Older People Volunteering – Literature Review

January 2009:1

Volunteer Development Agency

The Volunteer Development Agency is a regional organisation which was initiated in 1991 and formally established in 1993 and is the lead organisation in Northern Ireland for the promotion and development of volunteering, providing a central resource of support, information and training for those who work with volunteers. The Agency provides training, information and support to volunteer-involving organisations across all sectors on issues of good practice and policy regarding volunteering, volunteer management, child protection and voluntary management committees/governance.   It also plays a key role in administering grants related to volunteering for the Department for Social Development and the Department of Education. Further information on the work of the agency can be accessed using the following link, www.volunteering-ni.org

The Unlocking Potential Project - This project is funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies over a five year period. The project will have a regional focus but will be delivered at local level. The regional co-ordination and management will be provided by the Volunteer Development Agency; local delivery will be in association with local volunteer centres. Two of the volunteer centres will provide strategic support including hosting staff (Belfast & Castlereagh (VSB); Northwest Volunteer Centre) and will support partnerships of local stakeholders. The age range for the project is primarily for people who are 60+ years with scope to include 50+ years.

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;
- 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 Atlantic Philanthropies has funded the 'Unlocking Potential' project; it is a philanthropic organisation that seeks to bring positive change to the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people around the world through funding projects whose aims fit with their vision. Further information can be found at http://atlanticphilanthropies.org

The purpose of this literature review was to be a brief scoping exercise to inform the early stages of the Unlocking Potential Project.

Summary

The 'Unlocking Potential' Project is a five year piece of work, funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies. The overall objective of the project is to encourage and support healthier ageing and civic engagement in Northern Ireland, by enabling and empowering older people who are 60+ years to take part in volunteering. The project aims to increase the number of volunteers who are 65+ years (normal retirement age), by 10% over the next five years and the number of 50-64 year olds by 5% (the baby boomer generation).

Like other countries in the developed world, Northern Ireland's population is ageing. Population projections for Northern Ireland forecast a 70% increase in people aged 50+ years between 2007 and 2030 and a 73% increase in people aged 65+ years (NISRA 2006). However, although society has been successful at increasing life expectancy, it has not addressed the ageism which is attached to growing older. Older people are the most likely group to suffer from inequality and

> **Like other countries in the developed world, Northern Ireland's population is ageing.**

discrimination (Allen 2008, Dean 2003). Fortunately, in opposition to this discrimination, a culture of equality and rights for older people is also emerging. This is driven by the fact that those people aged 50+ years are becoming a larger proportion of Northern Ireland's society and also the fact that their views are being represented by an increasing number of strong, articulate pressure groups.

The report outlines the range of public policies in Northern Ireland which relate to volunteering and older people. To date, the focus of public policies which relate to older people has been on their needs or perceived dependency on the state i.e. demands on health and social care services. However, it is also important that societal attitudes and public policies focus on the rights of older people and ensures that legislation is put in place that prevents discrimination and promotes equal opportunities. The projected rise in the number of older people in our society presents an opportunity for volunteering to tap into this pool of skilled volunteers. Research has shown the valuable contribution that older people volunteering can make to their communities. Volunteering as a form of active citizenship and community involvement can be used to promote a more positive image of older people to society and also encourage more positive self image of older people towards themselves. Research evidence has also argued that volunteering can be a useful vehicle to promote and address many of the issues relevant to government priorities, which are relevant to older people i.e. poverty, social inclusion and health.

Research carried out by the Volunteer Development Agency within Northern Ireland has indicated little movement in volunteering over the last 12 years (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b). It has also suggested that those individuals who do volunteer are becoming more selective in the amount of time they are committing to volunteering. In terms of the

older age groups, the research found that although people aged 50+ years were the least likely age group to volunteer, they were the most likely age group to volunteer at least once per week. Older people represent an increasing proportion of the Northern Ireland population and those that do volunteer present a valuable asset, therefore measures should be taken to increase their involvement in voluntary action of all kinds.

There are a wide range of benefits of involving older volunteers in an organisation, these include maturity, experience, skills, availability and loyalty. Research has also shown that older volunteers can be the be-frienders of choice for many older people (Price 2007). The 'It's All About Time Survey' found that the main barriers stopping Northern Ireland based organisations from involving volunteers was that they did not think that volunteers would be suitable for their type of work (46.3%), lack of resources to manage volunteers (27.8%) and regulatory, legal or liability constraints (25.9%) (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b). UK based research has also found specific ageist practices within organisations i.e. upper age limits for volunteers or high premium rates for insurance or unavailable cover (Rochester & Thomas 2006). The issues these barriers create can deter older people from getting involved in volunteering and potentially dissuade organisations from involving older people as volunteers.

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There is a growing body of international research which demonstrates the many health benefits of volunteering. These include reduced blood pressure, decreased mortality and improvements in self rated mental and physical health. There is also much evidence for improvements in life satisfaction, increased social support and interaction (Graff 1991, Musick & Herzog 1999, Volunteering England 2008, Volunteer Development Agency 2007b, Herbert 2008, Rochester and Thomas 2006, Price 2007, and Hill 2006). The benefits that can be gained from older people being involved in volunteering activities also link in with the wider government and age sector agenda for older citizens, for example volunteering can help reduce social isolation which is a priority with the 'Lifetime Opportunities' strategy. From a practical point of view there are a range of practical and psychological barriers which need to be removed to make it easier for older people to volunteer. Improving the volunteering environment for older people, will require the consorted effort and will of government departments, volunteer involving organisations and communities which involves older people themselves. Section 12 of this report provides detailed recommendations which may be used to create such an environment.

This report has provided examples of a diverse range of exemplary older volunteering programmes from around the world, which includes intergenerational programs in schools and actively ageing programs. This sharing of research from around the world provides useful learning in good practice. This report has also identified specific knowledge gaps in

the Northern Ireland research which relate to the attitudes, expectations and behaviours towards volunteering for those people who are 50+ years. Lastly, during the next five years, the Unlocking Potential project will attempt to carry out a staged process of research, programme development and evaluation in order to answer some of the questions posed by this report (see section 12.1).

Contents

1.   Introduction

1.1   The 'Unlocking Potential' Volunteer Project

The 'Unlocking Potential' Project is a five year piece of work, funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies. The main aim of the project is to enable and empower 'older' people (50+ years) to take part in volunteering and in so doing become more actively involved in their communities. In specific terms over the next five years the project aims to increase the number of volunteers who are 50-64 year olds by 5% (the baby boomer generation) and those who are 65+ years old (normal retirement age) by 10%. In a broader sense, by challenging the negative assumptions made by society about ageing and older people the project aims to encourage and support a healthier ageing population in Northern Ireland and more inclusive, healthier communities. Figure 1 outlines the four key objectives of the 'Unlocking Potential' project.

Figure 1: Unlocking Potential 4 Key Objectives	
Objective 1	To challenge attitudes and raise awareness of the contribution and benefits of volunteering.
Objective 2	To increase the number of older volunteers - 50-64 by 5% (n=2950) 65+ by 10% (n=4700)
Objective 3	To improve access to and develop opportunities for older people that meet their expectations and positively impact on communities.
Objective 4	To enhance, through the volunteering experience, older people's quality of life in relation to equity, social inclusion, support and health issues.

1.2   Northern Ireland Population

The importance of a project such as 'Unlocking Potential' which is aimed at promoting a more positive societal image of ageing and enhance community participation of older people, is made all the more pertinent when one considers the fact that currently about a third of Northern Ireland's total population is aged over 50 years old (n=535,000), of which 14% (n=239,347) are aged 65+ years and 6% (n=109, 775) are aged 75+ years. This signifies the increasing power this group will have as consumers of goods, services and facilities and also their increasing influence on the political agenda due to the increasing power of the grey vote (Timonen 2008).

Population projections for Northern Ireland (Figure 2) forecast a 70% increase in people aged 50+ years between 2007 and 2030 and a 73% increase in people aged 65+ years (NISRA 2006).

Figure 2: Table showing Northern Ireland Population Projections for the 50+ Age Group				
Age	No. of People (1,000s rounded)			% increase from 2007 to 2030
	2007	2020	2030	
50-54	105	126	111	6%
55-59	96	123	116	21%
60-64	90	107	120	33%
65-69	71	90	114	61%
70-74	61	82	96	57%
75-79	49	66	77	57%
80-84	35	47	63	80%
85-89	19	29	42	121%
90-94	7	13	22	214%
95-99	2	3	7	250%
100 & over	0	0	1	n/a
Aged 50 and over	535	686	769	70%
Aged 65 and over	244	330	422	73%
Total Population	1,761	1,911	1,993	13%

Source: NISRA www.nisra.gov.uk/demography

1.3   Societal Views of Age and Ageing

Fortunately, through medical advances, better housing and health, life expectancy within the developed world is increasing. However, although society has been successful at reducing biological ageing, it has been less successful in addressing the ageism which is attached to growing older (Dean 2003, Allen 2008). Ageism can be defined as the systematic stereotyping and discrimination of someone on the grounds of age (Timonen 2008). It is a fact that as people grow older they are not valued as much as those younger than them. The first Northern Ireland based representative survey to gauge attitudes towards 'age issues' was carried out in 2003. From this survey, 48% of respondents considered that older people are treated worse than other age groups and is an indication that ageism is an issue here (Evason 2004). It is in everyone's interests both young and old that age discrimination is removed from society to enable one to look forward to enjoying their life as they grow older.

Unfortunately, the ageist mindset can become internalised by older people themselves, which leads to poor self image which can perpetuate the myth of age, frailty and dependence. This should not be the case, growing older should not be treated as an illness (Dean 2003). Fortunately, although ageism is still an issue in Northern Ireland, a culture of equality and rights for older people is developing. This flurry of activity is due to the increasing number of older people in our society and also the fact that their views are being represented by increasingly strong and articulate pressure groups. Organisations such as Age Concern (ACNI) and Help the Aged are well established organisations in Northern Ireland which champion the rights of older people. More recently, the introduction of pressure groups such as Changing Ageing Partnership (CAP) and Age Sector Platform are also working to create awareness, which includes lobbying issues and encouraging discussion about issues that are important to older people. The impact of this new forum was demonstrated recently with the rally at Stormont Buildings by pensioners and their supporters with regards to the fuel poverty crisis. The event was attended by a significant number of assembly members and executive ministers and received a large amount of media coverage (http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/pensioners-march-on-stormont-14066333.html). Also, OFMDFM's commitment to establishing an Office for the Commissioner of Older People is a positive sign of their commitment to engaging in discussion about the rights and issues of this group.

1.4   Use of the Word 'Older'- between and within group differences

Discussion related to older people issues varies in terms of the age benchmark set for describing the term 'older'. The age benchmark is increasing as those people currently in their 50s are re-defining what this means in terms of life experiences, lifestyles, health and expectations. The majority of developed countries have accepted the chronological age of 65 years as a definition of 'elderly' or 'older person' in the western world. While this definition is somewhat arbitrary, it is associated with the 'normal' age at which people begin to receive their pension (WHO n.d.).

It is important that the term 'old' is not used as a blanket label for all people who reach a certain age. Arguably, grouping people based on age or life stage is useful. For example, people reaching retirement are also more likely to be experiencing changes in their lifestyle, housing needs, physical or mental health. However, one must also be mindful of the differences 'between' and also 'within' age groups, based on social, economic, demographic, cultural, ethnical, health/disability related factors.

1.5   Older People Volunteering

Volunteering as a form of active citizenship and community involvement, can encourage the promotion of a more positive self image of older people towards themselves and also within

wider society. The older members of society come with significant knowledge, skills and qualities through having longer life experiences and learning. It is important that these skills are not left untapped as they get older. One way of encouraging older people to participate in society is through providing suitable volunteering activities. The international community recognises the importance of older people being involved in volunteering. The United Nations General Assembly has resolved that, *"Older Persons should be able to seek and develop opportunities for service to the community and to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to their interests and capabilities."* (United Nations Principles for Older People 1991).

1.5.1 Benefits of Involving Older People in Volunteering

The benefits of older people volunteering are multiple and varied and cross physical, mental, social and economic boundaries. Section 7: The Impact of Volunteering on Older Volunteers provides more detailed information on this.

1.5.2 Reasons Older People get involved in Volunteering

There are a wide range of reasons given by older people for getting involved in volunteering. These reasons can be as varied as any other age group, however, the reasons most notably connected to older people are helping others, the need to keep physically and mentally active, meeting new people, gaining new skills, providing structure to ones day when in retirement, the opportunity to make a contribution to society, dealing with 'empty nest' syndrome when children leave the family home and also after the death of a spouse or partner (Hill 2006).

This is an excerpt taken from a poem written by an older person who describes how she felt before and after getting involved in an activity programme for older people in her local area.
I've just retired turned 60 I feel old
I look in the mirror and what do I see?
The same ole face the same ole me
She then goes on to describe herself completely differently after experiencing the programme.
Being 60 is not the end
Now I look in the mirror and what do I see?
Not that same ole face, I see a brand new me   (Majorie Cassell's Forever Young Club)
                                                                                      Source (ACNI & HPA 2006)

2.   Public Policy

2.1   Northern Ireland Assembly

This is a very exciting time for policy development in Northern Ireland. Devolution has been restored since May 2007 after a four and a half year suspension. This change has meant that Northern Ireland ministers will now have the power to take a greater lead on developing policies to meet the needs of the Northern Ireland population. During the suspension Westminster had been making policy decisions for Northern Ireland.

2.2   Older People Public Policy Context

The issue of an ageing population has generated discussion at public policy level. The discussion has mainly focused on the increased demand on Health and Social Services and the stresses of ensuring adequate income and finance in later life. Planning ahead in order to overcome these issues is important in order to prevent problems which are associated with poor health and well being in older age i.e. isolation, poverty, neglect and ill health (Help the Aged 2008, DHSSPS 2002). However, limiting the discussion to these issues alone makes the narrow assumption that ageing is a negative process and one which happens at a uniform, chronological rate. This one sided discussion also disregards the past and current contribution of older

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people to our society. It has been estimated that the unpaid work of those who are 50+ years in the UK has an economic value of £24 billion per year. In addition, it cannot be assumed that the need for health care will increase directly in line with the growth in the number of older people within the population. Research at a UK level has shown that people are living longer, in better health and wealth than previous generations (Evason et al. 2005a). Unfortunately, although generally, older people's physical health and wealth is improving, they are not any happier and still remain the most likely group to suffer from inequality and discrimination (Allen 2008, Dean 2003). As stated in section 1.2, older age groups are increasing as a proportion of Northern Ireland society. This means that they are becoming a stronger cohort in terms of both consumer and voting influence. Particularly in terms of the latter, politicians will be best served by attending to public policies which address older people issues. Generally, the pressure on public policy decisions has been carried out through older people's rights based groups, such as Age Concern, Help the Aged and more recently Age Sector Platform. These larger organisations attempt to bring together the collective voice of the 100's of small, fragmented, socially pervasive but

politically weak groups which are the typical structure in Northern Ireland (Acheson & Harvey 2008).

2.3   Volunteering Public Policy Context

Volunteering is the lead responsibility of the Voluntary and Community Unit within the Northern Ireland Department for Social Development (DSD). The DSD is currently in the process of developing a 'Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland'. The Volunteer Development Agency, in partnership with the Institute of Volunteering Research, has been working with the DSD to produce a draft consultation document for the Minister for Social Development to consider and approve. It is envisaged that the strategy will help to '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.'[1]

Definition of Volunteering

"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" (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b).

There are two types of Volunteering recognised in Northern Ireland – 'Formal Volunteering' and 'Informal Volunteering'.

'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*" (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b).

2.4   Public Policies Related to Older People and Volunteering

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. The creation of this new role demonstrates OFMDFM's commitment to addressing the issues which affect older people. An interim advocate will take up post on the 1st December 2008 whilst the role and

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[1] For further information on the strategy use the following link,
www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary_and_community.htm

function of the commissioner is being finalised. It is hoped that the new commissioner's role will involve championing the rights and interests of older people in a more cohesive way.

In Northern Ireland, there are a range of public policies and strategies which have an impact on older people and volunteering. The government document, 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society- A Strategy for Promoting the Social Inclusion of Older People' (OFMDFM 2005), has prioritised the issues of social inclusion for those people who are 50+ years. This document is important for all those who are concerned with older people issues, as it is a clear message from government that promoting 'social inclusion' and 'active ageing' for those aged 50+ years has strong links to 'health and well being'. ACNI has also raised the need for greater preventative strategies which help to reduce social isolation and depression which can feature in older age.

'Lifetime Opportunities Strategy' is the government's anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy for Northern Ireland. In 2006, when the strategy was produced 327,000 people were living in poverty, 54,000 of which were pensioners. This strategy hopes to ensure that by 2020, 'no one in Northern Ireland will be denied the opportunities they are owed'. In terms of older people, the strategy's goal 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 2006a).

The aim of the five year 'Investing for Health strategy' is to improve the health and well being of the whole population. Specific programmes have been developed to support older people to live healthy and active lives; this includes areas such as physical activity and home safety (DHSSPS 2002).

The volunteering agenda also fits well with other government priorities which include policy and strategic frameworks such as 'Positive Steps Approach' and 'A Shared Future' which has a focus on sustaining community development and building community relations (Department for Social Development 2005, OFMDFM 2006b).

3.   Volunteering in Northern Ireland

3.1   Volunteering Infrastructure

The Volunteer Development Agency is the leading regional organisation in Northern Ireland for the promotion and development of volunteering. It is a central resource of support, information and training for those who work with volunteers i.e. volunteer centres and volunteer involving organisations. It also plays a key role in administering grants related to volunteering for the Department for Social Development and the Department of Education. There are currently 14 volunteer centres across Northern Ireland which act as local points of information for people who want to be more active in their communities; for organisations that want to involve volunteers and for general support on volunteering. The volunteer centres have a database system in place which includes information on volunteer skills and interests as

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well as the needs of the service users or volunteer involving organisations. This information then helps with the matching process. With the increased expectations of volunteers, more sophisticated tools may be required to allow users to specify an age range which links to specialised age appropriate positions.

The United Kingdom Volunteer Forum was created to be the mechanism through which national volunteer agencies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland could work collaboratively to promote volunteering, advocate for appropriate resources, influence social policy and support UK wide volunteering initiatives. These initiatives include the 'Year of the Volunteer', 'Investing in Volunteers' and 'Volunteers' Week. There is also a Northern Ireland based Joint Forum between government and the voluntary and community sector which has representatives from both sectors. The Forum is responsible for continuously reviewing and improving the communication channels between government and the sector. It also aims to facilitate open discussion on key issues which impact the relationship between the sector and Northern Ireland departments and their agencies.

3.2   Use of the Word 'Volunteering'

A more general issue within the voluntary and community sector is the inconsistent use of the term 'volunteering'. People who volunteer often describe what they do as 'helping out' or 'participating' with the group or purely describing it by the activity itself, 'I coach my local football team on a Thursday night'. Lack of consistency in use of the word volunteering to describe activities/action carried out for the good of others outside of ones own family, prevents a complete picture of the amount and type of volunteering which is happening in

communities. It also makes it difficult to communicate with or give recognition to the people getting involved in actions of goodwill for no financial gain. It may also mean that the volunteer involving groups or organisations are less likely to network with the existing volunteering infrastructure, such as volunteer centres or regional support such as the Volunteer Development Agency.

The following quote comes from a participant who attended the Volunteer Strategy Workshops facilitated by the Volunteer Development Agency and DSD in early 2007, during the consultation process on the Volunteer Strategy document for Northern Ireland.[2]

"Society, in general is not aware that many of the people within a lot of organisations are providing the service without actually being paid to do so".

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[2] Full report can be accessed from www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary_and_community/vcni-volunteering-strategy/vcni-research-volunteerring-ni.htm

4.   Volunteering Trends in Northern Ireland

4.1   Numbers of People Volunteering

Figure 3: Formal & Informal Volunteering
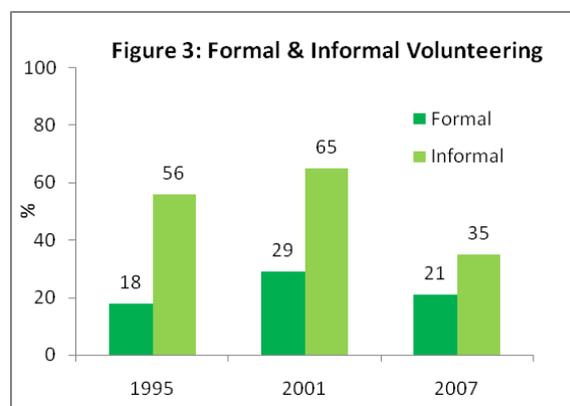
Over the last 12 years, the Volunteer Development Agency has carried out the most comprehensive pieces of research regarding volunteering in Northern Ireland[3]. Research carried out by the Agency within Northern Ireland has shown little movement in volunteering over the last 12 years. The most recent piece of research, 'It's All About Time', stated that 21% (n=282, 067) of the population were involved in formal volunteering and 35% (n=470, 111) in 'Informal Volunteering'. When 'Formal Volunteering' numbers are compared across the full 12 year period, levels have remained relatively static. However, 'Informal Volunteering' has had 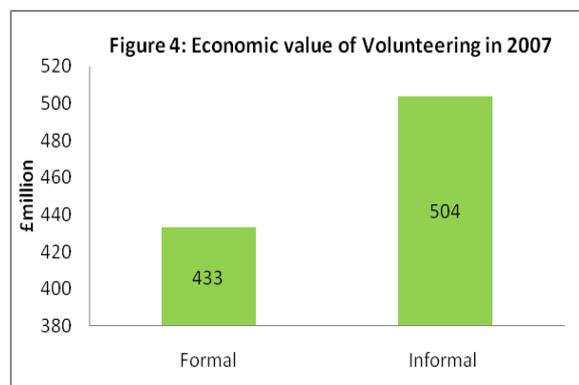a significant decline from 56% of the population in 2001 to 35% in 2007 (Figure 3). The research also found that 31% (n=145, 734) of volunteers are involved in both formal and informal volunteering. (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b)

4.2   The Economic Impact of Volunteering

Figure 4: Economic value of Volunteering in 2007

The economic value of volunteering in 2007 was equivalent to £937 million (Figure 4), (£433 million from formal volunteering and £504 million from informal volunteering). A decrease in either of these types of volunteering would be likely to have a negative effect on the Northern Ireland economy, particularly at this time of global credit crunch and economic downturn. In the 2007 survey, 77% of the volunteer involving organisations stated that they could not operate without the support of volunteers. The changing downward trend in volunteering is also being felt by organisations. In the 2007 report more organisations reported a decrease (42%) in the level of volunteers, than an increase (38%) (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b).

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[3] Copies of all the research carried out by the Volunteer Development Agency can be downloaded at www.volunteering-ni.org

4.3   Formal Volunteering within the Older Age Group

Figure 5: Nature of Formal Volunteering
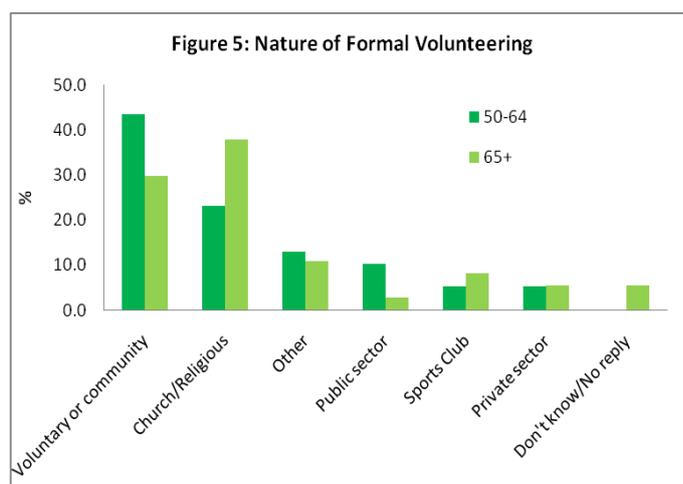
The 2007 survey indicated that 'age' was an important factor in terms of the type of organisations that volunteers will engage with. The 2007 survey found that those aged 16-24 (23%) and 35-49 (24%) were the most likely to formally volunteer. Those people in the 50-64 age group (21%) and the 65+ age group (17%) were the least likely to take part in formal volunteering. However, although people in the 50+ age group were least likely to get involved in formal volunteering, they were the most likely group to volunteer once per week (54%) and to give more time than any other age group (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b).

The two most common types of organisations for those aged 50+ years old to volunteer with were voluntary/community groups or church/religious groups. This was also the trend for all age groups. However, there were variations between the 50-64 and 65+ age groups (Figure 5), the latter being more likely to volunteer with a church/religious organisation and the 50-64 age group being more likely to volunteer with a voluntary/community group. Overall, raising and handling money was the main type of activity that these age groups were involved in, which was the most common activity for all formal volunteers, over the defined 12 month period.

4.4   Informal Volunteering within the Older Age Group

Overall, more informal volunteering is happening in Northern Ireland than formal volunteering. The 25-34 age group were the most likely group to be involved in informal volunteering (44%). The 65+ age group being the least likely group to be involved (27%) and the 50-64 age group was the second lowest (35%), after the 16-24 age group (33%). In terms of activities carried out through volunteering, the 50+ age group were the most likely group to say they 'kept in touch with someone who had trouble getting out and about'.

4.5   Attitudes and Motivations for Volunteering

'It's All About Time' research indicated that volunteers are becoming more selective in the amount of time they are committing to volunteering. They are tending to focus their time on one organisation and are giving less time per month (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b). The most common reason given by organisations for having difficulty in recruiting volunteers was that volunteers do not have enough time. A third of informal and formal

volunteers also stated that the pressure of work commitments was the most common reason for not becoming more involved in voluntary activities. And over half of those people who had stopped volunteering had given changing home/work circumstances as the main reason. Time, therefore seems to be the major issue preventing people from being involved in volunteering.

4.6   Is 'Lack of Time' an Issue for Older People?

The Northern Ireland based research also found that across all age groups, those people who were most likely to be volunteers were from the ABC1 socio-economic groupings and those in part-time employment. One could assume that the higher rate of volunteering by part-time workers than full-time workers is because they are more likely to have more free time to volunteer. However, those people who were not in any form of employment were actually the least likely to volunteer; this includes people in retirement as well as other economically inactive groups (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007b).

People in the 50-59 age group (baby boomer) are more likely to be involved in employment than the 60-69 age group (NI Labour Force Survey- http://www.detini.gov.uk). Generally, this group are also the most likely to be caring for other older people (Evason et al 2005). However, current trends are showing that the care they provide is narrowing to revolve around people within their immediate family i.e. parents, children, grandchildren, which significantly reduces the time available for getting involved in other activities within their communities (Evason 2007).

To date, research would suggest that the 'baby boomer' and 'retiree' groups are not getting involved in volunteering and are the most likely group to say that they feel 'too old' to volunteer (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b). In terms of these groups, further research is required in order to discover how much free time they have, what they are doing with this free time and their satisfaction levels with the current activities in their life. It is also important to get a clearer understanding of what the current attitudes and motivations are for older people in terms of both formal and informal volunteering.

5.   The Baby Boomers

5.1   Characteristics of the Baby Boomers

The 50+ years/post war 'baby boomer' generation (born between 1945 and 1965) will be reaching 'normal' retirement age during the next 15-20 years. Data from the 'Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey' has identified the 50-59 age group as being most likely to be dissatisfied with how older people are treated in Northern Ireland. The 50-59 age group were also the most likely group to state that older people were treated worse than other age groups. They were also the most likely group to state that with age one gets less respect (44%) and to be least satisfied with provision for older people (77%) (Evason 2004). Evason describes this group as the 'Angry Generation' due to the amount of pressure and strain they are under. Evason also states that the strength of their opinion is not surprising, if understood within context. Over the last quarter of a century, this generation has lived through the greatest transformation of the world of work, pensions and the welfare state. They are the generation under most pressure to provide care for parents and their own children. They are also under pressure to provide financially for their children for longer and to continue working for longer than in previous generations (2004). Generally, the current generation of 50-59 year olds are more active and independent than the previous group of 50-59 year olds. They have higher expectations, stronger attitudes, motivations and more varied interests in relation to all aspects of their lives.

> **Data from the 'Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey' has identified the 50-59 age group as being most likely to be dissatisfied with how older people are treated in Northern Ireland.**

Data from the 2004 'Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey' has shown the important role that grandparents play in family life. From the survey half of the grandparents were less than 65 years old. The survey found that the younger grandparents had at least once weekly contact with their grandchildren and were more likely to be involved in childcare activities (84% of 35-54 year olds; 73% of 55-64 year olds; 56% of 65+ year olds). Overall, 11% of grandparents surveyed stated that they had cut down or given up work to look after grandchildren - those in the 45-54 (16%) and 55-64 (15%) age groups were most likely to have agreed with this question. The 45-54 (80%) age group was most likely to agree that they had put themselves out to look after their grandchildren; this was compared to 71% of 55-64 year olds and 67% of the 65+ age group. This pattern may change in the next 10-15 years, as people decide to have children later in life. It may also be the case that grandparents in their 60s will be involved in more childcare activities. The report also found that grandparents who are currently in their 50s and 60s are assisting their own parents as well as their grandchildren (Evason et. al 2005b).

5.2   What do the Baby Boomers Expect from Volunteering?

The changing nature in what it means to be 50-59 years old means that the rest of society must also make changes to meet the needs and tap into the skills and qualities which this group can contribute to society. For the voluntary and community sector, there is a need for greater understanding of what this 'baby boomer' group expect from their engagement in voluntary action in relation to integration, independence, empowerment and quality of life (Huber & Skidmore 2003). The current baby boomer group is an active, motivated group, therefore, volunteering will be competing with the wide range of other things that this age group may choose to spend their time on. In order to meet the expectations of this group, the voluntary and community sector needs to move away from the more traditional roles which have been offered in the past. As Hoffman states, *"Older adults are increasingly looking to use their professional skills in volunteer settings and typically want to continue developing their knowledge and expertise"* (2008).

5.3   Grouping Individuals based on Volunteer History

The baby boomer group is likely to have a varied volunteering history, as demonstrated by the model developed by Davis Smith & Gay (2005). They suggest that some baby boomers will have had a long or intermittent relationship with volunteering, (life-long volunteers or serial volunteers), for others it will be a totally new addition to their psyche once they move towards retirement (trigger volunteers). Other research has suggested that older people are not more likely to volunteer after retirement. Rather, they are more likely to increase the number of hours they volunteer if they already are involved (Evans & Saxton 2005). Understanding the diverse volunteering experiences of this group will be a challenge, however, it is vital to fully understand this group in order to successfully attract them towards volunteering and in the longer term, ensuring their retention through providing suitable roles, support and management.

Figure 6: Volunteering History of the 50+ years Age Group	
The Life Long volunteers	These are people who have volunteered formally or informally throughout their lives.
Serial volunteers	These are people who have volunteered intermittently throughout their lives.
Trigger volunteers	These are volunteers in retirement age who have never volunteered before but who want to put their retirement to good use.

(Davis Smith & Gay 2005)

5.4   Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV)

Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) may be a useful way of promoting volunteerism, among older people, before they reach retirement. ESV schemes can involve an employer giving an employee 'time off' work to carry out some voluntary work. 'Time off' can involve

paid time off, flexi-time, time off in lieu, unpaid time off or voluntary work carried out during work time. In the 2004 'It's All About Time' report (2007) 23% of respondents who were in employment stated that their employer had offered an ESV scheme (Volunteer Development Agency 2001, Volunteer Development Agency 2007b).

Although this type of volunteering can be episodic in nature and so does not involve long term commitment, it can be useful in 'sowing the seed' for further volunteering activity during different life stages, which include retirement (Hoffman 2008). Also, ESV experiences which have been on a longer term basis can be a useful way of cementing volunteering into one's lifestyle pre-retirement and therefore may make it more likely that an individual will seek out other volunteering opportunities in retirement. Consequently, it is essential that the volunteering experiences are positive experiences for individuals if one hopes to entice them to seek further voluntary activities in the future. Unfortunately, the current economic crisis may make ESV more difficult for employers, especially employee 'time off' schemes. The international development charity, Volunteer Services Overseas (VSO) has reported in a recent article in Charity Finance that up to 20% of its volunteering placements could go unfilled this year, if it does not see an increase in applications from UK professionals (Charity Finance 2008).

6.   The Retiree Group

6.1   Characteristics of the Retiree Group

There are approximately 275,327 people on state pension in Northern Ireland. This makes up 16% of the total Northern Ireland population (Department for Social Development 2007). When referring to the Retiree Group, this normally refers to people who are 65+ years old, as this is the eligible age for receipt of the state pension. However, some people take early retirement or go part-time before the state pension age. The historical trend has shown that older people, who leave the employment market, tend to be out of the market for the longest or never return. Both voluntary and compulsory redundancies are set to increase with the current world economic downturn. Volunteering could be a useful way for individuals to build the confidence and self esteem to get back into employment and maintain social networks while they do so. It could also be a long term alternative to employment for those who have decided to stay out of

> **Both voluntary and compulsory redundancies are set to increase with the current world economic downturn.**

employment. 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. It is uncertain how this policy change will affect the pattern of volunteering of this group; the extent of this impact will not be known for some time.

The retired age group plays a significant part in family life through their role as grandparents, however, this role is often undervalued and underappreciated in society. About a half of grandparents surveyed in the 2004 'Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey' were retired. 56% of retired grandparents saw their children once a week or more, this compared to 73% of those aged 55-64. However, Evason et al. (2005) suggest that this pattern could have as much to do with the age of the grandparent - older grandparents are more likely to have older grandchildren who have moved away and have less opportunity to visit.

In Northern Ireland the 65+ year old age group is one of the groups most likely to be reported as disadvantaged. The disadvantage that some older people experience includes issues related to poverty which includes food and fuel, isolation, neglect and ageism, and the potential for and extent of disadvantage increases considerably as people move into their 70s and 80s. Help the Aged (2008) have recently produced a report which painted a bleak picture of the issues that some of the 65+ age group face in Northern Ireland. Some of the key findings highlighted were that 42% of older people are living in poverty, 14% of which are living in severe poverty and that older people in rural areas (33%) are twice as likely to be at risk of poverty than those living in urban areas (16%). The report also stated that 21% of those aged 65+ stated that they are 'always or often lonely', 1 in 4 people aged

65 years and over spend more than 15 hours home alone per day and 53% stated that television was their main form of company.

6.1.1 Post Retirement Activity Choices

People embarking on retirement or in retirement will have a range of different ideas on how to use their leisure time. The trend in the UK, for the short term period after retirement is for retirees to go on holidays, take part in hobbies, or care for family or neighbours (Davis Smith & Gay 2005). Other research suggests that the baby boomer generation are three times more likely to move house after retirement (Lowe & Speakman 2006).

6.2 What does the Retiree Group expect from Volunteering?

The fact that the 65+ age group are the least likely group to volunteer would suggest that volunteering is not attracting or targeting this group as effectively as it could do. Part of the problem may be that at the moment, there is a lack of understanding of what this group expect from volunteering. Potential barriers to volunteering increase considerably for those people who are 65+ year olds, who are living in poverty, socially isolated or feel disconnected from their community. The challenges presented with attracting this age group require sophisticated, inclusive methods of recruiting and matching older volunteers with organisations which are offering a more diverse range of opportunities and which have worked to remove some of the barriers which prevent people from volunteering.

Research carried out by Davis Smith & Gay (2005) in the UK, suggests that in the longer term after retirement, volunteering may seem like a natural progression from work or an alternative leisure activity. Some may have an interest in learning new skills. The informality and lack of bureaucracy that some types of volunteering can offer may also be an attraction. Further research to further understand the lifestyle choices and attitudes towards volunteering of retirees in Northern Ireland is required.

There has been debate in terms of the best time to attempt to attract retired people for volunteering. Research carried out by Hill (2006) in the UK suggests that if people are introduced to volunteering just before or just after they retire, they will be more likely to volunteer. However, other research carried out in the UK, has shown that promoting volunteering through post-retirement programs that are run six months into retirement may be more productive (Davis Smith 1992, Davis Smith & Gay 2005).

7.   The Impact of Volunteering on the Volunteer

7.1   The Benefits of Volunteering for Volunteers who are 50+ Years

Historically, volunteering has been discussed as the work done by volunteers to benefit the receiver and omitted to highlight the reciprocal nature of volunteering, in which the volunteer and the wider society also benefit (Volunteer Development Agency 2001, Volunteering England 2008). The benefits of volunteering are multiple and varied and cross physical, mental, social and economic boundaries. Some of impacts directly linked to volunteering include   lower blood pressure, stronger immune system, the ability to cope with one's own illness, improvements in self rated health, improved self-esteem, reduced social isolation, increased social support and interaction, improved life satisfaction, healthy behaviours and enhancing community links and connectedness (Graff 1991, Musick & Herzog 1999, Volunteering England 2008, Volunteer Development Agency 2007b, Herbert 2008, Rochester and Thomas 2006, Price 2007, and Hill 2006).

> **The benefits of volunteering are multiple and varied and cross physical, mental, social and economic boundaries.**

7.2   The Health Benefits of Volunteering

Fortunately, healthier lifestyles, improved medical technology and health care services have meant that older people in our communities are much healthier than the same group 30 years ago, healthier living includes remaining active socially and physically. Northern Ireland based research has shown that people who are more active tend to live longer and experience a better quality of life (DHSSPS 2004). However, there remains certain health related problems which are more likely to occur with increased age. In Northern Ireland the heaviest use of health services and poorest mental health is found in people aged 75+ years (Evason et. al. 2005).

In the UK, the Institute of Volunteer Research (2008) has also provided support for the beneficial effects of volunteering on older people's physical and mental health. They found that people who had retired from work were particularly likely to receive a sense of purpose, role identity, self-respect and reduced isolation from volunteering which may have previously came from employment. Other research from America has suggested that there is a negative relationship between health and paid work or caregiving, whereas, volunteering had a positive relationship with health. The argument being that volunteering is perceived as a 'choice' activity with less of the stresses or burdens associated with employment or caregiving (Moen et al. 1992). It is clear that maintaining civic engagement and community activity is important for maintaining physical and mental health for older people.

There is continuing debate regarding the causal relationship between health and volunteering. "Does volunteering lead to improved health or is it that healthier people are more likely to volunteer?" The University of Wales Lampeter carried out a systematic review on behalf of Volunteering England in 2008 to ascertain the health impacts of volunteering on individual volunteers and on health service users. The report showed very clear links between volunteering and positive health impacts. In particular the systematic review highlighted that older volunteers appear to derive greater health benefits than younger volunteers (Volunteering England 2008). The Corporation for National Community Service in America suggests strongly that people who engage in volunteer activities are less likely to suffer ill health later in life and that volunteering activity introduces people into a positive 'reinforcing cycle' of good health and future volunteering (2007).

> **It is clear that maintaining civic engagement and community activity is important for maintaining physical and mental health for older people.**

David Herbert from the Open University carried out a piece of research in Northern Ireland which investigated the possible effect of volunteering, across age groups. From this report there was strongest research evidence for the impact of volunteering on the physical health and mental health of older people (Herbert 2008). This report made reference to research carried out by Wilson & Musick (1999) which found that voluntary work had positive effects on the depression scores of those people who were 65+ years. This is an interesting finding for voluntary work within the older population of Northern Ireland as a recent report from Help the Aged (2008) indicated that depression is one of the biggest issues for older people living here.

7.3   The Barriers to Volunteering for those who are 50+ Years

There are many benefits gained from becoming involved in volunteering. This report has also focused on the potential benefits for the older volunteers, those who are 50+ years. However, there are also a range of issues which may act as particular barriers for older people becoming involved in volunteering.

7.3.1 Rising Cost of Living - Volunteer Expenses

In the current climate of rising costs of food and fuel, volunteering which does not provide reimbursement of volunteer expenses will be an increasing barrier to people becoming involved in volunteering activity. This will be a particular issue for those groups with the lowest income. In Northern Ireland the number of pensioners living on low incomes is significantly higher than other age groups (DSD 2006). Out of pocket expenses mileage rate for volunteer drivers in Northern Ireland has not generally increased in line with the rise in costs. The Community Transport Association (CTA) found in a recent survey that 55% of its

members had experienced a loss of volunteer drivers or had difficulties in attracting new volunteers because of the mileage rates and increasing fuel costs (CTA 2008).

7.3.2 Transport Difficulties

The ability to travel is an important determinant in an older person's ability to access to engage in community life, this includes accessing services or socialising with friends, community groups or voluntary opportunities. Older people are much more likely to give lack of transportation as a reason for not volunteering than any other age group (Fischer and Shaffer 1993). Also, rural areas tend to have a higher rate of older people than urban areas and research in the UK is projecting an increase in the number of people moving to rural areas in retirement (Stockdale 2008, Lowe & Speakman 2006). Public transport or community transport, such as dial a lift and door to door can become a lifeline for older people who are socially isolated, because they do not have their own car or access to transport. Unfortunately, public transport is not always convenient for older people who live in more rural areas or who have mobility problems. Also, unfortunately the demand for community transport in Northern Ireland often outstrips supply.

7.3.3 Perceptions of Volunteering

In the 'It's All About Time' report, 61% of those who said they were 'too old to volunteer' were 65+ years (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b). Studies with volunteers have suggested that the current image of volunteering is one which does not fit with older people's image of themselves (Davis & Gay 2005).

Some older people have a perception that volunteering negatively affects pensions/ benefits. 6% of non-volunteers in Northern Ireland stated that fear of their benefits being affected was a reason for not getting involved in formal or informal volunteering.

The bureaucracy attached to being a volunteer is an identified barrier to all age groups volunteering; however it is seen as a particular anxiety or annoyance for older people. Form filling and police checking systems can be a particular barrier for older people. Currently, anyone involved in working with children, young people or vulnerable adults is required to undergo a police record check through Access NI, before taking up their post. From October 2009, under a new Vetting & Barring Scheme, staff and volunteers will be required by law to be vetted and registered with the new Independent Safeguarding Authority. While this new scheme will provide significant safeguards for vulnerable groups, registration may prove to be off-putting to older volunteers.

7.3.4 Boundaries of Caring Narrowing

An Ark research update has shown that informal carers are less likely to be under the age of 35 than they were in 1994; 31% of carers being aged 55+ years. The report also showed a decrease of 7% in those people caring for neighbours/friends within their communities

between 1996 (21%) and 2006 (14%). They suggested that the boundaries of caring has moved towards immediate family rather than other people within their community. The biggest increase was shown in the caring of children/step children and spouse/partner (Evason 2007). This changing trend away from caring outside of one's immediate family may explain the fall in informal volunteering within Northern Ireland. The 'It's All About Time' Survey has indicated a steady decline since 1995 (56% in 1995 compared to 35% in 2007) (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b).

7.3.5 Lack of Variety in the Opportunities

Organisations which do not provide volunteering opportunities which match older people's individual interests, abilities and lifestyles will find it difficult to attract them. In particular the higher expectations of the baby boomer group require an increased variety of opportunities which include higher skill/higher demand roles. Research from the UK found that some older people were dissatisfied with only being offered low level, routine tasks that do not take account of their abilities or potential (Hutchinson 1999). Interestingly, a study also found that older men were more likely to say that they got bored or lost interest in their voluntary work (Davis Smith 1992). Research by Rochester et al. also found that older people from black and minority ethnic communities with little or no tradition of volunteering are more likely to volunteer within their own communities than in mainstream organisations (2002).

8.   The Impact of Volunteering on the Organisation

8.1   Organisational Benefits of Involving Older Volunteers

Along with the benefits and barriers of volunteering for the potential volunteers there are also benefits and barriers for the organisation involving volunteers. The following points highlight a range of benefits to involving older volunteers in an organisation (Institute for Volunteering Research 2008, Volunteer Development Agency 2007a, & Price 2007).

Figure 7: Benefits of Involving Older Volunteers

- Maturity and experience which has been gained from both inside and outside the workplace;
- Skills which have been built up through their life course;
- Availability - older people usually have more time to spare and are more flexible in terms of when they work;
- Loyalty - older people contribute more hours than any other age group and are more likely to be content with their voluntary work and to stick with it;
- Numbers - there has been a steep rise in the number of older people as a proportion of the population; this offers a pool of available volunteers to tap into; and
- Older volunteers are often the be-frienders of choice for many older people.

Rural Community Network carried out a piece of work to ascertain the level of involvement of rural voluntary and community groups with older people living in rural communities. 80% of the organisations questioned stated that older people play an important part in their groups. In 17% of cases, the organisations stated that over half of their committee members were 60 years or older. Interestingly, this research showed that groups were more likely to cater for the specific needs of older people with regard to support, services and facilities where they had older people who were actively involved in group committees (Rural Community Network 2004).

An evaluation carried out on a Home Office initiative into the promotion of volunteering and participation by older people found that organisations whose mission or purpose was to promote the well being of older people have a considerable advantage in involving older people as volunteers. They also found that those organisations that had volunteering as a recognised and central feature of their work were more likely to involve older volunteers quickly and effectively (Rochester et al. 2002).

8.2   Organisational Barriers to Involving Older Volunteers

Figure 8: Organisational Barriers to involving Older Volunteers
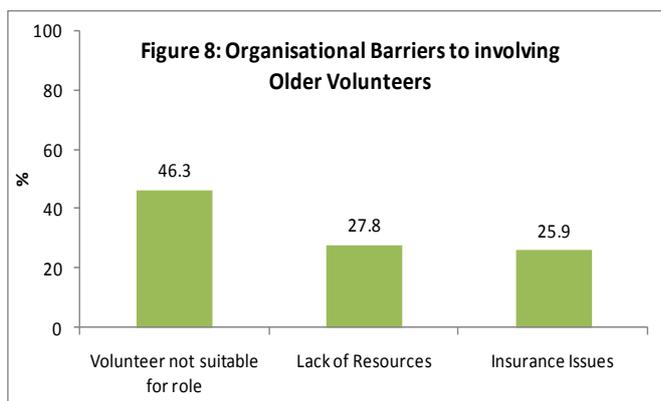
There are a number of barriers which prevent organisations from involving volunteers, generally. In the 2007 'It's All About Time' report organisations in Northern Ireland were asked about the most significant barriers they had to involving volunteers of any age group. The most common opinion was that volunteers were not suitable for the roles they had (46.3%), the second

most common view was that organisations did not have enough resources to properly manage volunteers (27.8%) and thirdly, a quarter stated that regulatory, legal or liability constraints stopped them from involving volunteers (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b).

8.2.1 Suitability of Volunteering Roles

It's interesting that nearly half (46.3%) of the organisations questioned stated that they did not have any roles in which volunteers would be suitable. It is possible that this barrier could be reduced if organisations thought more creatively in terms of the type of tasks which volunteers could do. Thinking creatively, in terms of roles offered should be a particular consideration when an organisation is involving older volunteers. It is important that organisations try not to adopt a narrow view of what activities are suitable for older people. A choice of volunteering roles, including those which are physically and mentally taxing should be offered. This could also include older people leading volunteering groups and being given the chance to set the agenda in relation to the activities they undertake. (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b). Creating challenges for volunteers through offering people the chance to learn new skills, or to use existing skills in a new setting are opportunities which the baby boomer/retiree group of volunteers are expecting from their volunteer experiences. In some cases organisations have an upper age limit with regards to volunteers. There is evidence in the UK of organisations restricting the type of activities that people who are 65+ years can become involved in. These restrictions can be based on difficulties with getting insurance or gaining reasonably priced premiums. They may also be based on organisations having stereotypical ideas of what older people wish or are able to do (Rochester and Thomas 2006).

8.2.2 Lack of Resources

Striving for good practice in the management of volunteers is important and organisations are encouraged to put strong support systems in place for volunteers within their group/ organisation. Unfortunately, lack of resources to train volunteers and lack of resources to properly supervise and support volunteers were both given by organisations in Northern Ireland as reasons for not involving volunteers (27.8%).

8.2.3 Insurance Issues

Just over a quarter (25.9%) of those organisations which did not involve volunteers gave the reason that there were regulatory, legal or liability constraints on volunteer involvement (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b). Further information gathering in terms of the extent and type of issues with regards to insurance cover for older people in Northern Ireland is required. However, research carried out by Volunteering in the Third Age (VITA) and Volunteering England found that volunteer involving organisations in England state that insurance companies are reluctant to provide cover for people who are 65+ years without additional costly information i.e. volunteers providing a medical certificate at their own cost, or charging additional higher insurance premiums. The report also stated that getting insurance cover for raising and handling money activities is particularly difficult, the older the volunteer becomes (Rochester & Thomas 2006). Raising and handling money is one of the most common types of volunteering within Northern Ireland. It was also the most common type of activity for people who are 50-64 and 65+ (Volunteer Development Agency 2007b). Some organisations have attempted to overcome these barriers by shopping around for the best insurance deals and have found that there can be reasonable offers available. In other cases, older volunteers are asked to complete a disclaimer form and continue to volunteer on an uninsured basis. This latter solution is far from ideal and may prevent older people from volunteering (Rochester & Thomas 2006).

9.   Older People Programmes

There are many examples of programmes which have older people involved. There are fewer which are specifically designed for people who are 50+ years. Also, not all of the programmes involving older people recognise the activities being undertaken as voluntary work. This under-recognition of volunteering activity is a general occurrence.

The following examples have been used to demonstrate the range of programmes which are specifically for older people from the North and South of Ireland, UK, USA and Australia. Where possible, the examples used are older people volunteer programmes. However, there are also some examples of very successful projects which are termed as social group by those who run and use them and although they do not use the term volunteering for what they do, they are in essence volunteer based activities.

9.1   Northern Ireland

The Volunteer Development Agency is the lead organisation in Northern Ireland for the promotion and development of volunteering. The Agency provides training, information and support to volunteer-involving organisations across all sectors on issues of good practice and policy regarding volunteering, volunteer management, child protection and voluntary management committees/governance. It also plays a key role in administering grants related to volunteering for the Department for Social Development and the Department of Education. There are currently 14 volunteer centres across Northern Ireland which are local points of information for people who want to be more active in their communities. They also act as an intermediary for organisations that want to involve volunteers.

The Turkington Fund is part of a portfolio of more than 30 funds and programmes managed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland. It was formally launched in September 2007 with a donation from the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, including the Turkington Bequest, and with financial support from the Atlantic Philanthropies. Its overarching goal is to encourage active participation by older people in society and in decision-making. To date, the fund has awarded grants of up to £3,000 to more than a hundred organisations across Northern Ireland, funding projects ranging from a community garden in Carrickfergus, "armchair aerobics" in Castlereagh, and a trip to the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament for a group based in Craigavon and Banbridge.

There is also a Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP) group in Northern Ireland, RSVP is an internationally renowned group, which involves people aged 50+ years. The volunteering opportunities offered by RSVP include befriending, administration, driving, shopping trips, gardening and a home-security programme. In addition there is a social element involved whereby the RSVP members can take part in social events/outings.

The Actively Ageing Well Programme is run by Age Concern and the Health Promotion Agency. It has 60 groups which provide opportunities for physical activities for the benefit of older people, as well as providing opportunities for older people to train to become group leaders, therefore allowing groups to grow and become self sustaining. For example a member of one of the groups participated in a Dance Leader Training Course, in which they gained an OCN Certificate. The person was then able to cascade their training back into their own group and was equipped to lead dance classes at their own club and other groups within their area.

9.2   Republic of Ireland

Volunteer Centres Ireland is a national body with responsibility for developing volunteering in Ireland, both nationally and locally. Supported by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, it is involved in promotion of volunteering, supporting the development of sustainable local volunteer centres, promotion and development of volunteering best practice and influencing policy in relation to volunteering. The Republic of Ireland is experiencing similar trends to the North; volunteering numbers are falling as organisations find it difficult to attract and retain volunteers, they are moving towards an ageing population and people who are at pre/post retirement, are finding it difficult to find ways of continuing to contribute to their communities.

Age and Opportunity is a national organisation which works to promote greater participation by older people in society www.olderinireland.ie. One of the projects is Senior Help Line, a confidential listening service available for the price of a local call from anywhere in the country. The Helpline operates seven days a week, 10am to 1pm and 7pm to 10pm.

The Republic of Ireland has intergenerational programmes in which older people act as a resource in primary schools. For example, the Coolderry National School in Co. Offaly, undertook a history project with pupils, where the children gathered information from their grandparents about life in the past.

9.3   United Kingdom

In England, the RSVP is run by the Community Service Volunteers and provides a good example of the vital role that older volunteers can play in their societies and in so doing have started to change the social concept of age and ageing. The RSVP published a study to demonstrate the ability and value that people over 80 years old can play in their communities (VITA 2006). During 1999- 2003 the Home Office Older Volunteers Initiative provided £1.476 million to run 26 projects to improve the number and diversity of people aged 50 or over who volunteer and involve themselves in the community.

The 'Inside Out Project' is a UK based programme set up to recruit older people who did not see themselves as volunteers and who would not like to be seen by others in that light. Many of those they have involved were residents in care homes and sheltered housing or users of day centres.

Dark Horse Venture project is an example of e-volunteering where older people and school children are brought together by email. The older people learnt about computers and the young people learnt about social history. Both parties were given the opportunity to understand each other's generation through participating in the project. Mobility through health problems or transport (provision & cost) issues is a common barrier for older people's participation; e-volunteering helps overcome these barriers and provides older people with valuable links to their communities.

9.4   USA

Senior Corps is a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service, an independent federal agency. The organisation currently links more than 500,000 Americans to service opportunities. It provides 3 different volunteering programs:

The Foster Grandparent Program connects volunteers aged 60 and over with children and young people with exceptional needs. Volunteers mentor, support, and help some of the most vulnerable children in the United States.

The Senior Companion Program brings together volunteers aged 60 and over with adults in their community who have difficulty with the simple tasks of day-to-day living. Companions help out on a personal level by assisting with shopping and light chores, interacting with doctors, or just making a friendly visit.

RSVP connects volunteers aged 55 and over with service opportunities in their communities that match their skills and availability. From building houses to immunizing children, from enhancing the capacity of non-profit organisations to improving and protecting the environment, RSVP volunteers put their unique talents to work to make a difference www.seniorcorps.org

9.5   Australia

Australia is forward thinking in terms of the resources given and value placed on volunteering. South Australia has its own Office for Volunteers and Minister for Volunteering. Western Australia already promotes volunteering amongst baby boomers www.volunteeringaustralia.org. The following excerpt highlights a program run by RSVP which created innovative ways of sustaining the over 80s as volunteers by adapting the opportunities to the changing abilities and needs of its volunteers as they become older.

Excerpt from RSVP Directors Speech on Older Volunteering

When I joined RSVP I met many volunteers who had been with the organisation twelve years, and joined at 65 or 70. They were often in very good health and had tremendous energy but now, as they are in their middle 80s, it is harder. One thing we have been looking at is how we can still involve them in volunteering. One very successful scheme, which is run in Camden, is a telephone befriending service, which is run by RSVP and funded by Camden social services. Older people who are extremely isolated and house bound were originally referred to us as needing an older volunteer to ring them, and at least two thirds of these people have now become telephone friends themselves. When you meet people from this group they say what a difference it has made for them to feel involved in both making and receiving these friendship calls. We also have several groups across the country based in residential homes who knit teddies for emergency services and little garments for hospitals' special needs units. I went to a residential home in Cambridge and the average volunteers' age is about 85. They have been sending knitted items and books and a variety of things to hospitals that they had linked up with in Africa. They had wonderful feedback from children and staff there showing the things they produced (CSV 2001).

Gill's report on older volunteering in Australia mentioned 'family/group volunteering' in which people volunteer, as a family or group, as being particularly relevant to the baby boomer generation, who have family commitments and time constraints. This report also posed the opportunity of family/group volunteering as a way of encouraging older people (of grandparent age) to volunteer with family or group support (Gill 2006).

10.   Marketing Volunteering towards Older People

10.1 General Marketing Towards People who are 50+ Years

As we move towards an ageing demographic we also move towards an ageing market place. Today much more attention is being given to how to attract the growing consumer group of 50+ year old age group. In particular, there is growing interest in understanding the attitudes of older people towards powerful new communication technologies, such as the internet. The Ofcom consumer panel survey, 'Consumers and the Communications Market', reveals that in the UK, age remains one of the most significant factors influencing whether or not people engage with the technology. The report also suggests that overall people's engagement with technology begins to decline significantly after the age of 55. It also states that the Northern Ireland consumer is even less inclined to have a mobile phone, digital TV (DTV) or internet access than the UK average (Ofcom 2006a).

10.2 Uptake of the Internet

The 'digital disengagement' of the older age group is particularly noticeable in the up-take of the internet, where 56% of people aged 65+ voluntarily excluded themselves from using it compared to the national average of 22%. A further piece of work was carried out by Ofcom in 2006, to explore in more detail older people's attitudes to the Internet. They found that attitude and character were the key determinants of whether or not people felt connected to the internet. They reported that these factors outweighed the influence of other factors such as age, health, or income. It stated that older consumers who are not using the internet would

> .. older consumers who are not using the internet would be more likely to engage with it if they were given the right kind of support, assistance and learning environment to help them overcome their fears.

be more likely to engage with it if they were given the right kind of support, assistance and learning environment to help them overcome their fears. 'Enabling' factors such as courses designed for and run by older people, together with mentoring schemes would encourage them to get online. The report also found that a key determinant of internet take up for the older consumer was prior experience at work. All those who had learnt at work were now home users (Ofcom 2006b).

However figures calculated by Help the Aged (2008) suggests that access to the internet falls significantly with age. For people aged 60-69 years old, 38% have access to the internet; however access fell to 8% for those people who were 70+. There are very successful courses such as Help the Aged Information Age Project which is a volunteer led and provides basic IT skills to the over 60s. An additional consideration for older people is getting access to a computer and the internet. Some older people who do not have these things at home, use

their local library. However, this is not accessible to all older people, particularly those who have no access to local amenities due to poor health, transport issues or the distance to a suitable site.

10.3 Strategies for Marketing Volunteering to the 50+ years Age Group

America has provided some useful learning in terms of marketing strategies that are successful with the 50+ years age group. Senior Corps   http://nationalserviceresources.org which is a program that helps Americans aged 55 and older to volunteer and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) which produces magazines and a website which is specifically focused on the 50 years and over age group can provide some key practical learning points for designing marketing material (Lindblom 2001, Rosenfield 1998)

- Make brochures appealing by using colour, increase the font size and minimise the amount of text used;
- Use quotes, stories and testimonials from volunteers, who are their peers, to attract interest;[4]
- Send messages through peers rather than celebrities or authority figures;
- Programs/marketing material which use the words 'older', 'senior' or 'retired' are less attractive; and
- Market to the 50 and 60 year old age groups separately.

10.4 Segmented Marketing

This latter point is an important one which warrants further discussion. George Moschis, a professor of marketing in Georgia, raised this point that the older consumer market should not be treated as a homogenous market. He suggests that older people are a much more heterogeneous group than younger consumer groups. Once they are blended together they lose their effectiveness in attracting either party. However, Moschis also noted that a further challenge lies in how best to segment those aged 50+ years (Moschis 2003).

10.5 Examples of Marketing Strategies

AARP started experiencing market losses in the late 90s, in 2000 it rethought its communication with those people in the 50+ years age group and realised that there was an extreme diversity between people in their 50s and those in their 60s. They decided that people in these two age brackets need to be separated. For this reason they now produce three types of magazines, which cater for 50-55 year olds, 55-65 year olds and the 65+ year olds (Lindblom 2001).

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[4] http://nonprofit.about.com/od/volunteers/tp/boomertips.htm

In Northern Ireland, there has not been specific marketing towards the 50+ years age group with regards to volunteering. However, Translink the public transport body, which is managed by the Department of Regional Development, is attempting to attract people who are 60+ years to obtain a smart pass card, in order for them to avail of free public transport. They have currently two smart pass cards - the '60 plus smart pass' and the 'senior smart pass' for those who are 65+ years. However, although they have two separate products for these groups, they have not used separate marketing campaigns or different visuals in the marketing material. An evaluation of the concessionary fare was carried out by the Department of Regional Development, however, it did not involve a review of the marketing campaign therefore the attitude of older people towards the campaign or the direct impact of the campaign on the uptake is unknown (Department of Regional Development 2007).

11. Conclusion

We have an ageing population. This means that an increasing proportion of our society will be made up of the older age group. Therefore, in the future a growing number of potential and actual volunteers will also be older than has been historically the case. The baby boomer and pre/post retired groups have many skills, much experience, enthusiasm and altruism, which can be harnessed by volunteering. Volunteering is a useful vehicle for building stronger communities and challenging social prejudice. Promoting and supporting older people to get involved in volunteering could have a positive impact on ageism and stereotypical views of older people. Public policy development concerning the issues of older people, particularly those over 65+ years, has tended to focus on health needs, however, it would be important to also develop public policies which help to generate opportunities to utilise their skills and experience. Research has highlighted multiple benefits for those involved in volunteering, in particular, research has shown that older volunteers experience fewer health issues as they get older and report diminishing symptoms for existing health conditions (Volunteering England 2008).   There continues to be a debate regarding the causal relationship between health and volunteering. However, it is undoubtedly the case that irrespective of the differences between those who volunteer and those who do not volunteer, volunteering itself leads to improved physical and mental health, and therefore acts as a 'self reinforcing cycle' (Corporation of National Community Service 2007).

> **Promoting and supporting older people to get involved in volunteering could have a positive impact on ageism and stereotypical views of older people.**

Generally, organisations need to demonstrate good practice in terms of volunteer management. Individuals who are 50+ years are not a homogenous group. Organisations/ groups and volunteer centres which are recruiting volunteers need to become more sophisticated in how they match volunteers and create varied opportunities which meet individual/group motivations. Carrying out primary research with older people directly and the professionals who work within the sector could inform this process, as well as learning from good practice examples of older people programmes from Northern Ireland and other programs from around the world.

Public policies need to be developed which promote, encourage and support volunteering. These policies need to be based on a strong knowledge base. As yet there is a paucity of research on volunteering within a Northern Ireland context. To date, both the UK and the USA are the only two countries which have specifically targeted volunteers who are 65 years or older. The Volunteer Development Agency has produced the most comprehensive and robust pieces of work to gauge the amount, type and value of volunteering in Northern

Ireland. However, much more evidence based research needs to be produced to fully understand volunteering from a Northern Ireland perspective and from the perspective of different demographic groups, which include those people who are 50+ years. The understanding from new research should be used to support existing activities and structures i.e. regional structures, local volunteer centres, volunteer involving organisations and partners within the age sector. Partnership working across all sectors to promote older people becoming involved in volunteering will help to ensure that a greater number are given the opportunity to participate and engage within their communities. This literature review has demonstrated that being involved in volunteering can have a wide ranging positive impact in relation to older people's integration, independence, empowerment, health and quality of life. This report has also demonstrated the positive impact that volunteering can have on the recipients of the volunteering, the volunteer involving organisations and the communities within which the volunteering activities happen.

12. Recommendations

There are eight recommendations listed below -

1. Government, voluntary and community, public and private sector organisations must prioritise volunteering and see the value of it as a vehicle for promoting a healthy, active lifestyle for older people. Developing initiatives to promote and support older people to get involved in their communities is more likely to nurture community cohesion and inclusion, thereby encouraging positive self image for older people and also helping to change societal perceptions of what it means to be older.

2. Government, voluntary and community, public, private sector organisations must work together in order to ensure that older people are treated equitably within society, this includes opportunities to participate in civic activities. One very successful conduit for civic participation is volunteering.

3. Government, voluntary and community, public, private sector organisations which involve volunteers are more likely to encourage a greater number of older people to volunteer by providing a more person-centred and varied range of opportunities which will meet different people's interests, abilities, and fit in with other interests and commitments they have in their lives.

4. In order for all sectors to increase the number of older people volunteering, they must also work to reduce the obstacles which stop them from being attracted to it or retaining their interest.

5. There is a gap in the range of volunteering opportunities that are available for older people in Northern Ireland, especially activities which promote healthy, active lifestyles.

6. Building an evidence base of Northern Ireland based research will inform public policies which are relevant to older people volunteering; it will also inform best practice in the recruitment, management and support of older volunteers.

7. There is a need for continuous monitoring of volunteering demographics, attitudes and behaviours. The inclusion of a range of volunteering questions within key national surveys would provide useful up to date information.

8. There is a need for an agreed uniform definition of the term 'volunteering', there also needs to be consistent use of the term 'volunteering'. This would strengthen the validity and reliability of research results, as well as engendering a more cohesive community of organisations and individuals which are involved in volunteering.

12.1 Further Evidence Based Research

Leading on from the need for further Northern Ireland specific research, there are a range of questions which would be useful to ask the Northern Ireland population.

1. How does volunteering affect the quality of life of older people?
2. What is the impact of older people volunteering on the recipients and the organisations?
3. What are the attitudes of the 50, 60 and 70 year old age groups towards volunteering?
4. How can we make volunteering programmes/opportunities more attractive to the older age groups?
5. What are the organisational attitudes and barriers towards involving older volunteers? Do these attitudes and barriers differ across the business sector?
6. What are the attitudes of insurance companies towards providing cover for older volunteers?
7. What is the most effective marketing approach for volunteers who are 50+ years?
8. Should the marketing message be different for 50, 60 and 70 year olds?
9. How useful are electronic communication technologies for engaging with 50, 60, 70 year olds i.e. e-volunteering, e-marketing?
10. What is the best way to engage with employers with regards to encouraging them to provide and or promote employee volunteering opportunities?

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