

Power in purpose

The difference we make in mobilising volunteers



Executive summary

- Volunteers are the lifeblood of the voluntary and community sector. Without their dedication and skills, much of the work of charities and community groups would simply not be possible. In 2016, the economic value of formal volunteering alone was estimated at £23.9 billion. During the Covid-19 pandemic, an estimated 10 million volunteers have supported community responses across the UK.
- 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, worth a combined £690 million in funding from National Lottery proceeds, government and other sources.

Social and economic impacts

- VCS grantees are helping more people to get involved in their community or to support a cause close to their heart. Three of our largest investments alone - [#iwill](#), [Our Bright Future](#) and [Spirit of 2012](#) - have given **662,000 people an opportunity to make a difference** in their community since 2013.
- Volunteering has personal, social and environmental benefits, but also makes an economic contribution. An estimated **1.9 million volunteers** from the charities we fund have **contributed £4 billion to the economy** over the past three years. [Ageing Better](#) uses volunteering to help people find purpose and make connections. Between 2015 and 2020, 14 partnerships worked with over 19,500 volunteers, who contributed almost 630,000 hours, or **83,000 working days**.
- Recognising the importance of volunteering to our society, we have increased volunteering grants by 64% between 2013 and 2019. For example, [Create Your Space](#) projects work with local volunteers to transform outdoor community spaces. After just over a year, volunteers had given 3,175 hours to plant wildflowers, guide visitors, clear litter, and design new outdoor projects.
- Volunteers have been at the heart of Covid-19 responses, from delivering food to reducing loneliness. Our 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. In England and Northern Ireland, the 10,000 groups we funded worked with 1.5 million volunteers to mitigate the pandemic's impact.
- This includes supporting newly formed groups such as [Greenwich Mutual Aid](#), a volunteer-led group, which fulfilled over 300 requests for help and delivered over 400 foodbank parcels. A Coronavirus Community Support Fund grant paid for volunteer expenses and a coordinator, to ensure the group could sustain this vital work. We also supported city-wide efforts. [Voluntary Action Leeds](#) helped to co-ordinate 8,000 new volunteers, referring them to the 1,500 Leeds groups that responded to Covid-19 in their communities.

A stronger, more diverse VCS

- Around 94% of our grantholders involved volunteers in their work during Covid-19. And in 2021/2022, the 10,000 groups we funded in England and Northern Ireland worked with around 150 volunteers each; seven for every paid member of staff.
- Our funding supports charities to find candidates for specific roles, as well as broader volunteer recruitment. [More Than Food](#) in Lisburn, Northern Ireland began as a small foodbank with five volunteers. With our funding, the project expanded into a full support service for people experiencing food poverty, with workshops, creative activities and cookery classes sitting alongside core food provision. The project has had 320 volunteers over 2.5 years, supporting 6,500 people.
- No matter how many volunteers an organisation has, good volunteer management is key to maintaining quality services and enabling volunteers to thrive. Our funding supports organisations to better manage their volunteers. Including things like training, hiring coordinators, or involving volunteers in decision making. We also fund volunteer centres to connect volunteers to VCS groups and provide training and mentoring. Over the past five years, we've supported 59% of volunteer centres in England, with £56 million in National Lottery and government funding.
- Our funding works to remove barriers to volunteering and create more inclusive opportunities. This includes funding for costs associated with taking part, such as travel, food, phone bills and other expenses. We also support strategic initiatives to increase understanding and raise awareness about how volunteering can be more inclusive. Between 2007 and 2021, [Time to Change](#) trained over 7,500 volunteers with lived experience of mental health problems to campaign, raise awareness, and tackle stigma and discrimination.

Paths to a better future: Impact on volunteers

- Volunteers benefit from helping their communities. Our survey of nearly 14,000 CCSF project volunteers found that almost all participants (99%) experienced at least one personal benefit from volunteering, with 'making a difference' (84%) and 'sense of purpose' or 'personal achievement' (both 66%) scoring highly.
- Volunteering offers the chance to develop and learn new skills. [Fulfilling Lives](#), which works with people who experience multiple disadvantage, found volunteering can provide work experience without the pressure of a formal role. A quarter of people supported by Fulfilling Lives undertake volunteering, and those who leave with a positive destination are more likely to have done so (31%) than those who leave for negative reasons (18%).
- Grantholders see improved confidence, higher aspirations and better resilience among volunteers. Match funded through #iwill Fund, [Potentials Fund](#) helps 10 to 20-year-olds get involved in volunteering, from mentoring at football clubs, to refurbishing youth clubs. Compared to volunteers' scores at registration: 38% felt more confident to try new things after taking part, 40% felt better able to motivate and influence people, and 41% felt more capable of achieving goals.