



Power in purpose

The difference we make in mobilising volunteers

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Introduction

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the voluntary and community sector. Without their dedication, knowledge and skills, much of the work of charities and community groups would simply not be possible.

Many of these groups recruit formal volunteers who bring specialist skills to address specific challenges, but we must also recognise informal volunteers – kind neighbours, for example, who help people who may not get support from anywhere else and make our communities better places to live. From small acts of kindness like walking someone's dog when they're not well, to regular, long-term commitments such as being a trustee, volunteers make a difference to people's lives every day. In 2016, the economic value of formal volunteering alone was estimated at £23.9 billion.¹

The impact of volunteering goes beyond the people or organisations they support; volunteers themselves benefit from helping others. Research has found that volunteering is associated with enhanced wellbeing, including improved life satisfaction, increased happiness and decreased symptoms of depression.² Volunteering gives people the chance to meet others, make friends and expand their social networks.³ It also provides an opportunity to experience something new and learn new skills, which can keep minds active, raise aspirations and increase employability. Research has even shown that volunteering can lead to greater civic engagement⁴ and help people feel part of their community.⁵

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, an estimated 10 million⁶ volunteers and helpers have mobilised to support community responses across the UK, bringing the incredible impact of volunteering under the spotlight. There have also been changes in the pattern of volunteering, with many first-time volunteers coming forward amid a surge in neighbourliness and informal volunteering, while at the same time some charities saw formal volunteering decline as their regulars had to shield.⁷ This has reignited discussions in the sector about how best to mobilise volunteers, different forms of volunteering, and how to retain new volunteers while helping former volunteers to feel safe again.

In light of this, we're looking into what we've funded in this area before and during the pandemic, and the difference this has made. We draw on the 4,200 grants that we've given out to charities and community groups over the past five years to support volunteering, amounting to £690 million of National Lottery, government and third party funding.⁸ We do this to shine a light on the contribution of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the volunteers they work with.



Friends of the Earth

What do we mean by volunteering?

In volunteering, people choose to give their time, skills and effort to support an organisation or cause. There are many different forms, from formal volunteer positions that are part of a project or a group, to informal volunteering within communities. Below are some definitions of the different types discussed in this report:

Volunteering/formal volunteering: Providing unpaid help through clubs, community groups or organisations such as charities. This is what most people commonly understand as volunteering, in the traditional sense.

Informal volunteering: Providing unpaid help to individuals who are not relatives, outside of an organised group. Neighbourliness, reciprocity and mutual aid are terms associated with informal volunteering. This approach reframes traditional ideas about volunteering, by avoiding the implied power imbalance between 'volunteer' and 'beneficiary'. People checking in on neighbours who live alone, that buy someone's shopping if they know they are struggling, or help a young person with their homework may not see themselves as volunteers, but fall under this category.

Social action: This is a broader category which includes volunteering as one of many activities people undertake to improve their community or the environment, or to make a positive difference to others.

This report focuses primarily on formal volunteering and volunteering as social action, and less on informal volunteering which is done outside of an organisation – although this will be included where our grantholders recognise it as volunteering. While we may draw from programmes which sometimes pay or compensate people with lived experience for their time, we focus on examples of voluntary support.



Welcome to our Woods

Making a difference

4,200 grants to support volunteering

£690 million of National Lottery, government and third party funding in the five years to 2020–2021.

Social and economic impact

More people volunteering

662,000 people helping out in the community through three programmes.

A positive economic impact

1.9 million charity volunteers contributed £4 billion to the economy over the past three years.

Alleviating the impact of Covid-19

1,500 grants to support the volunteering response to Covid-19: 10,000 grantholders worked with 1.5 million volunteers in England and Northern Ireland to support people through the pandemic.



Making a difference



99% of volunteers

during Covid-19 experienced at least one personal benefit from volunteering

A stronger, more diverse VCS

94% of grantholders involve volunteers

Our funding enables the VCS to recruit, support and train volunteers, and we fund 59% of volunteer centres in England.

Inclusive opportunities for all

Opening up volunteering by removing barriers and providing specialist support.

Paths to a better future

Improving employability with opportunities to:

- learn new skills
- gain experience

Personal development in areas of:

- confidence and self esteem
- resilience and aspirations

Reducing isolation by providing:

- a sense of purpose
- new connections

Social and economic impacts

1. More people making a difference

More people would volunteer if they knew how. The 2018/2019 Community Life Survey found that 42% of people didn't volunteer, or didn't do so more frequently, because they weren't aware of volunteering roles or how to find out about them.⁹ Many of our VCS grantholders are working to change that, with both small and larger groups finding ways for people to get involved in their neighbourhood or a community, or to support a cause close their heart.

Three of our largest volunteer investments alone - [#iwill Fund](#), [Our Bright Future](#) and [Spirit of 2012](#) - have given 662,000 people an opportunity to make a difference in their community since 2013. We've made a particularly significant investment to support young people's ambitions, aiming to set them up for life with the benefits that volunteering can bring.

Since 2016, Our Bright Future has given more than 120,000 young people an opportunity to get involved in environmental work in their community. Together with staff, young volunteers have helped to protect coastal areas, used surplus food to reduce waste, designed and planted orchards, and designed and led recycling projects. So far, they've transformed 3,000 unused, unloved community spaces and created 306 new ones, including nature reserves, school gardens, beaches and parks.¹⁰

As well as learning about the environment, green economy and conservation, by June 2019, the young volunteers had gained over 3,900 awards and qualifications, in fields from construction and marine life to Duke of Edinburgh awards. These qualifications have increased some participants' ability to influence, as well as their drive to succeed in school and at work.

There are many spin-off benefits for the young volunteers. Nearly four out of five (78%) said that taking part had had an impact on the direction of their career, whether through a choice of studies or a job. Three-quarters said they were going to volunteer again as a result of participating. Many were pursuing voluntary positions with greater responsibility, like governance and management board positions at national environment charities, schools and environment campaigns. In a small survey of 258 participants, a third of respondents said that they had secured a job or set up a business in an area related to their voluntary work. Many more were able to use their volunteering experience to strengthen their university applications.¹¹



#iwill Fund is another major investment to build young people's skills and confidence to make a difference, especially young people from less affluent communities. It's a joint £50 million investment with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). By June 2021, over 500,800 young people had taken part, improving their communities and the lives of their peers. The majority (67%) of young volunteers come from less affluent parts of the country. And more than half of these young people are 13 or younger.¹²

The Scouts Association are using their #iwill funding to train 14-18 year olds as volunteer Young Leaders, who are rolling out scouting for four and five year olds. Between October 2020 and May 2021 they've trained 17 young leaders to run the new Squirrel Scout units across the country.¹³ So far, nearly 600 children have participated.¹⁴ With volunteer leaders helping them in activities like sending handmade cards to local care homes during Covid-19.

Many small grants help to increase levels of volunteering too, so more people can benefit from the experience and organisations have a pool of willing helpers. We funded [Dundee Volunteer and Voluntary Action](#) to create 30 opportunities for young people to volunteer in care homes, helping them to develop their confidence, skills and interests, while the residents enjoyed their company and the activities they ran.

Other programmes focus on volunteering as a vehicle for change, including 10 [Place Based Social Action](#) partnerships across England that are bringing together local communities with grassroots groups, public sector organisations, service providers and businesses to address priorities in their neighbourhoods. So far 1,320 volunteers are working towards local improvements; from improving local transport, to creating whole new visions for their area, like a dementia friendly borough in Colchester.¹⁵



Falkland Centre for Stewardship

44,000 volunteers lifting the spirits of the nation¹⁶

Spirit of 2012 builds on enthusiasm for big events, like the Olympic and Paralympic Games, to improve how people feel about themselves and their communities. Set up in 2013, with £47 million of National Lottery funding, it's a ten-year charitable trust that organises sports, arts and cultural events across the UK.

By mobilising 44,000 volunteers, they've given 2.8 million people an opportunity to take part in 124 community projects and they've reached a total of 5.3 million people across the country through events and celebrations.

It has benefited participants and volunteers alike. The Spirit of 2012 evaluation shows that the share of people who scored highly on life satisfaction increased from 70% at the start of the involvement to 80% at the end, while the share of those who've felt anxious reduced from 50% to 44%.

Many also feel happier. Scores for life satisfaction and happiness were behind national averages at the start of involvement, but exceeded them by the end. The share of those who scored highly on happiness increased from 68% to 77%, slightly above the national average of 75%.

Many put this down to feeling more connected to their community. In Hull, over 2,500 volunteers gave over 100,000 hours of their time to support City of Culture events like the installation of Blade, a 75-metre art installation in the city centre. And 342,000 people attended the Made in Hull opening week, with 94% of the audience agreeing that the event had made them feel more connected with the city's history and heritage.¹⁷

Many volunteers felt better due to greater confidence and new skills gained by doing something new or different, often to benefit others. "I never used to do stuff like this, I would have just avoided it. I feel better about myself," explained one. Another added: "I have definitely come out of my shell."

But volunteering experiences aren't always positive. A one-off involvement in organising an event can prove stressful; volunteers tend to have a more positive experience when they are treated as partners in the process. This means involving people for a longer period of time, with training and support throughout. In Hull, the City of Culture volunteers were offered masterclasses. As a result, many wanted to take on more work than expected.

2. A positive economic impact

Volunteering has personal, social and environmental benefits – but it also makes a substantial contribution to our economy. An estimated 1.9 million volunteers from the charities we fund have contributed £4 billion to the economy over the past three years. These numbers are based on the Charity Commission volunteer data for the 17,154 charities we have funded over that period, making up 35% of our grantholders during that time.¹⁸

Putting a monetary value on volunteering doesn't capture the passion, commitment and experience volunteers bring and gain - but we've included it here because the impressive figure helps to demonstrate its importance to society and the economy.

Combining volunteer stories with data gives a fuller picture. “[Volunteering has] opened up a world of opportunities and new friends I had no idea were out there,”¹⁹ explained a volunteer from [Ageing Better](#), our largest investment to tackle social isolation among the over 50s. The programme uses volunteering as a way to help people find a sense of purpose and make new connections. Between 2015 and 2020, 14 partnerships had worked with over 19,500 volunteers from different backgrounds. They have contributed almost 630,000 hours of their time, which equates to 83,000 working days.²⁰

Ageing Better volunteers have become befrienders, designed and delivered local micro-grant programmes, organised discussions about wellbeing in their communities, and run their own activity groups, such as craft clubs and men's sheds. While many proudly wear the label 'volunteer', for others the term can be off putting, and instead get involved as 'members' or 'helpers'. They are often former programme participants, who have been encouraged to identify and value their own skills. The programme evaluation shows that volunteers were less lonely than participants who were not involved in volunteering. Volunteers have also become more aware of isolation and loneliness amongst older people - knowledge they help to spread within their local communities.²¹

Recognising the importance of volunteering to our society, we've increased our investment in this space from around 440 grants in 2013/2014, to over 700 per year in 2018/2019 and since. And we've introduced new programmes that support people-led community development, like [Create Your Space](#), our joint initiative with the Welsh Government, to empower communities to conserve, create and enhance outdoor spaces in Wales. Working with local volunteers, they transform spaces such as woodlands, parks, allotments, and underused land. After just over a year of delivery, volunteers had already given 3,175 hours of their time to help clear six tons of fly-tipped rubbish, plant wildflowers, guide visitors, and design new outdoor projects.²²

3. Alleviating the impact of Covid-19 on people and communities

Volunteers have been at the heart of both local and national responses to the pandemic, from delivering food and essentials to reducing loneliness and keeping spirits up. National Lottery funding has played an important part: we gave out over 1,500 government and National Lottery grants in 2020/2021 to support the volunteering response to Covid-19. And in England and Northern Ireland, the 10,000 groups we funded last year worked with a total of 1.5 million volunteers to mitigate the impact of the virus and associated restrictions on communities.²³

This made a huge difference to communities across the country. Homeless charity [Caring in Bristol](#) rapidly set up a city-wide food delivery service. They brought together 148 volunteers and 14 restaurants to prepare and deliver almost 80,000 meals between March and June 2020. From March 2020 to June 2021, volunteers dedicated over 22,800 hours to collecting ingredients, preparing meals, distributing food, and cleaning. Their work was worth an estimated £203,148.²⁴ Funding from the National Lottery and Coronavirus Community Support Fund (CCSF) enabled them to continue this valuable work into the following months and subsequent lockdowns.

We supported cross-sector efforts, involving partners from the public, private and third sectors. Like [Voluntary Action Leeds](#) (VAL), which coordinated the city's Covid-19 volunteering response. At the start of the pandemic, 200,000 people, a quarter of the city's population, visited their volunteering webpages. And 8,000 people came forward wanting to help – more than they could immediately find roles for.

So VAL looked across the sector, feeding volunteers out to the 1,500 Leeds organisations who were responding to Covid, and supporting groups to make the most of those who wanted to help. As many lacked the capacity and experience to manage larger pools of volunteers, VAL helped with background checks, such as verifying driving licenses, and taking people through the vetting process. They broke down lists of volunteers, ward by ward, and linked them with local organisations. They also provided a dedicated member of staff, with “guidance, support, and a pack – induction materials, checklists, everything they needed to work with the volunteers.” Support was particularly important for smaller organisations, which needed help to build up their internal infrastructure and confidence.²⁵



– Voluntary Action Leeds

We also supported grassroots groups, like [Greenwich Mutual Aid](#) (GMA), a volunteer-led group made up of more than 900 people. Formed quickly over Facebook, this group of volunteers fulfilled over 300 requests for help from neighbours, from shopping to prescriptions, and delivered over 400 foodbank and baby bank parcels. They worked closely with the council to refer people with complex or urgent needs and ensure everyone knew how to get help. A CCSF grant enabled them to pay volunteer expenses and take on a paid coordinator, to ensure GMA can sustain this vital work.

Our larger grantholders have supported newly-formed mutual aid groups too. In Hackney, the [Place Based Social Action](#) (PBSA) partnership worked together with new groups to identify where they could add value, rather than forcing them to work within existing systems, which could have undermined their enthusiasm and creativity.

This collaboration benefited both sides. The partnership stepped in to provide training and advice for the mutual aid groups, helping with safeguarding, referrals and processes for deliveries. At the same time the work increased awareness of the PBSA partnership, and people have since approached them to set up their own local projects. The partnership has shifted its focus towards connecting mutual aid groups and volunteers more generally to where they are needed, such as to domestic abuse services.

Infrastructure bodies helped at a local and regional level. [Brecon Volunteer Bureau](#) acted as a broker: they brought volunteers on, made sure they had the experience needed, and then referred them to the most appropriate organisation. As demand for their services increased, they applied for an [Awards for All](#) grant to expand their provision and work with others to coordinate a volunteer-led response to 800 vulnerable residents.

Now the challenge lies in sustaining new groups and volunteering initiatives. We've supported [BS3 Community Development](#), a trusted local community group, to do that in Bristol. They've taken on some of the work that five furloughed community workers started when they set up a local Covid-19 Response Group of 1,100 volunteers. They've also innovated, like pairing a local running group (This Mum Runs) with a local pharmacist to collect and safely deliver prescriptions and worked with schools to provide families in need with food parcels.

More people helping in their communities²⁶

We've carried out a survey of nearly 14,000 volunteers in England to find out more about the volunteering response to the pandemic at National Lottery and government-funded charities.

Interim findings show that one in eight (12%) were volunteering for the first time. And a third (36%) hadn't volunteered at the organisation before, suggesting that the pandemic mobilised a new group of people to give up their time.

While many continued to deliver the same types of activities as they had done before the pandemic, volunteers were more likely to report helping people to access food and essential items (up from 22% to 34%) and less likely to report organising or helping to run an activity or event (24% down from 42%).

A stronger, more diverse VCS

1. Helping the VCS find and recruit volunteers

Volunteering is a part of almost every project and programme we fund. Around 94% of our grantholders involved volunteers for at least some of their work during Covid. And in 2020/2021, the 10,000 groups we funded in England and Northern Ireland worked with around 150 volunteers per organisation; seven volunteers for every paid member of staff.²⁷

Volunteers can complement staff roles and bring value to services. Our funding enables charities and community groups to find and recruit the volunteers they need to support their work. Some have used their grants to find and attract candidates for specific roles, like volunteer legal advisors or trustees. Others carry out broader recruitment drives to increase the pool of volunteers they can draw from.

[Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations](#) found out that four in five local groups would like help in recruiting trustees, so they started a rally to attract new volunteers at careers fairs, online events, and through social media campaigns. Over the three-year project, they helped 110 organisations to find trustees, helping them to target the skill areas they were missing and showing them how to use social media to reach candidates. They also delivered training around policy, digital and social media to 184 people who went on to be recruited as trustees.²⁸

[The Attic Project](#) in Wales supports older people to sort through or dispose of their possessions in a way that is good for them and the environment. Volunteers help people to sort through possessions both practically and emotionally, giving them a chance to reminisce, reducing feelings of social isolation and improving wellbeing. A National Lottery grant meant they could appoint a volunteer coordinator to recruit and train 94 volunteers over the course of the project, who dedicated 2,155 hours to help older people declutter their homes.²⁹

Volunteers were found by attending volunteering fairs, community events and working with universities to provide student placements. They also used social media and local news outlets to raise awareness. Their support can make a huge difference to people's lives. As one client put it, "Up until [volunteer's name], I'd gone past caring. But having the room sorted a bit has boosted me a lot. I'm not as stressed as I was...I feel like I can breathe – I am not so embarrassed now to let emergency services in."³⁰

Volunteer matching services help organisations to find people with the skills and experience they're looking for. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this became more important than ever, as organisations needed to quickly mobilise people to deliver urgent support in response to the unfolding crisis.

At the beginning of the first lockdown, [Team Oxford](#) launched the [Furlough Exchange Scheme](#) to match furloughed workers (typically, but not exclusively, from the private sector) with suitable volunteer roles for charities and voluntary groups. Prospective volunteers were surveyed on their personal skills and abilities via an online platform, and were then matched to suitable opportunities with Team Oxford's charity and community partners.

As lockdown eased and more people returned to work, Team Oxford's focus moved back to engaging with large employers. They created a digital skills audit service to survey employees about their specialisms and skills, allowing for better matches with organisations.



Welcome to our Woods

Volunteers helping services to grow

The [More Than Food](#) project in Lisburn, Northern Ireland began as a small foodbank with five volunteers and three referral partners, opening once a week. Through an £85,000 grant, Lisburn City Church Community Trust has expanded the foodbank into a full support service for people experiencing food poverty, with workshops, creative activities and cookery classes sitting alongside core food provision. The project now works with 85 referral partners and has had 320 volunteers over 2.5 years.

The National Lottery grant has allowed the organisation to give volunteers additional training, and to recruit volunteers with the specific skills needed to offer the new services. For example, as well as running the foodbank, volunteers now help with the kids' club, run 'eat well, spend less' courses, and even develop specific support for clients when this can't be provided by referral partners.

Appointing people as needs have arisen means there is now a larger pool of trained volunteers to draw on for different tasks, including clients who have progressed into volunteering as their confidence has grown. Long-serving volunteers have found new energy and enthusiasm thanks to the variety of support the Trust is able to offer through this improved structure, and the range of tasks available mean people can find and develop a role they enjoy.

The project supported 6,500 people between March 2020 and February 2021, making a real difference to people's lives during an immensely challenging time. "You have been a godsend", as one client put it. "These past few years have been the worst in my life, but since being part of the activities at the Trust I finally have hope again. I feel like everything is going to be alright now, I feel free."³¹

2. Resources to manage, train and support volunteers

No matter how many volunteers an organisation relies on - whether it's two or 200 - good volunteer management is key. It helps to maintain quality services and retain volunteers, and can enhance the positive wellbeing effects of volunteering. If done well, it means organisations get the best from their volunteers, and volunteers get the best from their role.

Our funding supports organisations to better manage their volunteers. This includes things like hiring a volunteer coordinator, providing training, or involving volunteers in decision making.

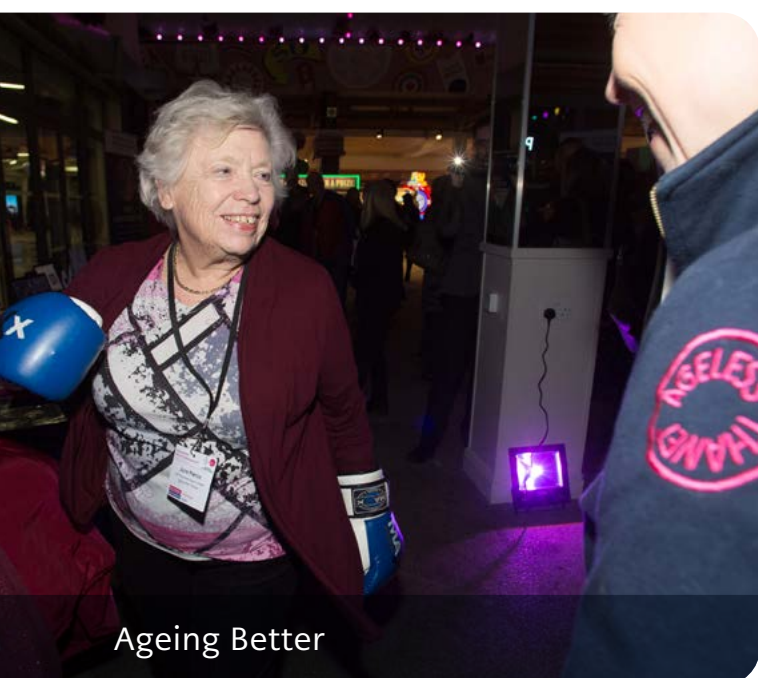
[Assist Sheffield](#) supports over 140 refugees and asylum seekers each year. Assist wanted to better manage and support the 300 volunteers that make this wrap-around service possible. As part of their National Lottery grant they created a new Client Support Manager role which has enabled them to restructure how their volunteers and staff work together, as well as improve on the support, recognition and training the volunteers receive. This reduced volunteer turnover as they felt happier and more fulfilled in their roles.

As one volunteer testified, "It's really fantastic having access to Matt [Client Support Manager] during Friday Team sessions for specific advice and support when needed - it's made a real difference to the support we give."

One of the changes they have made is designing a new Safeguarding, Confidentiality and Boundaries training course for volunteers to complement their induction training. And they run a monthly programme on issues requested by volunteers such as mental health first aid and advice skills. One volunteer was impressed with the support they were given, "the induction training session was particularly effective [...] and any problems that have arisen are taken on board and properly addressed".³²

Good volunteer management means that charities can fulfil their duty of care to their volunteers, making sure they're not overworked or dealing with situations they aren't trained for or comfortable with. This can help to avoid stress, anxiety, and burnout, and means volunteering remains enjoyable and fulfilling.

Since the summer of 2017, [Ageless Thanet](#) (an Ageing Better partnership) have recruited 110 volunteers as part of their mission to make Thanet a great place to grow older. They take a flexible approach to volunteering, understanding that while some people can commit to regular activity, volunteers should never feel pressured to give their time. To support this, they've started to recruit a 'bank' of reserve volunteers. This takes the pressure off regular volunteers, so that if they need to step away for any reason (such as holidays, appointments, or ill health) activities can continue as scheduled and participants don't have to miss out.³³



Ageing Better

Volunteering can be particularly tough when it involves supporting people with difficult experiences or situations such as trauma, addiction or mental health issues. This may bring back personal memories and experiences for volunteers with lived experience of similar issues. In this case it's even more important to have good support in place for volunteers, to maintain their wellbeing and reduce the risk of burn-out, emotional fatigue, or vicarious trauma.

Positive Voices project, run by the [Bridgstowe](#), supports people who are newly diagnosed with HIV or struggling with their diagnosis in Bristol, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset. One part of the project is a volunteer peer support service, where people meet with a peer mentor who is also living with HIV and understands the struggles involved.

Our funding has enabled Positive Voices to support the emotional wellbeing of their volunteer mentors with monthly supervision. They've also been trained to understand and manage boundaries, and how to signpost people to support that they can't provide. One volunteer said, "The training course it was great [...] We did the boundaries thing [...] and how to better listen, what kind of signs to look for when we are with someone, how to signpost people if we needed because at the end of the day we are not counsellors or anything, we are just normal people in the same kind of situation."³⁴

We also fund volunteer centres with the expertise and networks to find and connect volunteers with groups that need their time, skills, experience and passion. Over the past five years, we've supported nearly three out of five (59%) volunteer centres in England, with a total of £56 million of National Lottery and government funding.³⁵ As well as connecting volunteers to VCS groups, these centres also provide additional services and resources, including training, mentoring and information.

Swansea CVS, Neath Port Talbot CVS and Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations worked together to develop the [Link Up project](#) after they identified a gap in skills development and mentoring for trustees. Link Up supports organisations to carry out a skills audit, recruit new trustees with the skills they need, and provide a trustee induction. Link Up also offers existing trustees and boards the opportunity to be matched with a volunteer mentor who can support them in developing their skills and confidence.

By 2021, the third year of the project, Link Up has supported 53 trustee boards to develop their recruitment practices and procedures. It has 30 mentors from private, public, and academic sectors supporting trustee boards and has trained and placed 73 new trustees.³⁶ Boards and trustees report improved knowledge of governance and greater confidence to resolve management issues. As one trustee said: "I was allocated a mentor and she has been amazing. She helped me find solutions to challenges."³⁷



Showing the value of volunteering in the health sector

Helpforce works with NHS trusts and voluntary organisations to increase and improve volunteering opportunities in the health and care sector. They bring staff, patients and volunteers together to co-design programmes and show the powerful impact of volunteering in hospitals and the wider community. We've supported their work through National Lottery funding since 2017.

Helpforce has built strong relationships with over 100 NHS trusts across England, adding a level of coordination and quality to volunteering in the sector that wasn't there before. They enable trusts to test, measure and share new approaches³⁸ and make the case for investment in volunteering, by providing them with impact and insight tools to measure their volunteer services.

For example, West Suffolk NHS Trust worked with Helpforce to compile data about bleep volunteers. Wearing a bright red uniform, these volunteers run errands across the hospital, carrying a phone so staff can contact them. They support staff with non-clinical tasks such as collecting and delivering medicine from the pharmacy for patients to take home. This frees up valuable time for staff to focus on patient care.

From September 2018 to September 2019, tracking the amount of times the volunteers collected and delivered medicine, the volunteers saved staff more than 54 hours and made 450 trips to and from the hospital pharmacy on average per month. This is estimated to have saved hospital staff more than 700 hours over a 13-month period.³⁹

Overall, their evidence from over 900 surveys shows that volunteers can improve patient experience and patient-centred care, reduce patient anxiety and staff stress, and give staff more time to care.⁴⁰ The research also suggests that volunteers help to improve the mobility of patients while in hospital, lift their spirits, and keep them active when they return to their communities.

"The Helpforce pilot helped us push the boundaries of volunteering, rethink the nature of volunteer roles, and experiment with how service innovations could be managed differently," said Carrie Smith, Volunteer Services Manager from Southampton.⁴¹

3. Accessible and inclusive volunteering opportunities

Evidence shows that people who have the most to gain from volunteering face some of the biggest barriers to getting involved. Life satisfaction gains, for example, have been shown to be greater for those on low incomes, but this demographic is also less likely to get involved with volunteering than higher income groups, with ill health and disability cited as particular barriers.⁴²

Research has also found that young people, Black, Asian and other minority ethnic volunteers, and disabled people are more likely to have a less positive experience of volunteering, and that volunteers from ethnic minority backgrounds have lower levels of satisfaction as volunteers. Disabled volunteers are also more likely to say volunteering negatively impacted their health and wellbeing than non-disabled people.⁴³

Our funding works to remove the barriers to volunteering, like costs associated with taking part. We support grantholders to cover travel, food, phone bills and other expenses, so that people don't have to choose between paying up or missing out.

This is where small grants can make a big difference. In 2019, [Belvoir Community Hub](#) in Belfast found that demand for services was growing, as was the number of people wanting to volunteer. The organisation applied for a National Lottery Awards for All grant to help recruit more volunteers, deliver training and pay for volunteer expenses, helping the hub to extend opening hours and offer better volunteer support.

National Lottery funding also supports more strategic initiatives to increase understanding and raise awareness about how volunteering can be more inclusive. [Centre for Ageing Better](#) is a charitable foundation funded through the National Lottery Community Fund. They've been working with DCMS to explore how organisations can ensure volunteering opportunities are open to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. Together, they've now funded five projects which pilot, develop and share new approaches to inclusive volunteering.

Growing Connections was one of these. It brought together 89 staff and volunteers from a network of community gardens in London to learn about age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles and develop resources for other gardens including [a guide to inclusive and welcoming community gardens](#).⁴⁴ "We've got a lot out of it", said a representative of one of the gardens involved. "We've improved our garden, we're now more inclusive and I feel that we're in a better place to reach out to new volunteers and keep them interested and involved."⁴⁵

Some grantholders target specific groups who they know are under-represented amongst volunteers. They find out what makes it easier for these groups to take part, and help to break down the barriers they are facing. The [Scottish Refugee Council](#) (SRC), for instance, worked with charities and community groups to increase volunteering opportunities for refugees. Over the course of a year, they invited 32 groups to monthly workshops, which gave 162 prospective volunteers the chance to meet them face to face. The organisations learned what refugees and asylum seekers had to offer and were able to recruit volunteers on the spot.⁴⁶ As part of the project, SRC created a [top tips resource](#) to help organisations make volunteering accessible and valuable for refugees and asylum seekers.

Specialist charities are well placed to design and deliver accessible, inclusive volunteering programmes. Organisations led by and for marginalised groups have the knowledge, connections and experience to create volunteering programmes that work for people who often otherwise find themselves left out. That's why we fund projects like [Can Do Cymru](#), which supports young disabled people aged 16-35 to lead on social action in their local communities.

By the end of their first year, Can Do Cymru had recruited and engaged 262 young disabled people, who had contributed over 2,200 hours of time to volunteering in the community. For instance, the project collaborated with Matt's Café, a pay-as-you-feel community café, to put together essential care packs for homeless people in Swansea. The volunteers were so inspired by the project that they continued creating packs to donate to various shelters, reaching over 150 homeless people in the Swansea community in December 2020.

Participant surveys show how the chance to volunteer and make a difference to their local community had benefitted the young people. All of the Can Do volunteers said they felt more included in their local community, while 95% reported learning new skills, and 59% said they wanted to take up further volunteering, training or employment opportunities as a result of participating in the project.⁴⁷

Volunteer wellbeing champions⁴⁸

Between 2007 and 2021, [Time to Change](#), led by Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, helped to shift public attitudes to mental health. 5.3 million more people demonstrated greater understanding of, or compassion towards people with mental health problems – a 12.5% improvement. Our funding enabled the work of these leading mental health charities to reach millions of people and contribute to this change.

Volunteer mental health champions were at the heart of their work. Time to Change staff trained over 7,500 people with lived experience of mental health problems to campaign, raise awareness and tackle stigma and discrimination. Working in their local community, workplace, school, college or youth organisation, the volunteer champions were given opportunities to talk through their own experiences in safe spaces, then trained to share their stories.

In 2019, 65 young champions delivered 1,183 conversations in schools, online and in communities. Young champions in the North East ran a session at a school to 25 pupils and five staff on active listening skills, to “demonstrate one way that people can be in their mate's corner”. As a result, the pupils from the school started to make plans to have ‘wellbeing warriors’ at the schools – pupils who would look out for others who might be having a hard time.

In the same year, 87% of their new workplace volunteer champions took action at work, for example by talking about their experiences publicly and training line managers.

As well as helping to raise awareness, volunteering benefitted the champions themselves. A 2019 survey of 796 champions found that nearly three-quarters (72%) felt more confident to challenge stigma and discrimination as a result of taking part (compared to 61% in 2018).

Paths to a better future: Impact on volunteers

We know that volunteers benefit from helping their communities. Our survey of nearly 14,000 people who volunteered with CCSF-funded projects reports that an overwhelming majority of participants (99%) had experienced at least one personal benefit from volunteering, with “making a difference” (84%) and “a sense of purpose” or “personal achievement” (both 66%) particularly common.

Three quarters of respondents also said they had enjoyed it.⁴⁹ But these positive changes shouldn't be taken for granted. As we've seen, the effects of volunteering are shaped by a number of factors, such as the volunteer's own circumstances and motivations, and how well their experience is managed.⁵⁰

1. A sense of purpose and connection

We know that wanting to make a difference is a leading motivator for many people to start volunteering.⁵¹ In turn, this can help them to feel they are part of something bigger - which helps to improve their own wellbeing.

[Ageless Thanet](#) uses volunteering to promote a sense of purpose in the lives of older people. They asked 39 people who had completed 50 hours of volunteering how the experience had affected them. More than 84% felt they were making a useful contribution. This was reported alongside increases of confidence (65%), having things to look forward to (69%) and feeling more motivated (71%).⁵²

Volunteering can also reduce loneliness for the people who give their time, as well as the people they help. [Every Step of the Way](#) (ESOW), delivered by Fulfilling Lives in Birmingham, has trained and supported 131 people experiencing multiple and complex disadvantage to volunteer as 'experts by experience', to support their peers and help other services to understand what they are going through. "I've volunteered elsewhere but Every Step of the Way is different," explains Eddie, one of the Experts by Experience. "I'm part of a community. I feel connected, with the people who run it as well as with my colleagues."⁵³



Our Bright Future

Many older people who make a contribution to the wider community see an increase in the quantity and quality of their social connections, increased self-esteem and sense of purpose, and improved levels of life satisfaction – all of which help people to feel less lonely and isolated.⁵⁴ And people who are at risk of loneliness may prefer the idea of helping others who are isolated, rather than joining a club or service as a beneficiary.⁵⁵

For example, [Access Ambassadors](#) in Sheffield matches volunteers aged 50 and over, with older people to help them get involved in activities. After Margaret lost her husband, she was in a “bit of a black hole”. She was referred for home-based counselling by her GP and later matched with an Access Ambassador, Josie. Josie took Margaret on shopping trips, as well as places she had never visited, or might not have chosen for herself. Josie recognised the benefits of the volunteering opportunity for herself as well. “I live alone, and could have been in Margaret’s place. [...] It wasn’t what we did, it was the meeting, talking and sharing stories.” Margaret and Josie have continued to meet up as friends after the formal end of the intervention.⁵⁶



Ageing Better

2. Developing skills and gaining experience

Volunteering offers the chance to develop existing skills and learn new ones. These could be soft skills such as communication, organisation, planning and problem solving, as well as vocational or practical skills such as digital skills, gardening and customer service. When people gain skills, it can help them to find or progress into employment, or simply enrich their personal life and relationships.

Many of our grantholders use volunteering as a stepping stone to employment. [Fulfilling Lives](#), which works with people who experience multiple disadvantage, found that volunteering can provide experience of a work environment without the pressure of a formal role. A quarter of people receiving intensive support from Fulfilling Lives undertake some form of volunteering, and people who leave the programme with a positive destination are more likely to have done some volunteering (31%) compared to those who leave for more negative reasons (18%).⁵⁷ Participants say that learning new skills and reflecting on their strengths helps them to plan their next steps to employment.

[Liberty Consortium](#) runs Thrift, a charity shop in Derry/Londonderry, where young people with a learning disability or autism can gain experience in retail and customer service. Project coordinator Sharon Tosh explains that, “These young people really want to be accepted in the community and want to have a job.” Young volunteers run every aspect of the shop, including serving customers, managing stock and cleaning. The placements are an important stage in their journey to the workplace, giving volunteers meaningful work experience to move into employment or further volunteering opportunities.⁵⁸

Volunteering can also be a way to gain skills in a specific sector. Funded through Our Bright Future, [UpRising](#)'s environmental leadership programme coached and mentored young people aged 18-24 to become green leaders. After a leadership weekend, knowledge sessions with high-level professionals, and skills sessions from professional trainers, participants volunteered on a campaign of their choice. Over 3,000 young volunteers engaged with the programme's 62 campaigns, on topics such as conservation, body image, mental health, and supporting ex-offenders.

Baseline and post-course surveys illustrate the impact on UpRising participants. Across the programme, they reported a 14% improvement in confidence, 28% increase in knowledge, and 43% increase in skills. One in five reported an increase in wellbeing. Participant Agathe Dijoud said, "UpRising has challenged me, pushing me outside my comfort zone but this has helped me to significantly improve my confidence in a lot of areas. As well gaining skills which I think will help me in my future career."⁵⁹

3. Personal growth and development

Volunteering can create a sense of achievement and of being valued. Our grantholders have seen improved confidence and self-esteem, higher aspirations, or better resilience among their volunteers. All of these contribute to personal growth and development.

Match funded through the #iwill fund, [Potentials Fund](#) projects help 10 to 20-year-olds get involved in volunteering. They range from mentoring programmes at football clubs, to training for young volunteers so they can repair and refurbish youth clubs and community centres.

Compared to their scores at registration, volunteers from across the Potentials Fund reported improvements across a range of individual development indicators; 38% felt more confident to try new things, 40% felt better able to motivate and influence people, 41% felt more capable of achieving their goals, and 41% improved their score for 'feeling satisfied with myself'. They became more confident to speak in groups, deliver presentations or lead groups of other volunteers and participants. One recorded how a shy volunteer had developed: "She was one of the quietest engaged on the project. She struggled to speak up and had little self-belief in herself. The team has had the pleasure of seeing her grow in confidence and she was the stand out volunteer during a sports day event, which involved 50 Year 1 and 2 students."⁶⁰

Volunteers involved in [Big Local](#) have also talked about gaining a new lease of life and a sense of belonging. Big Local has awarded funds of at least £1 million to 150 neighbourhoods across England over 10-15 years, putting residents themselves in charge of improving their communities. Across these projects, volunteering ranges from environmental work like litter picking and gardening groups, to partnership members who decide how the funding is spent. They found that promoting involvement and enabling local people to influence projects helps them to develop new skills, improve their aspirations, and grow in confidence. One participant explained how they felt as a result of their volunteering role, "I've never done this [voluntary/community work] before. I'm learning all the time. But helping people has given me a new lease of life."⁶¹

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