



SPIRIT OF 2012  
INVESTING IN HAPPINESS



**CAN EVENTS HELP BUILD  
HAPPY, THRIVING AND MORE  
CONNECTED COMMUNITIES?**

**A SPIRIT OF 2012 INQUIRY  
CHAired BY SIR THOMAS  
HUGHES-HALLETT**

**REPORT**

**1**

**HOW EVENTS CAN BOOST  
VOLUNTEERING**

**EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Major sporting events, royal jubilees, street parties and festivals are occasions that bring people from all walks of life together to commemorate or celebrate moments of importance in national and community life. As well as the pleasure they bring, such moments can act as a catalyst that leads to social and economic change, some of which may be realised years after event has ended. The positive impacts of events can include new sporting or cultural facilities, local regeneration, a larger visitor economy, new jobs, and increased inward investment. Events can also strengthen social connections and increase civic pride. Most events require volunteers for them to run smoothly: 70,000 people came forward to offer their time as Olympic and Paralympic Games. Volunteering at an event can have positive social and economic impacts, and be a route to regular volunteering.**

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While events can leave lasting positive impacts, such legacies have not always been achieved.. Research commissioned by Sport England showed that just 7% of first-time volunteers at large sporting events go on to volunteer in grassroots sports<sup>5</sup>. Many organisations that work with volunteers feel that the power of events to boost volunteering is not being fully utilised. Many organisations that work with volunteers feel that more could be done to leverage the power of events to boost volunteering.

Next year will see the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games which will involve 25,000 volunteers. Nearly 5,000 volunteers will be involved in the Rugby League World Cup and the Women's Euros in 2022. It is likely that hundreds of thousands of people will volunteer over the Platinum Jubilee weekend, organising street parties and local pageants. Without a coordinated effort, the events of 2022 may not leave a volunteering legacy. This is why *Happy, Thriving and Connected Communities: The Spirit of 2012 Inquiry into the Impacts of Events* decided to focus on volunteering for its launch report. We want build on the surge in volunteering we saw during lockdown and use next year's events to grow this social movement even more.

To inform this launch report, the Inquiry took expert evidence from people with experience of working with volunteers or organising events and undertook five online discussions with members of the public. Participants were selected to be broadly representative of the UK population in relation to gender, ethnicity and social grade, using a professional market research company. The Inquiry also commissioned a nationally-representative survey of 2,073 UK adults, undertaken by ICM between 24-27 September 2021.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONTINUED

**Our findings showed that 40% of UK adults had volunteered before, or since, the start of the pandemic in March 2020, either informally, for example, by helping a vulnerable neighbour or by giving their time to a formally-constituted organisation.**

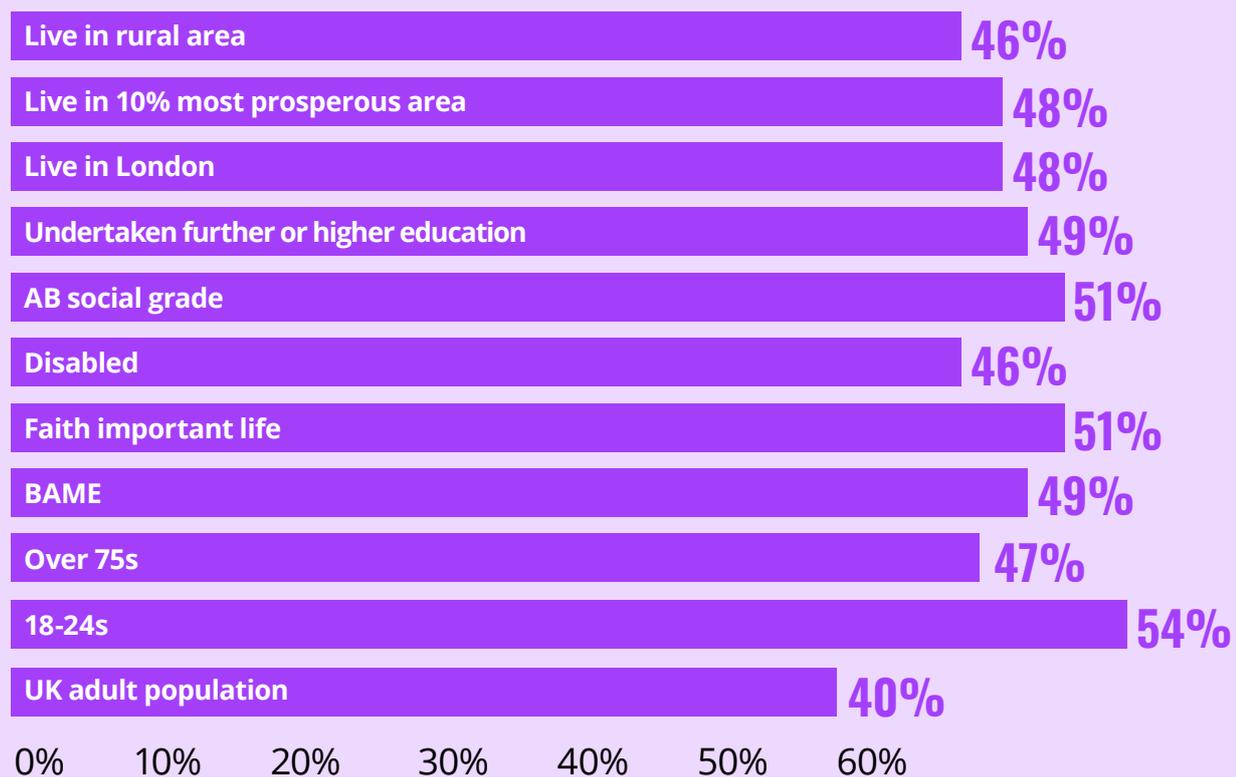
# 85%

**of women feel that volunteering improves people’s mental health and wellbeing, compared to 76% of men.**

Eight out of 10 people volunteer in their local area and people are most likely to give their time to civil society organisations, but some people volunteer in public sector organisations, for example as special constables, in schools or for the NHS. The environment, community development, and health and social care are the volunteering causes that have most appeal, both to those who currently give their time and to those with no history of volunteering.

The availability of free time, social values, and different perceptions about the value of volunteering all influence a person’s propensity to offer their time. Figure 1 shows that some sectors of society are more likely to volunteer. The survey showed that younger people are more likely to be motivated by the impacts that volunteering can have on their employability, with 87% of 18-24 year olds agreeing volunteering helped improve people’s skills and job prospects. 85% of women feel that volunteering improves people’s mental health and wellbeing, compared to 76% of men.

**Fig 1. Percentage of adults who said they had volunteered before or since March 2020**



Source: ICM survey of 2,073 UK adults, undertaken for Spirit of 2012, 24-27 September 2021

## WHO VOLUNTEERS? CONTINUED

About half the people who volunteer are regular volunteers, giving their time more than once a month. Scaled up, this suggests that 9% of the adult population of the UK (4.8 million people) are regular volunteers. Younger people and those from higher social grades are less likely to be occasional volunteers, while those who give their time on a regular basis are more likely to be of retirement age. Some 72% of volunteers aged 65-74, and 73% of those over 75 reported that they volunteer more than once a month.

### Who volunteers at events?

Some 14% of adults said that they had volunteered at a local or major event in the last 12 months, with another 29% of people saying that they had volunteered in this way more than 12 months ago. The large majority (86%) of regular volunteers

have given their time to help out at an event, but large and small events also attract first-time and occasional volunteers who can benefit from the experience. Volunteering at community events has a low bar to entry and can be a route to more active involvement in people's local communities.

### Who does not volunteer?

The survey suggests that 60% of people do not volunteer. About a third of non-volunteers have specific reasons for not giving their time; they may feel volunteering is not for them or it is not their responsibility. The other two-thirds of this group, who amount to 21 million people or 40% of the UK's adult population, may be interested in volunteering at a future date but currently face barriers that prevent them doing so.

### Of every 50 people



## Better volunteering

Volunteering brings many benefits, to the individuals who give their time and to the organisations that receive help. Sectors such as heritage and grassroots sport would not be able to function without the help of volunteers, as wouldn't most of the UK's smaller charities. Volunteering also strengthens social connections and gives people a stronger stake in society. But these benefits will only be realised if volunteering is a positive experience that leads to positive impacts. The Inquiry has drawn on a range of evidence to develop some practical ideas for action to help achieve these aims. In particular we believe that we can be much better at using the power of events to boost volunteering.

The proposals below represent the Inquiry's initial ideas. We will develop them further over the next 12 months before we produce our final report. However, we are confident that our proposals, if implemented, would mean that volunteering would have greater positive impacts. Here are the Inquiry's initial ideas for action.

### 1. Better communications

As a society, we need to make a stronger case for volunteering and give people more information about what it involves and the benefits to them and their communities. Nearly half (44%) of people who did not volunteer said they would be more likely to volunteer if they knew there were things that they could do that would interest them; 36% of this group said that they would be more likely to volunteer if they had more information about what in volunteering involved.

We also need to champion volunteering. We would like to see the honours system give greater recognition to volunteers. We would like the Government to consider appointing 100 volunteering champions from a range of different professions and backgrounds, including those from business, faith, education, and from the Royal Family. Each champion would serve a fixed term and be tasked with making the case for volunteering with their peers and in their local communities.



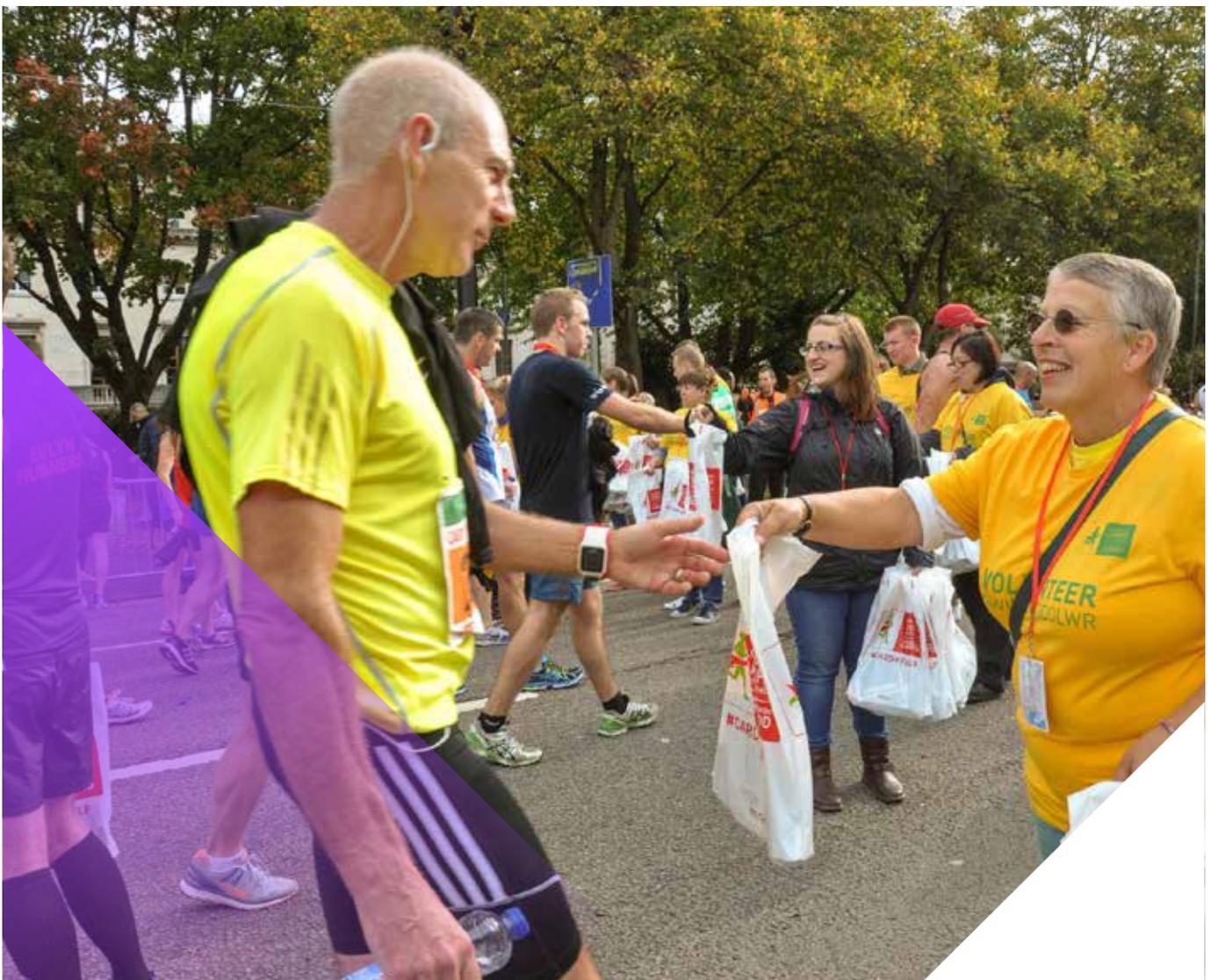
## 2. Better volunteering experiences

Organisations that work with volunteers, including event organisers, need to consider how they deploy volunteers, the tasks they offer and how volunteers are supported in their roles. Making sure that volunteering is a positive experience will make it easier for these organisations to recruit and retain volunteers. The biggest barrier to volunteering is competing pressures on people's time due to work, study or caring responsibilities. The Inquiry's survey showed that nearly half (46%) of people who were not volunteering said they would be more likely to offer their time if there were flexible ways to help, for example, occasional tasks or things they could do from home or online. Offering people a range of volunteering activities has already been shown to be a successful means of recruiting and retaining volunteers.

## 3. A funded local infrastructure

Sometimes those who stand to gain the most from volunteering face the greatest barriers that prevent them from taking part. If the benefits that volunteering brings are to be fully realised, such barriers need to be addressed, and volunteers themselves need feedback and support.

This requires Government and philanthropic investment in local volunteering infrastructures, including the legacy organisations that work with volunteers after major events. Such funding should be used to reduce barriers to volunteering faced by disabled people. It should also cover items such as volunteers' travel expenses, and the salaries of paid staff to recruit and support volunteers, and to build relationships with colleges and employers, as well as community and faith groups who can often reach people who are not coming forward to volunteer.



## 4. Better use of digital

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We can make better use of technology to encourage volunteering. We would like to see greater use made of digital platforms that link organisations that need volunteers with people who are able to give their time.

The Government should also consider a programme of work to develop a national volunteering wallet or passport that would provide a record of a person's identity and safeguarding checks, training, as well as recording their volunteering experience. This would reduce the delays associated with placing volunteers and make it easier for people to give their time to a number of organisations.

## 5. Events as an opportunity to recruit volunteers

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The profile of volunteering was raised during the London 2012 Games with evidence suggesting that more people came forward to volunteer. We can use events to champion volunteering, give people information about what it entails and recruit volunteers. We would like to see football matches used to recruit volunteers for grassroots sports and local community organisations. Concerts and festivals should be used to recruit volunteers for arts organisations.

## 6. Use anniversaries to boost volunteering

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Anniversaries present opportunities to champion specific areas of volunteering. The 75th anniversary of the NHS in 2023 could be used to champion volunteering in health and social care, and for projects which aim to improve the nation's physical and mental wellbeing. In 2024 it will be 200 years since the RNLI and the RSPCA were founded. The work of land and sea rescue and animal welfare organisations is supported by many thousands of volunteers, and these anniversaries could also be used to boost volunteering for these causes.

## 7. Funder leverage

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Funders should use their influence to make sure that events have positive social and economic impacts. Events should only receive public subsidies if organisers set out detailed delivery plans for securing positive impacts on society, including through volunteering. There should be demarcated funding for legacy volunteering projects in Government, and philanthropic support for sporting and cultural events, including future UK Cities of Culture.

## 8. Planning and strategy

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Taking the above ideas forward will require leadership and delivery plans from the Government, including administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We would like to see volunteering strategies in all four nations of the UK, in the combined authorities and in every local authority. These strategies should be backed up with funding and set out how the UK (i) can increase the number of people who volunteer and improve the experience (ii) can increase the positive social and economic impacts that volunteering can bring, particularly among social groups who are less likely to volunteer.

Planning for legacy volunteering programmes must not be afterthought. It needs to be an integral part of the planning of an event and early decisions need to be taken about the ownership of volunteers' contact details.

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To find out more about Spirit of 2012, visit  
**[www.spiritof2012.org.uk](http://www.spiritof2012.org.uk)**

