Commissioner will hold a very important position. The role and duties of the commissioner is currently being discussed through a consultation process. It includes encouraging participation by older people in public life and encouraging best practice in the treatment of older people in service provision and in promoting the provision of opportunities (point 8.5, page 47 of consultation document) (OFMDFM 2009).

Linkages

The proposed duties of the Commissioner will include promoting a positive attitude towards older people and encouraging their participation in public life. The Commissioner has a role in issuing guidance on best practice in relation to the interests of older people.

As mentioned in the consultation document, the Commissioner will have a role to play in promoting and celebrating the positive aspects of ageing, including the valuable experience and wisdom that comes with ageing (point 2.2).

The Commissioner should be the voice of older people and make a difference to their daily lives by influencing policy, challenging service delivery and raising the needs of older people both individually and generally (Point 2.5).

2.1.5 Safer Ageing: A Strategy and Action Plan (2009)

The existing 'Community Safety Strategy' has a focus on ensuring that everyone feels safe in their communities. The 'Safer Ageing Strategy' complements the existing strategy and has a particular focus on the safety needs of older citizens in their homes, neighborhoods and communities (Community Safety Unit 2009).

Linkages

Many of the initiatives and schemes which the Safer Ageing Strategy seeks to support and fund are supported by involving volunteers. For example the Good Morning and Befriending schemes could not reach out to the same number of individuals if it was not for involving volunteers in their work. In fact, often people who receive support of this kind prefer to know that they are being supported by people who choose to do it rather than being paid for it.

2.1.6 Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (2008)

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations, introduced in October 2006, made it impossible for colleges to continue to offer concessionary fees solely on the basis of age. This left many pensioners facing increased fees for their attendance at college courses. Due to the financial constraints that many older people, particularly those of pensionable age face, paying for a course may not be a choice when they are already struggling with basic costs of living.

Linkages

Lifelong learning is much more than providing employability skills, especially for older people, the main goal can be to help people maintain mental and physical health and well being, build social and community engagement and improve confidence (WHO 2004). Volunteering can act as an alternative way of providing new learning. Volunteering can also be much more effective in adapting its teaching style to suit people who may wish to learn in a more informal way (As Good As They Give 2001).

2.2 Strategic Linkages with a focus on Health

This section of the report will outline current public policies which have a focus on health and will draw out what strategic linkages exist with the 'Unlocking Potential' project. Where information is available an update on progress of the relevant policy objectives will be highlighted.

2.2.1 Investing for Health (2002)

'Investing for Health' is the main public policy for health in Northern Ireland, which has an over- arching aim to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and well being of all citizens in Northern Ireland. The Strategy has a particular focus on the most disadvantaged in Northern Ireland of whatever age. Specific programmes have been developed from this strategy to support areas of highest deprivation which will include communities where older people (DHSSPSNI 2002).

Linkages

The Volunteer Development Agency (2008) has produced a literature review which has highlighted the wide range and depth of high quality research which has evidenced the impact of volunteering on the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of older people. Volunteering has been described as 'the cornerstone of community life' and 'the fabric

of society'. Giving ownership and responsibility to individuals and groups with volunteering as a conduit can have a hugely transformative effect.

Progress Made

The Strategy contains a framework for action which is based on multi-sectoral partnership working amongst departments, public bodies, local communities, voluntary bodies, district councils and social partners. The DHSSPS is due to review 'Investing for Health' in 2009. As it is now near the end of 2009, this review is more likely to begin in 2010 (http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/phealth/php/ifh.htm).

2.2.2 A Healthier Future: A 20 Year Vision (2005)

'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 focus of this work (DHSSPSNI 2004). Following the Review of Public Administration decisions about the organisational framework for the delivery of health and social services will clearly influence how the regional strategy is delivered.

Linkages

There is a growing body of evidence which has highlighted the positive impact that volunteering can bring to the health and wellbeing of older people (Volunteer Development Agency 2008). There are also clear indications that people from lower socio-economic groups are likely to gain the greatest benefit from being actively involved in their communities through volunteering (Morrow-Howell et al. 2009). Age Concern Help the Aged NI have recently stated that the number of older people reporting to have good health has fallen to 27% (ACHANI 2009b). In addition, depression and social isolation are significant issues for the older people of Northern Ireland (Help the Aged 2008). There is no rational reason for it to be the case. There is clearly a need for wide ranging initiatives that can help combat against the factors that can lead to poor health. Volunteer involving organisations involve older people as both givers (volunteers) and receivers of the work carried out by organisations.

2.3   Strategic Linkages with a focus on Volunteering

This section of the report will outline current public policies which have a focus on volunteering and will draw out what strategic linkages exist with the 'Unlocking Potential' Project. Where information is available an update on progress of the relevant policy objectives will be highlighted.

2.3.1 The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland (pending)

This first Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland has been out for a period of public consultation and the final report is being prepared. The main aim of producing the strategy is to set out a plan for how volunteering should be developed over the next 5 /10 years. The strategy includes five overarching themes and 42 specific proposals. The key themes are (1) Recognizing the Value and Promoting the Benefits, (2) Enhancing Accessibility and Diversity, (3) Improving the Experience, (4) Supporting and Strengthening the Infrastructure and (5) Delivering the Strategy (A copy of the consultation is available from www.dsdni.gov.uk).

Linkages

One of the proposals of this strategy is directly linked to addressing the under-representation of older people in volunteering which was highlighted in It's All About Time (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). There are many other more generic proposals which have the potential to impact on older volunteers. These include developing ways of recognizing the value and promoting the physical, mental and social benefits of volunteering and also improving the experience.

2.3.2 Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (2006)

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 was passed as a result of the Bichard Inquiry arising from the Soham murders in 2002, when the schoolgirls Jessica Chapman and Holly Wells were murdered by Ian Huntley (a school caretaker). The Inquiry questioned the way employers recruit people to work with vulnerable groups, and particularly the way background checks are carried out. From 12 October 2009 increased safeguards for children and vulnerable adults were introduced in Northern Ireland, with the start of the implementation of the Vetting and Barring Scheme under the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order (SVG Order). The existing vetting and referral arrangements under POCVA (Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults NI Order 2003) ceased from this date.

Linkages

This new legislation will have implications for how volunteer involving organisations work with all vulnerable groups, this includes older people.

3.0   Conclusion

Volunteer Involving Organisations play a useful role in tapping into the skills of older people as volunteers; they also play an important role in supporting the public sector by providing services to elderly and vulnerable older people. This work must continue to be supported and strengthened. The prevalence of volunteering within the older people

age group can be a useful indicator of change in levels of social inclusion and civic engagement. It would be useful for future reviews and research to include this variable when measuring participation and equality of opportunity. Overall this report has shown that volunteering is a powerful tool in encouraging active citizenship and engagement; and it plays a key role in addressing key government priorities which are focused on older people which include active ageing, healthy living, social inclusion, equality, citizenship and community safety. The 'Unlocking Potential' Project will continue to work towards its own aims which will be aligned with the final Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland. They Project will also seek to work alongside policy makers to inform the main public policies in Northern Ireland which all have the common vision of making Northern Ireland a place where people can grow older happily and healthily.

4.0   Useful Links

Copies of other publications which have been completed as part of the 'Unlocking Potential' Project is available from http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/Unlocking_Potential/. An overview of Ageing Public Policy Initiatives in Ireland, North and South. A copy of the report is available from CARDI www.cardi.ie

5.0   References

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Appendix 1: Public Policy for Older People and Volunteering: A Mapping Exercise

POLICY DOCUMENT	POLICY AREAS	STRATEGIC LINKAGES
Investing for Health Strategy (2002) A Healthier Future: A 20 Year Vision (2005)	Multi-sectoral frameworks for tackling social disadvantage and promoting equality. Shift in emphasis by focusing on prevention rather than cure- to tackle the factors within our social, economic, physical and cultural environment.	There is a growing body of evidence which has highlighted the positive impact that volunteering can bring to the health and wellbeing of older people.
Bamford Review: Living Fuller Lives (RMHLD 2006)	Mental Health Needs i.e. Depression. Provided evidence of a significant problem which is under resourced.	Links to isolation, limited social contact. Encouraging mental activity is important, linked to QOL. 75+ worse than 65-74. Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride announced a review of the Northern Ireland Promoting Mental Health Strategy and the development of a new Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (DHSSPS-Press Release 28.01.09)
New Deal for 50+ initiative of DEL i.e. do voluntary work while waiting to gain employment	DSD are encouraging people in their 50's who are moving towards retirement to consider the options which are best for them (DSD- Press Release 30.11.09). The Minister outlined the various advantages of choosing to defer claiming the state pension and working on.	Ageing population is presenting difficulties for Workforce Planning. The current recession has meant that the unemployment levels are at their highest in many 37 years. Volunteering could be seen as a way for individuals of all ages to gain new skills, maintain existing skills, increase self esteem, confidence and maintain social links while looking for employment.
DRD (2005) Accessible Transport Strategy 2007-2009	Public Transport/ Community Transport	Suitable public or community transport is an important way of assisting and encouraging older people to leave their homes to socialise and generally engage in community life. 61% older people who have a free pass use it (DRD 2009) Take up of travel passes are lower in rural areas.
Caring for Carers Strategy (2008) Recognising, Valuing and Supporting the Caring Role. DHSSPS	Older Carers- 31% of carers are 55+ (Ark) Burden of older carers (at risk of social exclusion and poor health)	The boundaries of caring are narrowing around immediate family members. Fewer informal carers (3% of ARK sample) are now caring for neighbours or friends Who Cares Now- ARK Research Update (2007)
Safer Ageing: A Strategy and Action Plan for Ensuring the	The 'Safer Ageing Strategy' complements the existing Community Safety Strategy and has a particular focus on the safety needs of older citizens in their homes,	Many of the initiatives being taken forward or being further supported as part of this strategy include neighbourhood watch, good morning projects, befriending schemes which rely on volunteers.

Safety of Older People	neighborhoods and communities.	
Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (2008)	The end to concessionary fares for older people taking part in life long learning courses.	Volunteering roles can be an alternative option for those people interested in informal learning experiences. There is a need to support older people groups to organise themselves to share skills. Supporting cascaded training would help to keep learning and skills in a group which can help to sustain them.

OFMDFM (2005) Ageing in an Inclusive Society: Promoting the Social Inclusion of Older People.	Social Inclusion- Older people living in remote rural areas and those in disadvantaged urban housing estates are most excluded.	Objective 5 of this strategy aims to promote equality of opportunity for older people and their full participation in civic life and challenging ageism. It is clear that older people remain healthier for longer when they maintain social contacts that aides mental stimulation and maintains community networks. As volunteers older people can feel like they have a valuable role in society. Juxtaposed can be the role which volunteers of al ages play in caring for the elderly and vulnerable.
OFMDFM (2005) *Lifetime Opportunities: Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland.*		
OFMDFM (2005) A Shared Future	Framework for Good Relations and Equality in Northern Ireland. This strategy prioritized work around the sustainability of funding to support local community groups. It also wished to focus on the need for better co-ordination between government departments.	Part of the positive outcomes from volunteering is in building positive relationships between people of different religions, ethnic backgrounds. In It's All About Time 56% of formal volunteers attributed increased contact with other communities / religions to their engagement in volunteering (2007).
Neighbourhood Renewal Programme	Inter generational	
Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (2006)	The rules have changed in terms of steps taken before an employer's recruit people to work with vulnerable groups, and particularly the way background checks are carried out.	This new legislation will have implications for how volunteer involving organisations work with all vulnerable groups, this includes older people.

Policy documents that are specifically related to volunteering

POLICY DOCUMENT	POLICY AREAS	STRATEGIC LINKAGES
Volunteering Strategy for NI (final report pending)	Specific proposal for supporting older people's involvement in volunteering as one of the under-represented groups in volunteering. Other under-represented groups that older people can fall into are Males, BME, Disabled and Lower Socio-Economic groups.	The work of the 'Unlocking Potential' project will be supported within the development of the overall Volunteering Strategy for NI.
The NI Programme for Government (2008)	Promote strong, integrated, sustainable communities where people want to live work and socialise (PSA 12: Objective 5).This includes the governments commitment to:- • Develop a new strategy to promote active citizenship and sustain volunteering in Northern Ireland. • Provide a range of targeted programmes to build capacity in communities targeting need. • By 2012 to increase volunteering and active citizenship by 10% compared with the baseline measure in It's All About Time (2007).	The 'Unlocking Potential' Project has a specific aim to increase numbers of volunteers within the 50+ age group. The project supports programmes which focus on the involvement of older volunteers. To date it has run a marketing campaign in Belfast and Derry which has highlighted a free telephone number and national database for finding volunteering opportunities. The outreach work of the project continues to engage with volunteering groups across NI by providing information and guidance in good practice in volunteer management.