

Organisational Involvement of Volunteers who are 60+ Years Old

**A Snapshot of the opinions and practices of organisations
within the Belfast / Castlereagh and Londonderry /
Strabane Area**

April 2009

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The Volunteer Development Agency is the lead organisation in Northern Ireland for the promotion of volunteering. The Agency also develops volunteering by providing 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

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Main Findings

94.7% (n=268) of the organisations surveyed involved volunteers. 78% (n=209) of these organisations involved volunteers who were aged 60 + years.

Overall, the majority (25.4%) of organisations which responded to the survey categorised themselves as working within community development. 6% of the organisations which responded were categorised as specifically 'older people' groups.

The average number of volunteers within the organisations surveyed was 16; this concurs with the NI representative survey (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). Volunteers in the 60-69 age group made up 20.5% (1/5) of all volunteers involved in organisations.

The most common volunteer activities carried out were organising or helping to run an activity or event, leading a group / member of a committee / trustees, raising or handling money and secretarial / admin or clerical work.

The vast majority (96.3%) of the volunteer involving organisations surveyed believed that the volunteering roles they offered were suitable for the 60+ age group.

The most commonly cited benefits of involving volunteers who are aged 60+ years were commitment / flexibility / enthusiasm and their ability to assist in the governance and management of the organisation.

The two most common barriers to involving people who are aged 60+ were people not knowing how to find out about opportunities and worries about the risk of liability and fear of bureaucracy.

The main reason given by organisations for not involving volunteers was because the remit of the organisation was not suitable for volunteer roles. Approximately a quarter of the organisations agreed that people who are 60+ years old do not approach their organisation.

There was a range of practices that organisations said were working successfully in their engagement with older volunteers, including providing good management, direct recruitment or linking in with older people through personal contact or through existing groups / networks.

57.6% of volunteer involving organisations did not use the services of their local volunteer centre. Two main reasons given were (1) not deeming it necessary to use a volunteer centre / successfully using other recruitment methods and (2) lack of awareness of volunteer centres / no recognised benefits to using a volunteer centre.

Organisations were asked about the type of additional support which would improve their capacity to involve the 60+ age group. The points raised were help with resource requirements i.e. funding for staff to manage volunteers, office space, advertising / marketing material. As well as the need for support to promote volunteering opportunities more effectively and to a wider audience i.e. volunteer fair, volunteer centres.

Organisational Survey

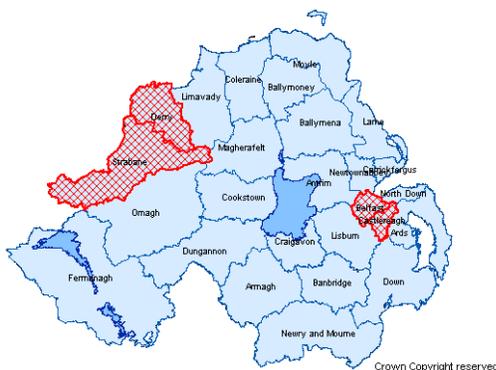
Introduction

Background

The 'Unlocking Potential' project is a five year project, funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies. The overall aim of the project is to encourage and support healthier ageing and civic engagement in Northern Ireland, by enabling and empowering older people to take part in volunteering. The project has a number of specific objectives which will be informed by ongoing pieces of research during key stages of the work.

The Objectives of the 'Unlocking Potential' Project

- To challenge attitudes and raise awareness of the contribution and benefits of volunteering;
- To increase the number of older volunteers (*65+ years old by 10% over the next five years and the number of 50-64 year olds by 5%. In numeric terms this equates to an expected increase of 7,650 volunteers*);
- To improve access to and develop volunteer opportunities for older people that meet their expectations and positively impact on communities; and
- To enhance, older people's quality of life in relation to equality, social inclusion, support and health issues.



In operational terms the project has a regional focus, the co-ordination and management of which is provided by the Volunteer Development Agency. In addition there are two delivery partners, VSB and Northwest Volunteer Centre which provide local delivery of the project in Belfast / Castlereagh and Londonderry / Strabane respectively.

Objectives of the Survey

This survey forms part of a series of pieces of research which will be undertaken over the course of the project to inform public policy and best practice in the recruitment, management and support of older volunteers.

The main aim of this survey was to provide a 'snap shot' of a sample of volunteer involving organisations within the two delivery areas of the project. There were also a number of objectives which this survey hoped to achieve-

- To identify organisations involvement of older volunteers;
- To identify the range & type of volunteer opportunities offered;
- To identify the recruitment methods used by organisations;
- To understand the perceived benefits / barriers of involving volunteers who are 60+;
- To Identify strategies in recruiting and supporting volunteers who are 60+ and
- To understand organisational reasons for not involving volunteers who are 60+.

Policy Context

Older People Issues

Historically, a major focus of public policy relating to older people has been on their needs or their perceived dependency on the state i.e. demands on health and social care services, pension short fall. Unfortunately this narrow vision disregards the past and current contribution that older people make to the societies in which they live. However, particularly in the last couple of years government has taken responsibility for addressing social inclusion and ageing issues by committing to the establishment of an Office of the Commissioner for Older People as well as developing policy documents specifically addressing age related issues i.e. 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society- A Strategy for Promoting the Social Inclusion of Older People' and the 'Lifetime Opportunities Strategy' (OFMDFM 2005, OFMDFM 2006).

The pressure on public policy decisions has been carried out through a limited number of large older people's rights based groups, such as Age Concern, Help the Aged and more recently Age Sector Platform, as generally the infrastructure of older people groups in Northern Ireland is typically made up of 100's of small, fragmented groups which although socially pervasive are politically weak (Acheson & Harvey 2008).

Volunteering

In terms of volunteering, people who are 50+ years old are the least likely group to volunteer and this trend increases as people move into the 65+ age range (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). Research has also found that those people who were not in any form of employment, which one could assume had more available free time to volunteer, were in fact the least likely to volunteer (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). Research carried out recently has also demonstrated the positive influence which volunteering has had on people who are 60+ years old (Volunteer Development Agency 2009:1). For the remainder of the report when the term 'older people' or 'older age groups' are used this will refer to those who are 60+.

Methodology

The main aim of the survey was to provide a 'snap shot' of a sample of volunteer involving organisations within the two project delivery areas (Belfast / Castlereagh and Londonderry / Strabane). The survey was piloted with 11 organisations which were known to involve volunteers. Comments and issues raised by the pilot were used to amend the final survey before it was disseminated.

The distribution list of organisations was compiled using the existing databases of Volunteer Development Agency, NIVCA, NW volunteer centre and VSB. Internet searches of organisations which were known to be linked to the older age group were also carried out, as it is this age group who are a specific focus of the project. The database once merged was cleaned for duplicates and for organisations which were outside of the geographical parameters of the study. It was apparent that this list was not exhaustive and may have been affected by selection bias as many organisations, particularly smaller ones are difficult to locate and may not have been traceable through the search methods used. In terms of administration of the survey an electronic version using survey monkey was provided for those organisations that had an email address, a postal survey was sent to those organisations for which no email was available. A second postal and electronic version of the survey was sent to boost the response rate, as much as possible. To encourage people to complete the survey, organisations that completed the survey were entered into a prize draw which was worth £500 of Agency training services.

SPSS was used to analyse the survey results, the electronic surveys were imported into SPSS from Survey Monkey as an excel document and the postal surveys were input directly.

Geographic Area	Total Sample	(frequency) returns	(%) return
Belfast / Castlereagh	962	189	19.6
Londonderry/ Strabane	339	94	27.7
Overall	1301	283	21.8

As this was preliminary research in which little information was already known about the number and size of organisations which involved older

volunteers, within the 2 geographical areas, a convenience sampling technique was deemed the most suitable. Overall, the response rate for the survey was 21.8%. In terms of geographic breakdown this equates to 19.6% for Belfast / Castlereagh and 27.7% for Londonderry / Strabane. Due to the relatively small response, the fact that a convenience strategy for data collection was used and the evidence of self selection bias towards those organisations that involve volunteers in the response sample, interpretation of the findings should not be taken as representing a true picture of the whole population of voluntary organisations within the project delivery areas. However, it has provided a useful exploration of the views and practices of organisations within the delivery areas and in particular has identified specific organisations who are interested in getting involved in the project further.

Findings

Organisational Involvement of Volunteers



Overall, 94.7% (n=268) of the organisations surveyed involved volunteers, 5.3% (n=15) did not. In a geographical context, 97% of respondents in Belfast / Castlereagh involved volunteers compared to 89% in Londonderry / Derry. The average number of volunteers within the organisations surveyed was n=16, this concurs with the NI representative survey (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). In terms of geographic areas, the organisations in Belfast / Castlereagh had on average n=20 volunteers each compared to n=14 in Derry / Strabane.

Extent of Volunteering by Organisation Type

	Overall	Belfast	Derry
Involve Volunteers	94.7%	97.4%	89.4%
Total Number of Organisations	268	184	84
Average number of volunteers ¹	16	20	14

Demographic profile of volunteers

	Overall (%)	Belfast	Derry
Male	49.6	49.7	49.3
Female	50.4	50.3	50.7
Under 16	2.0	2.4	1.4
16-24	16.3	17.7	13.5
25-49	25.8	25.8	25.7
50-59	23.3	22.5	24.8
60-69	20.5	19.1	23.0
70-79	9.4	9.3	9.5
80+	2.8	3.1	2.3

Gender and Age Breakdown of Volunteers

Within the survey, 640 volunteers were involved with 268 organisations. The survey also showed that organisations had an equal split between male and female volunteers. Generally, the trend in Northern Ireland has shown a greater number of female volunteers within organisations than males. Volunteers in the 60-69 age group made up 20.5% (1/5) of all volunteers recorded by organisations. The 'It's All About Time' research stated that the age

¹ The median was used to estimate the average number of volunteers as a small number of organisations had a very significant number of volunteers. The use of the mean would have meant any estimates produced on these figures would have been skewed.

range 24-54 years old represents the core volunteer base for most groups (41%) (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). A similar picture was gained from this survey in which the most common age group for volunteers was 25-59 (49.1%).

Breakdown of Respondents by Category of Organisation

	%		
	Overall	Belfast	Derry
Community Development	25.4	24.3	27.7
Health / Social Care	19.1	17.5	22.3
Arts / Culture	13.1	9.5	20.2
Young People	11.7	14.8	5.3
Older People	6	5.8	6.4
Women's Group	5.3	5.3	5.3
Disability	4.2	5.3	2.1
Religion / Faith	3.9	5.3	1.1
Animal / Conservation	3.2	4.2	1.1
Political / Law	2.5	3.2	1.1
Unknown	2.5	1.6	4.3
Information / advice	1.8	1.6	2.1
Statutory	1.4	1.6	1.1

n=283

n=189

n=94

Overall, the majority of organisations who responded to the survey were categorised as working within the field of community development (25.4%) and health / social care (19.1%); this was followed by and arts /culture (13.1%) and young people (11.7%).

Range of Roles carried out within Organisations

Roles carried out by volunteers in your organisation

	%		
	Overall	Belfast	Derry
Organising or helping to run an activity or event	75.7	73.9	79.8
Leading a group / member of a committee / trustees	70.9	72.3	67.9
Raising and Handling Money	54.1	53.3	56.0
Secretarial / admin / clerical work	51.5	48.9	57.1
Working with young people	42.9	45.7	36.9
Promotion	40.3	39.7	41.7
Giving advice / information / counselling	39.2	37.5	42.9
Arts / crafts / drama / music	38.1	40.8	32.1
Representing	32.8	31.5	35.7
Youth Work	30.2	32.6	25.0
Campaigning	29.9	29.3	31.0
Befriending or mentoring people	28.7	31.0	23.8
Providing transport	28.4	31.5	21.4
Selling tickets	27.6	20.1	44.0
Visiting People	23.9	24.5	22.6
Other practical help e.g. shopping, gardening, building, meals on wheels	20.9	19.6	23.8
Teaching or training	20.5	20.7	20.2
Information technology	18.3	19.0	16.7
Collecting / making things to be sold	17.5	16.3	20.2
Health / Social Care	17.2	16.8	17.9
Childcare	15.7	19.0	8.3
Coaching	14.2	15.8	10.7
First Aid	12.3	12.5	11.9
Helping in church or religious organisations	9.0	10.3	6.0
Working in a charity shop	7.8	9.2	4.8
Rescue work	1.9	2.7	0.0

(responses exceed 100% as this was a multiple choice question)

n=238

n=189

n=94

There was a wide range of volunteering roles carried out by the organisations surveyed. The most common volunteer activities carried out were organising or helping to run an activity or event, leading a group / member of a committee / trustees, raising or handling money and secretarial / admin or clerical work. This provides a similar picture to the Northern Ireland based representative survey carried out in 2007².

² It's All About Time, Volunteer Development Agency.

Recruitment Methods Used by Organisations

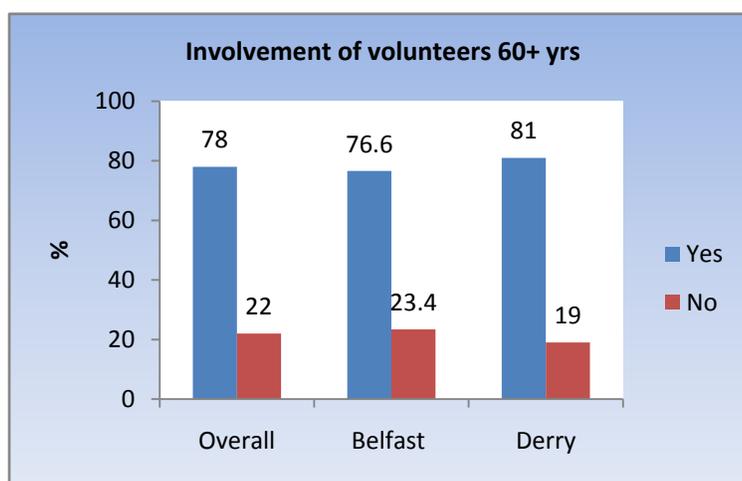
Methods used to recruit volunteers 60+ yrs and generally

	Rank	
	Recruit generally	Recruit 60+
Personal Contact	1	1
By Word of Mouth	2	2
Leaflets	3	3
Volunteer Centres	4	6
Local Events	5	4
Internet / Organisational Website	6	7
Community Centre	7	6
Promotional Events / Volunteer Fairs	8	5
School / College / University	9	13
Newspaper (local / weekly)	10	8
TV or Radio	11	10
Through a church / religious organisation	12	9
Newspaper (Regional)	13	11
Library	14	12
National Campaigns (volunteers week)	15	14
Employers Volunteering Scheme	16	15
Millennium Volunteers Programme	17	16
National Newspaper	18	17

n=238

n=209

The most common methods used to recruit volunteers who were 60+ yrs was largely consistent with those used to recruit volunteers generally (Volunteer Development Agency 2007). However, local events, volunteer fairs and church / religious organisations were more commonly mentioned as being used for recruiting those people aged 60+. A number of people also mentioned that they recruited the 60+ age group through health professionals i.e. GP, hospital staff.



Involvement of Older Volunteers

The majority of the organisations surveyed stated that they currently involve volunteers who were aged 60+ years old (78%). The organisations surveyed from Londonderry / Strabane were slightly more likely to involve volunteers who were 60+ years old (81%) than the organisations from Belfast / Castlereagh (76.6%).

Benefits of Involving Volunteers who are 60+ years old

The Benefits of involving volunteers who are 60+ years

	%		
	Overall	Belfast	Derry
They are committed / flexible / enthusiastic	89	87.9	91.2
They bring new / additional skills	69.9	69.5	70.6
They assist in the governance and management of the organisation	64.1	61.7	69.1
They promote a sense of community ownership as they are local	59.3	57.4	63.2
We couldn't operate without their support	55.5	56.7	52.9
They enhance the effectiveness of the organisation	53.1	49.6	60.3
They enable our programmes to survive	50.2	51.1	48.5
They help improve services / increase service provision	48.8	49.6	47.1
They raise the profile of the organisation	47.8	49.6	44.1
They save the organisation money	39.7	38.3	42.6

Responses exceed 100% as this was a multiple response question

n=209

n=141

n=68

As can be seen from the table above, organisations believed there was a wide range of benefits from involving volunteers who are aged 60+ years. Generally a similar view point was given by organisations from Belfast / Castlereagh and Londonderry / Strabane regarding the benefits of involving volunteers who were aged 60+ years. Overall the three most commonly cited benefits were older people's commitment / flexibility / enthusiasm, the skills they bring to the organisation and their ability to assist in the governance and management of the organisation. Other comments that organisations made are listed below-

“They have some spare time to help us as they are often retired with few dependents. They want something interesting / worthwhile to do with a little of their time, feeling that they can still play their part in society despite being older themselves” (Belfast)

“We feel that volunteering is all about the individual so age is generally not a factor” (Belfast)

“They bring a wealth of life experience and wisdom to our service” (Derry)

Perceived Barriers of Volunteering

Reasons that stop people aged 60+ yrs from volunteering

	This Survey	Rank Northern Ireland ³
People may not know how to find out about opportunities or getting involved	1	5
People may be worried about the risk and being liable if anything goes wrong	2	2
Fear of bureaucracy puts people off	3	3
Potential volunteers have trouble accessing transport	4	6
Potential volunteers may fear losing benefits / being out of pocket	5	4
Lack of flexibility or variety in types of volunteering opportunities on offer	6	7
People may be put off by criminal records checks	7	8
These individuals have insufficient free time	8	1

Overall, there was consensus between the two study areas in terms of the common perceptions of what stops people from volunteering. The most common reason given was people not knowing how to find out about opportunities. This would suggest that lack of knowledge is a specific barrier for the 60+ year's old age group getting involved in volunteering. Worries of risk of liability and fear of bureaucracy were also identified as issues. Interestingly, a recent representative survey of volunteer involving organisations in Northern Ireland stated that people having insufficient free time was the main barrier for volunteering. In this survey organisations did not see time as an issue, as it was ranked last in terms of relevance by the organisations surveyed (Volunteer Development Agency 2007).

“They may not realise the value they can bring. May not realise that they still have a lot to give and how many skills they have” (Belfast)

“People fear having to learn new skills e.g. on computer” (Derry)

³ Volunteer Development Agency (2007) It's All About Time.

Statements Regarding Organisational Perceptions of Volunteers who are Aged 60+

	%		
	Overall	Belfast	Derry
People who are 60 yrs + have not approached this organisation	25.4	25.0	26.2
Our volunteer policy includes an upper age limit	4.1	4.3	3.6
The volunteering roles this organisation offers are not suitable	3.7	4.9	1.2
We are unable to obtain business insurance for older volunteers	0.4	0.5	0.0
	n=268	n=184	n=84

The organisations were given a number of commonly held statements in terms of barriers to involving volunteers and asked whether they applied to them (Rochester and Thomas 2006). Approximately a quarter of the organisations agreed that people who are 60+ years old do not approach their organisation. Very few organisations agreed with the other statements which related to the organisation having an upper age limit, not offering suitable roles or being unable to obtain business insurance for older volunteers.

Success Factors in Involving People who are 60+ years old

Organisations who felt they were successful in involving volunteers who were 60+ years old were asked to give reasons. The points below outline the 'factors for success' identified by those organisations.

Management Practice

Many of the success factors mentioned by volunteers relate to organisations demonstrating a solid value base for their involvement of volunteers, as well as good management practice as outlined by the Investing In Volunteers quality standard. There was also reference made to roles being created which fit the individual's interest and abilities, which includes '*giving older people the opportunity to contribute in new and exciting initiatives and programs*'. As a consequence these organisations are more likely to provide a positive experience for a volunteer, which in turn, is more likely to increase retention and uptake of other volunteers (Volunteer Development Agency 2001:2).

"A tactful way of asking; by not asking for too much time/commitment; by being flexible/undemanding/presumptuous with volunteers. By finding out their interests and using them accordingly. Appreciating and thanking them so letting them know that they are useful. They have easy access to support from our organisation with full back-up. We offer a good service which they believe in and wish to be a part of. They like and trust me as the Independent Age representative therefore want to help" (Belfast)

"Listening to older people's views and needs, establishing relationship, communicating the worth of volunteering, organising activities that they want, promoting action for engagement of marginalised youth" (Derry)

Another organisation also mentioned the fact that they have a variety of roles which would suit many groups' interests, including older people.

“The nature of our organisation means we have a huge breadth of different volunteering opportunities that suit all age groups and skill sets including the 60+” (Belfast)

Recruitment Strategies for Older Volunteers

Specific Campaign

Organisations mentioned the fact that recruitment campaigns and in some instances direct recruitment of older people for specific roles was a factor in their success. Organisations mentioned linking in with older people through existing groups / networks which are known to involve older people / retired people i.e. churches, community groups.

“Direct recruitment to a defined role has worked well e.g. targeting WI, Bowling club etc. to recruit for a second hand bookshop volunteer” (Belfast)

“Using older volunteers as live case studies - asking them to come along to recruitment events and talk about their experiences and benefits of volunteering” (Belfast)

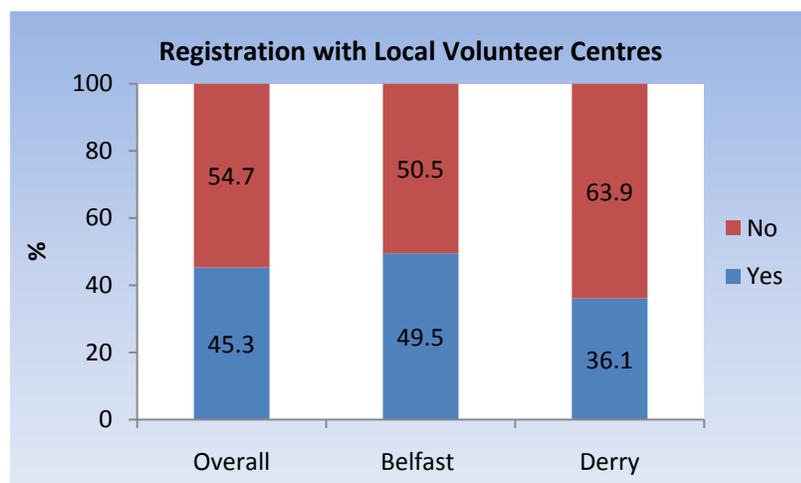
Personal Contact / Word of Mouth

Personal contact was mentioned as a useful way of recruiting volunteers. This contact was gained through the volunteer firstly engaging with an organisation as a service user. Related to this point, organisations believed the fact that their core business was older people focused made them more attractive to older volunteers.

“We have been very lucky to have hard working committed individuals - who we do volunteering for and them for us - it's a two way thing” (Belfast)

It was also mentioned that volunteers can be gained indirectly through their family member or friend who use the services of an organisation. This also links in with the fact that in some cases individuals are drawn to an organisation because of the cause and that it has a particular resonance with them.

Use of Volunteer Centre Infrastructure



On average over half of those surveyed did not use their local volunteer centres for advertising their volunteering opportunities. Organisations from Belfast / Castlereagh (49.5%) were more likely to state that they used their local centre compared to those in Londonderry / Strabane (36.1%).

Those organisations which did not use volunteer centres were asked to specify the reasons. Overall, 73 specific comments were made by 72 organisations⁴ which were categorised under two main themes, these were; not deeming it necessary to use a volunteer centre / successfully using other recruitment methods (44 comments) and a lack of awareness of volunteer centres / no recognised benefits to using a volunteer centre (29 comments).

Not Deemed Necessary / Successfully using other Recruitment Methods (44 comments)

Forty-four comments related to organisations not seeing the need to use a volunteer centre for two main reasons - that opportunities were being filled successfully through existing networks i.e. personal or professional contact, word of mouth and the fact that they required a small number of volunteers, which they could easily fill.

“We have not felt the need as any volunteer that approaches (us) usually tends to know the organisation or know someone who is already involved” (Belfast)

No Awareness / Understanding of the Benefits of Volunteer Centre (29 comments)

Twenty-nine comments related to the issue of organisations not being aware of their local volunteer centre or not having thought of using one.

“We are not aware of such provision” (Belfast)

“Not sure what benefit this would bring to our organisation” (Derry)

⁴ One organisation had two specific comments within its response to this question

Support Requirements for Involving People Aged 60+ years old

Organisations which currently involved volunteers who were 60+ years old were asked to outline the areas of support they felt would improve their capacity to involve this age group.

Additional support with resource requirements was a common response from the organisations, in terms of funding for staff to manage volunteers, transport, office space, advertising / marketing material. Organisations also mentioned the need for support to promote volunteering opportunities more effectively and to a wider audience i.e. volunteer fair, volunteer centres.

“Access to funding to provide meals transport, training & childcare support” (Belfast)

“We would love to start up a new volunteer programme in the community. Need funding/resources” (Derry).

A significant amount of the support deemed useful to more successful involvement and support of volunteers related to expertise in effective volunteer management.

“..more support and advice on volunteer development” (Belfast)

“Information on more specific roles suitable to 60+” (Belfast)

“Advice as how to best contact the older person to enable them to hear about the opportunities” (Belfast)

Organisations who did not Involve Volunteers

Fifteen organisations did not involve volunteers in their organisation. These organisations were categorised as health and social care (n=5), community development (n=4), unknown (n=3), Arts and Culture (n=1), Information and Advice (n=1) and Older People (n=1). Overall, the most likely reason given for not involving volunteers was the fact that the work carried out by the organisation was not suitable for volunteers (n=14)⁵. Other reasons given for not involving volunteers were the difficulties in recruiting individuals (n=3), as well as having a lack of adequate resources to support them (n=3). None of the organisations agreed that they were indifferent to the value of volunteers or lacking in knowledge of how to involve volunteers.

⁵ Due to the small numbers represented, frequencies rather than percentages have been used.

Reasons given for not involving volunteers

	Frequency		
	Overall	Belfast	Derry
Work not suitable for volunteers	14	5	9
Can't recruit volunteers with right skills or expertise	3	2	1
Lack of adequate funds for supporting volunteer involvement	3	2	1
Can't recruit sufficient numbers of volunteers	1	1	0
Can't recruit volunteers that are available when we need them	1	1	0
Lack of paid staff to properly train and supervise volunteers	1	1	0
Organisation is indifferent or resistant towards the value of volunteers	0	0	0
Do not know how to go about involving volunteers	0	0	0

n=15 n=5 n=10

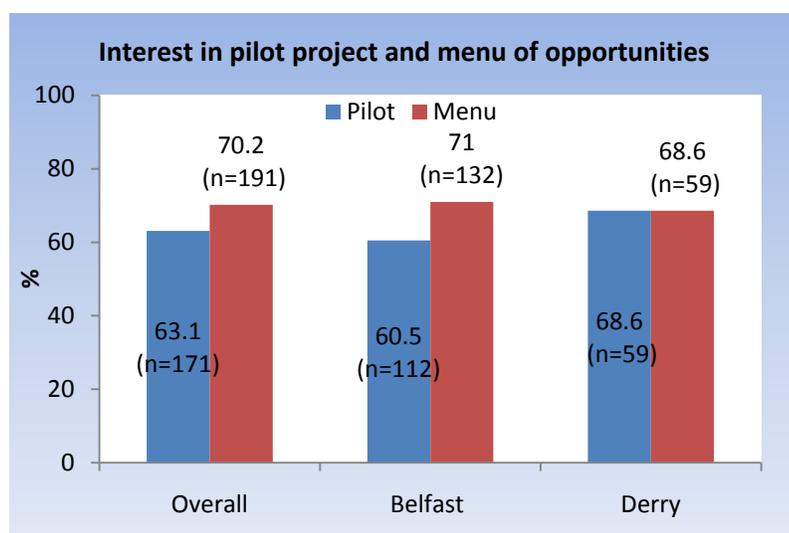
Consider involving volunteers in the future?

	Frequency		
	Overall	Belfast	Derry
Yes / Maybe	5	3	2
No	10	2	8

n=15 n=5 n=10

Five of the organisations who did not currently involve volunteers said that they would consider involving them in the future. The Belfast / Castlereagh based organisations showed more interest in this than the Londonderry / Strabane based organisations.

Interest in Engaging with the 'Unlocking Potential' project



171 (63%) organisations showed interest in being involved in a pilot project aimed at increasing the involvement of volunteers aged 60+ years. In terms of city breakdown this equates to 112 organisations in Belfast / Castlereagh and 59 in Londonderry / Strabane.

191 (70%) organisations surveyed stated that they would be interested in advertising their opportunities on a menu, which would be promoted across Northern Ireland as a recruitment tool for people aged 60+ years.

Interestingly, more organisations from Belfast / Castlereagh were interested in this opportunity compared to the pilot project. Overall, 58% of the organisations surveyed were interested in both opportunities.

At the end of the survey, organisations were given the opportunity to provide any other comments, some of which have been noted below;

“We find the management of volunteers too difficult for a very small organisation and therefore are really unable to avail of their services” (Belfast)

“Our funds have been very badly hit by the recession (dividend based income) and we are currently re-evaluating our services but plan to continue to finance and support older people (70+) in their homes with a friendly visitor from their area” (Belfast)

“Thanks for asking these questions which have caused me to pause and reflect somewhat on our practice/ committee membership” (Derry)

“We have used volunteers in the past as the organisation works in childcare and this can be difficult, however we would consider looking at this type of volunteer to act as ‘a granny or grandad’ for some of the families we are involved with” (Derry)

Discussion & Recommendations

This section of the report has focused on some of the research findings from which some practical recommendations could be made for organisations involving or hoping to involve volunteers in their work and also some specific recommendations for the 'Unlocking Potential' project.

Recommendations for Volunteer Involving Organisations

The following recommendations have been made for Volunteer Involving Organisations;

Finding

Approximately a quarter of the organisations surveyed believed that people who are 60+ years old do not approach their organisation.

1. Recommendation

Organisations may be more successful at recruiting older volunteers if they proactively target them through marketing or advertising. Recent research carried out with people aged 55+ reported that this age group were most likely to source information on activities, events or entertainment in their local area through weekly (53%) or regional (34%) newspapers, family or friends (24%) and internet / emails (24%). Interestingly when informal volunteers or non-volunteers were asked specifically to outline how they would find out more information about volunteering, the most common medium was internet (27%), followed by weekly / regional newspapers (19%) (Volunteer Development Agency 2009:1). Therefore, this research would suggest that a range of communication mediums, including modern means such as the internet, may have the farthest reach with this age group.

Finding

Similarly to volunteering within Northern Ireland as a whole⁶, the most common volunteer activities carried out by organisations in this survey were organising or helping to run an activity or event, leading a group / member of a committee / trustees, raising or handling money and secretarial / admin or clerical work. The vast majority (96.3%) of the organisations surveyed believed that the volunteering roles offered were suitable for the 60+ age group.

2. Recommendation

Literature suggests that volunteers have increasing expectations from their volunteering experience, which includes a greater variety of opportunities as well as higher skill / higher

⁶ It's All About Time, Volunteer Development Agency.

demand roles (Volunteer Development Agency 2001:2; Volunteer Development Agency 2009:2). Organisations who have a wider variety of volunteering opportunities offered to older volunteers may find it easier to match volunteers to roles and to maintain their satisfaction and engagement. It is important that organisations remain open-minded to the roles that can be undertaken, listen to individual interests and provide encouragement for trying something new rather than focusing on offering stereotypical roles i.e. physical and mental activities.

Finding

Overall, the three most commonly cited benefits of involving older volunteers were the commitment / flexibility / enthusiasm and skills that they bring to the organisation and their ability to assist in the governance and management of the organisation.

3. Recommendation

Older people, particularly those who have not had previous experience of volunteering, may not see the skills and qualities which they have gained through their life and may underestimate their use within a volunteering role. Therefore any communication with the older age group should highlight the value of these life skills which may include, practical skills-driving, DIY, personal experience, listening and passing on knowledge of life.

Finding

Organisational perceptions of the main barriers for people who are 60+ years old from volunteering were lack of knowledge about volunteering opportunities, followed by worries of risk of liability and fear of bureaucracy.

4. Recommendation

Organisations who wish to improve their attractiveness to the older age group may wish to consider putting practices in place to increase this group's knowledge of volunteering opportunities; as well as creating a better understanding of processes, such as criminal records checks, which organisations must carry out by law. These two areas have been discussed separately below;

Targeted recruitment

As recommendation 1 suggests (page 20) organisations may find that they reach a greater number and more diverse group of older people by applying a variety of communication methods from the traditional to the more non-traditional mediums, such as the internet and e-mail. Organisations may also have a more effective marketing campaign if they use a range of locations to reach this group i.e. local events, existing local networks / groups which attract this demographic, volunteer fairs, church / religious organisations, doctors surgery's and pharmacies. There is a body of American marketing literature which provides practical advice

on the design of marketing material for this age group which includes making brochures appealing by applying colour, using a larger font size (14pt), using quotes and testimonials from volunteers who are their peers and also sending messages through peers rather than celebrities (Volunteer Development Agency 2009:2). Recent research carried out in Northern Ireland has also shown that people in their 50-60's prefer to be described as 'older', 'experienced' or 'over 60', than 'old people', 'senior' or 'retired' (Volunteer Development Agency 2009:1).

Fear of Bureaucracy / Risk of liability

The criminal checking system can be one of the more frustrating administrative burdens for both organisations and volunteers. However, it provides a necessary role in helping organisations to make informed decisions about the people they choose to work with their service users / clients / members (www.accessni.gov.uk). It is important that the purpose of these checks' are communicated to volunteers. This transparency can help to alleviate the anxiety or frustration that some people have with this process. Having this information as part of the volunteer information pack / information meetings is good practice. It is also important that organisations have adequate insurance cover for the work that volunteers carry out on their behalf and that volunteers are made aware of this. It may also be reassuring and lessen the barrier of the risk of liability for volunteers if they are reassured that this measure is in place (Volunteer Development Agency 2008).

Finding

Of the 15 organisations which did not involve volunteers, the main reason given was because the work remit of the organisation was not suitable for volunteer roles.

5. Recommendation

By thinking creatively and innovatively, organisations may be able to provide volunteering opportunities which provide a useful function in the organisation as well as providing a new experience for a volunteer. It is important that organisations consider their capacity to manage volunteers before recruiting. It is also important that organisations prevent potential problems with 'job substitution' by ensuring that opportunities are not something which a paid member of staff has been doing or should be doing.

Finding

57.6% of volunteer involving organisations did not use the services of their local volunteer centre to advertise volunteering opportunities. The two main reasons given for this were, (1) not deeming it necessary to use a volunteer centre / successfully using other recruitment methods and (2) lack of awareness of volunteer centres / no recognised benefits to using a volunteer centre.

6. Recommendation

Organisations which are unsure about the need for registering opportunities with their local volunteer centre are advised to make themselves known to them. The Volunteer Centre network acts as a conduit matching individuals interested in volunteering to opportunities that have been registered with them. By working with registered volunteer involving organisations they are aware of the skills and the hours required for a role and are able to signpost volunteers to opportunities which best meet their needs and the needs of the organisation. Volunteer Centres are aware and are able to provide up to date information on current policy issues which affect volunteering, such as Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults legislation, Access NI checks and information on available funding. The Centres are responsible for the distribution of a small grants programme which supports community and voluntary groups develop and support their volunteers. Volunteer Centres have a role to play in publicising the range of services which they can provide and to make the process of registering opportunities as simple as possible. It is possible to find out volunteer centre locations through the 'Volunteer Now' Website (<http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/>).

Finding

In terms of additional support to improve their capacity to involve the 60+ age group, organisations raised the point that help with resource requirements i.e. funding for staff to manage volunteers, transport, office space, advertising / marketing material would be useful. Organisations also highlighted the need for further support in promoting volunteering opportunities more effectively and to a wider audience i.e. volunteer fairs, volunteer centres.

7. Recommendation

Organisations would be advised to build the cost of volunteer involvement into funding bids so that they are able to support their volunteers effectively to provide the best experience for everyone. The Volunteer Development Agency provides training, information and support to volunteer-involving organisations across all sectors on issues of good practice and policy regarding volunteering, child protection and voluntary management committees/governance. Agency staff are available to deal with queries on the telephone, or by email, visiting projects or organising meetings. A wide variety of free information is available on the Agency website. Volunteer Centres are a free resource for advertising volunteering opportunities. Organisations can also produce leaflets and posters relatively cheaply in-house, using a word document. The Volunteer Development Agency provides some advice on producing recruitment material, which includes identifying a clear 'image' and 'message' for the target group. The message should address why there is a need for volunteers and what can be achieved through volunteer work. Additional advice on developing a recruitment leaflet is available from the

following publication: Volunteer Development Agency (2001:2) *As Good As they Give, Workbook 2: Attracting and Selecting Volunteers*⁷.

Finding

There was a range of practices that organisations said were working successfully in their engagement with older volunteers, including providing good management, direct recruitment or linking in with older people through personal contact, or existing groups / networks.

8. Recommendation

Good practice in volunteer management will help with the recruitment and retention of volunteers, irrespective of age. The Volunteer Development Agency has a range of free easy read 'As Good as they Give' publications on its website, which provides useful information and guidance⁸. Nevertheless, there is evidence that adjusting communication or management style slightly to fit with particular group characteristics can have successful results. For example, a common pattern of fears expressed by older people who are considering volunteering are fear of commitment, of not being capable / physically fit enough and of not receiving out of pocket expenses (Volunteer Development Agency 2009:1).

Recommendations for the 'Unlocking Potential' Project

The survey identified a significant number of organisations that would be interested in becoming part of a volunteer pilot project and / or registering volunteering opportunities on a dedicated section of a website which focused on the 60+ year old age group. There was also a very clear message from the organisations surveyed that support and advice on managing older volunteers was an important training need.

Overall, it is vital that the project consults with both older volunteers and volunteer involving organisations at key stages of its work. This survey itself is an example of the important information that can be gained from engaging with key informants.

Some specific recommendations have been made for the 'Unlocking Potential' project, these are listed below;

Finding

The majority of the organisations who responded to the survey stated that they were involving volunteers who were 60+ years old.

1. Recommendation

⁷ http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/publications/#Volunteer%20Management

⁸ http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/publications/#Volunteer%20Management

It is important that the 'Unlocking Potential' project engages further with those organisations that have experience of involving older volunteers, as they can provide useful good practice tips which can be spread to other organisations. The 'Unlocking Potential' project could play an important role in spreading these tried and tested successful strategies. It is also important that the communication routes used to do this are varied enough to suit all organisational preferences i.e. leaflets, information seminars, training sessions / booklets, web based learning, one to one support etc. A small number of organisations which were not involving older volunteers engaged with this survey, therefore, it would be recommended that the project attempt to engage with these organisations in other ways i.e. future training or information events.

Finding

Much of the good practice outlined in this report will be relevant to volunteers of all age groups, however, this survey and other relevant research has highlighted that there are specific approaches which organisations believe works well with 'older' volunteers.

2. Recommendation

The project is well placed to provide information to organisations on the most effective advertising / recruitment methods. Getting this marketing correct will be particularly important for gaining the interest of those individuals who have no previous experience or knowledge of volunteering. The project could also play an important role in providing comprehensive guidance on effective volunteer management of people who are 60+ years old. A critical factor in the success or failure of getting a volunteers' early commitment is in providing a wider portfolio of volunteering opportunities, which challenge and motivate individuals and spread further than the 'normal' set of opportunities offered to this age group.

In summary, much of the good practice that helps to attract and retain volunteers will be the same for everyone, irrespective of age. However, there is an increasing body of research which suggests that organisations have a more positive image and are more successful in attracting and retaining volunteers, if they are sensitive to individual / group motivations, lifestyles and interests when matching volunteers to a role. It is hoped that this report will add to the existing research base and provide some useful practical guidance for organisations that currently involve or would like to involve volunteers who are 60+ years old. This report has provided a useful exploratory investigation of the opinions and practices of organisations from which the 'Unlocking Potential' project can use to inform the project, which includes building relationships with interested organisations, informing the development of training, as well as practical guides for volunteer involving organisations that wish to involve older people.

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