

# Formal Voluntary Action in Rural Northern Ireland:

What does this tell us about the existing and potential impact of volunteering on community well being and capacity?



This Research was funded by the Rural Development Division South (RDD) of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

April 2013

## Foreword

For a number of years the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has provided funding to support community development activities in rural areas, most recently through contracts to provide a Rural Community Development Support Service.

The Department recognises the considerable contribution that volunteers make to the quality of life of rural communities and has been seeking ways to demonstrate the level and impact of volunteering in rural communities as a result of our funding for rural community development support. To help in this process we were pleased to work in partnership with Volunteer Now and our delivery bodies to undertake the research which forms the basis of this report. I would like to thank Volunteer Now for their advice and guidance, our delivery bodies for facilitating the research, and all those who took the time to complete the survey.

The report has highlighting some important issues in relation to the operation of our current programme and the Department is re-assessing the role of volunteering within the context of our support for rural community development.

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## Acknowledgments

This research was commissioned by the Rural Development Division South (RDD) of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). The RDD is responsible for delivering the Rural Community Development (RCD) Support Programme. <http://www.dardni.gov.uk>



The research was carried out by Volunteer Now. Volunteer Now is a regional to local organisation which supports the development of volunteering across Northern Ireland. [www.volunteernow.co.uk](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk)

Special thanks must go to the rural community development support programme delivery bodies that helped to administer the questionnaires. Staff of DARD's Rural Development Division South and Volunteer Now would also like to thank the organisations and volunteers that spent time answering our questions.

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The information and views set out in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

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## Executive Summary

The Rural Community Development (RCD) Support Programme has a number of key objectives which are specifically relevant to volunteering, in particular the focus on developing capacity and leadership in rural communities, developing governance practices as a means of supporting community involvement, maintaining strong rural communities and assisting engagement with the social economy sector. This research gathered the views of both volunteers and key contacts within organisations to get a sense of the impact of volunteering in rural communities and to help inform the type of support that could be provided to volunteer involving organisations to meet these programme objectives. A survey methodology was applied.

### Volunteer Results

- The results of the volunteer survey is based on a sample of 172 people.
- The majority of the results are based on responses from volunteers that are involved with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations (93%). At least one volunteer responded from 20 of the 26 council areas.
- The vast majority of the volunteers that responded were aged 35 years and older (93%).
- The estimated annual economic value contributed by volunteers responding to this survey was £452,431.
- 98% of volunteers were satisfied with their volunteering.
- Overall, volunteers rated highly across the full range of areas of possible impact listed i.e. physical, social, human, cultural and economic. Scores on a number of statements did fall significantly below 75% in a number of areas; those being opportunities to obtain accreditation or qualifications through volunteering (60%) and the amount of awards / certificates received from volunteering (59%) (page 12).
- Nearly half (45%) of volunteers gave 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'not relevant' on statements related to 'how well their skills were utilised' and 'opportunities to obtain accreditation or qualifications'. It would be useful to explore this area of training and development in more detail (page 13).
- Half of the volunteers surveyed reported that volunteering had impacted on their employability skills.

### Organisation Results

- The survey was targeted at the Secretary or key contact within an organisation.
- A total of 329 organisations responded.
- The majority of organisations identified as Voluntary and Community Sector (93.5%). A small percentage responded from a Church/ Faith based (4.3%) or as a Sports Club / Group (2.2%).

- Responding organisations were involved across a wide range of areas. The most common being health and well being, older people, children and young people, advice and information and community development work.
- Volunteers accounted for the bulk of the workforce within responding organisations (85%, n=8407).
- The average number of volunteers per organisations was 13. There was a high number of organisations that were completely volunteer led- 65% of the organisations reported that they did not have any paid staff.
- The most common income band overall was £1,001-£10,000 (32%). Compared to mapping research on the income of volunteer involving organisations across Northern Ireland, the organisations in this survey were smaller.
- Organisations offered a wide range of volunteering opportunities, the most common roles included administration /office (69%), committee/ trust members (64%), and fundraising (63%).
- The organisations had a range of legal structures; charitable incorporated organisation was the most common. Just over half of the organisations said they were a Social Enterprise.

## **Discussion & Practical Implications**

Overall, this report has shown the wealth of assets (capitals) that are being nurtured and developed through volunteering in rural communities in Northern Ireland. It also highlights the wide diversity of activities being offered through rural organisations, many of which are volunteer led and run.

The report has set out a number of practical implications coming from both the volunteer and organisation survey results. This includes recognising the opportunities available to build on the sterling work already being done by volunteer involving groups. DARD as the government department responsible for community development in rural areas has a central role to play in steering organisations to available infrastructure support which can help them to build on their capacity, maximise the opportunities to benefit from voluntary action and also to recognise and promote volunteering to individuals in these communities. The existing volunteering infrastructure can offer a wide portfolio of support and guidance which is specific to volunteer involvement and which can complement the other work already being done through rural community development organisations and public bodies.

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## Background

### Aim of Survey

The Rural Community Development (RCD) Support Programme has a number of key objectives which are specifically relevant to volunteering, in particular the focus on developing capacity and leadership in rural communities, developing governance practices as a means of supporting community involvement, maintaining strong rural communities and assisting engagement with the social economy sector. Rural areas do not have the same range and variety of social and cultural infrastructure as urban areas. In rural communities, especially those furthest away from a town or city, faith organisations /faith based groups, village halls, community hubs and sports clubs, which rely on volunteers, are an essential part of life and build a sense of community and space.

The current recession and government austerity measures are challenging for communities across Northern Ireland, however, the attributed negative impact from weather systems over the last number of years had made things even harder for rural communities and the farming community in particular. Community support and connections are always important but are particularly so at these times (Woolvin, 2012). It is imperative that every effort is made to reduce isolation, increase care and support services and generally sustain the well being of communities. The Voluntary and Community Sector has a specific role in delivering support services and these services rely on the good will of volunteers. While we know that the volunteering infrastructure in rural areas has a wide skill base, there is support available on a range of policy and practice issues that volunteer involving organisations can benefit from. The Northern Ireland Executive has publically recognised the importance of volunteering across Northern Ireland by publishing the first Volunteering Strategy in 2011. with a number of key objectives set out in an action plan (Department for Social Development, 2011). This report helps to build a picture of the type of support that volunteer involving organisations in rural areas can benefit from and the importance of taking a strategic view of volunteer development.

The Carnegie Commission for Rural Community Development has carried out a range of research, including developing a Charter for Rural Communities. In one of its report it highlights the importance of volunteering in rural areas and the need to imbed a support system around this for capacity to be built and communities to be enriched.

*“Growing the capacity of local people, agencies and professionals that support communities and build social networks founded on high levels of volunteering and skilled support is one of the pre-requisites for vibrant rural communities” (Carnegie Trust UK, 2007).*

## Methodology

This was a light touch piece of research; the overall aim being to help inform the type of support that could be provided to rural community development work in the future. It was also used as an opportunity to get a sense of the impact of volunteering on individuals working in these rural communities.

The methodology applied focused on engaging with two stakeholder groups: these were volunteers engaged with rural organisations or groups (formal volunteering) and the Secretary or key contact from organisations working within rural areas. A hard copy and online survey was used to reach both target audiences. In absence of a central register of organisations in rural areas; the rural community development support programme delivery bodies were asked to disseminate the survey on behalf of DARD. All organisations and individuals who receive support from these bodies were given the opportunity to respond.

**The survey with volunteer involving organisations** in rural areas was to help map the range of organisations, including contact details, the nature of the organisation, legal structures, income, number of staff and volunteers and volunteer roles.

**The survey with volunteers** aimed to measure the impact of formal volunteering in rural areas. Each volunteer was asked to give details on the type of volunteering they did, number of hours provided per month and satisfaction with their role. There was also a number of key questions on changes across 5 areas of impact called capitals- physical, human, social, economic and cultural. These capitals come from a framework developed within the Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2010). A list of statements were provided that related to each capital area. Volunteers were asked to provide answers using a standard 6 point likert scale of 'satisfaction' or 'level of change' (very satisfied, quite satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, quite dissatisfied, very dissatisfied and not relevant). For the purposes of producing tables, results were collapsed into a shorter 4 point scale (satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied and not relevant). Unless otherwise stated where figures do not add up to 100% this is due to rounding up or down to the nearest whole number.

### EXPLANATION OF CAPITALS

**'Physical capital'** refers to the concrete product or output for example number of training courses attended by volunteers or the number of hours provided by volunteers.

**'Human capital'** relates to the acquisition of skills and personal development.

**'Economic capital'** describes the financial and economic effects that result from volunteering, for example employability and employment skills.

**'Social capital'** relates to relationships, networks and bonds of trust between people.

**'Cultural capital'** relates to community identity and participation.

Source: Institute for Volunteering Research (2010) Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit.

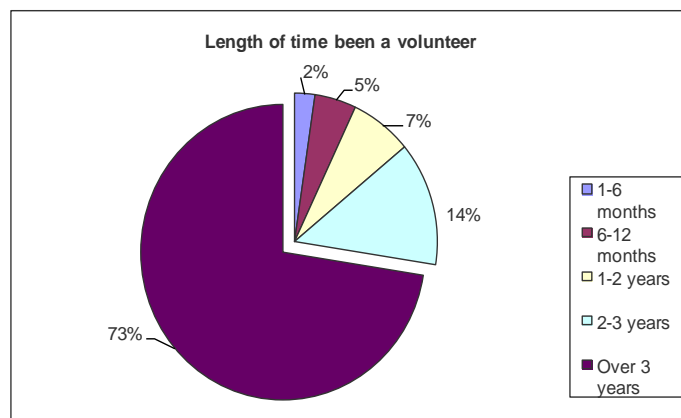
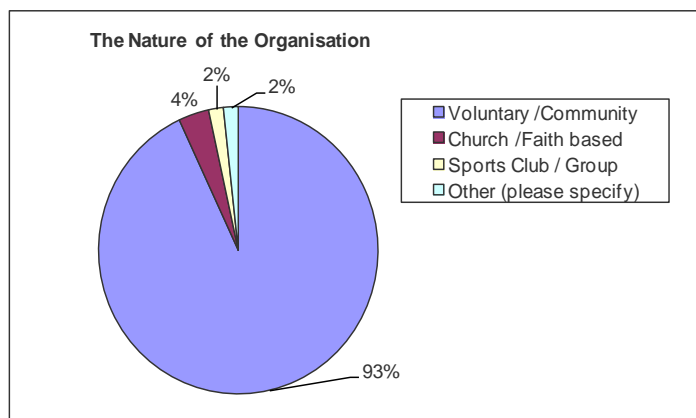
The Rural Development Division South (RDD) of DARD had overall responsibility for the management of this research. Volunteer Now was consulted to suggest an appropriate



methodology and to design the surveys. Staff within RDD South were responsible for data collection and follow-up; analysis and report writing was carried out by Volunteer Now.

## Volunteer Feedback

### Profile of Responding Volunteers

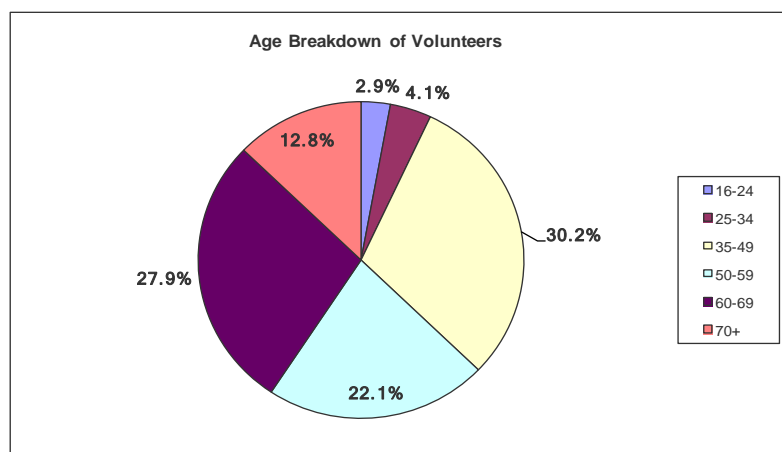


The results of the volunteer survey is based on a sample of 172 respondents, although not all of these people responded to every question. The number of volunteers that it was sent to was not tracked so it is not possible to give a percentage response. At least one volunteer responded from 20 of the 26 council areas. A full breakdown is listed in Appendix 1.

The majority of the results are based on responses from volunteers that are involved with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations (93%). A small percentage were involved in Church/ Faith based (4%), Sports Club / Group (2%) or other (2%). The volunteers involved in this survey had a substantial amount of volunteering experience. Three quarters of them had over 3 years experience as a volunteer.

All respondents were from a white ethnic background and 13% described themselves as having a disability. In terms of gender breakdown 62% (n=106) were females and 38% (n=66) were male. This gender breakdown is comparable to the most recent public survey of volunteering in NI (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007)

### Age breakdown



The vast majority of the volunteers were aged 35 years and older (93%). A significant proportion were aged 60 years of age and over (4 out of 10). There was very few respondents from the 16-24 yr old (2.9%) or 25-34 yr old age group (4.1%).

## Average Number of Hours Volunteered per Month

Each volunteer was asked to indicate the average number of hours they volunteered per month. The 157 individuals that gave an answer to this question were volunteering for a combined total of 3767 hours per month. Using a simple equation which involved multiplying the number of volunteers by the total number of hours given over the course of a year at an average hourly wage of £10.01, it has been estimated that the annual economic value from volunteering is £452,431. Although this does not take into account the economic investment put into volunteering in the form of paid staff support, training and out of pocket expenses etc. It is clear that the value from volunteering is substantial, especially if one considers that 212 of the 329 organisations included in this survey were volunteer led and therefore had no salary costs towards managing volunteers.

| Economic Valuation |                               |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| 3767               | Total number of hours per mth |
| 157                | Number of volunteers          |
| £10.01             | Average hourly wage *         |
| £37,703            | Economic Value (mth)          |
| £452,431.98        | Economic Value (year)         |

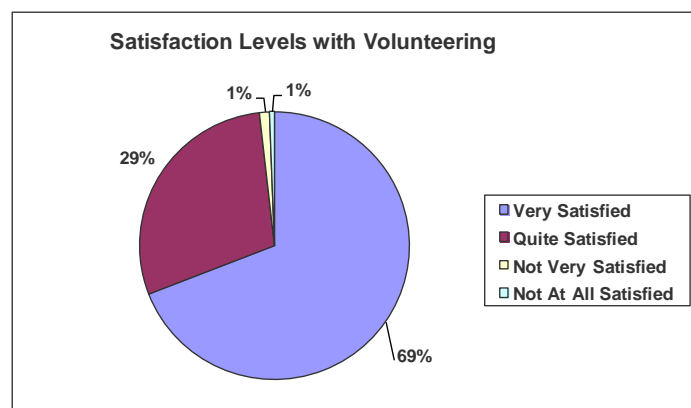
\* Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings- Office for National Statistics-2011 Provisional Results  
Table 10.5a Hourly pay - Gross (£) - For all employee jobs: United Kingdom, 2011  
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcM%3A77-235202>

## Sub Sector Volunteer Involved In

| Sub Sector Volunteer Involved in (multiple response q.) |     |     |
|---|-----|-----|
| Answer Options  | %   | (n) |
| Community development                                   | 68% | 117 |
| Health and well being                                   | 47% | 81  |
| Older people  | 44% | 75  |
| Young people and children                               | 42% | 73  |
| Advice and information                                  | 41% | 70  |
| Education / training                                    | 34% | 58  |
| Arts / culture / heritage                               | 33% | 56  |
| Women   | 30% | 52  |
| Volunteer Development                                   | 28% | 48  |
| Environment / conservation                              | 24% | 41  |
| Sport   | 17% | 30  |
| Disability  | 14% | 24  |
| Housing / homelessness                                  | 6%  | 10  |
| Church / Faith based                                    | 5%  | 9   |

Volunteers were asked to define the sub-sector of work they were engaged in. Respondents were able to select more than one subsector and the results show that volunteers were involved across a wide spectrum of work. The most common area was community development (68%), followed by health and well being (47%), older people (44%), children and young people (42%) and advice and information (41%).

## Satisfaction Levels with Volunteering



Overall, respondents expressed satisfaction with their volunteering- 69% were ‘very satisfied’ and 29% were ‘quite satisfied’. Only 2% reported to be ‘dissatisfied’ with the volunteering they were doing.

## Impact of Volunteering

This section of the survey focused on self reported individual development and satisfaction with training and support. The training and support section is based on standard best practice for involving volunteers as set out in the UK Investing in Volunteers Quality Standard.

## Training and Support

### Satisfaction Levels with Training and Support Received

|   | Deemed Relevant (%) |                                    |              | Not relevant (%) |
|---|---------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|
|   | Satisfied           | Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied | Dissatisfied |                  |
| Access to training /support that is of direct relevance to my volunteering      | 76                  | 18                                 | 5            | 14               |
| Opportunities to obtain accreditation or qualifications through my volunteering | 60                  | 31                                 | 9            | 24               |
| The quality of the training / support   | 73                  | 23                                 | 4            | 22               |
| The amount of awards/certificates I have received for my volunteering           | 59                  | 27                                 | 14           | 30               |
| How well my skills are utilised   | 81                  | 14                                 | 4            | 8                |
| What is expected of me as a volunteer   | 83                  | 15                                 | 3            | 8                |
| What I can expect from the organisation as a volunteer                          | 78                  | 17                                 | 4            | 10               |
| The support I receive to carry out my role                                      | 77                  | 16                                 | 7            | 8                |
| How well organised the volunteering is  | 78                  | 16                                 | 6            | 7                |
| The recognition I get for the contribution I make                               | 74                  | 20                                 | 6            | 10               |

The table above lists a number of statements which help gauge how the volunteer involvement was organised and the quality of it from the perspective of the volunteer. Across all of the different areas of potential impact (‘capital’ areas- described in page 2), training and support was the area with the highest percentage of groups giving ‘not relevant’ as an answer. Of those volunteers that deemed different areas of training and support as being relevant, the table above shows that overall most volunteers were satisfied with most areas of training and support received.

Respondents were most satisfied with how well their skills were utilised (81%), what was expected of them as volunteers (83%), what they could expect from the organisation (78%) and how the volunteering was organised (78%). Scores on a number of statements did fall significantly below 75% in a number of areas and / or had above expected levels of respondents giving 'not relevant' as an answer. Those being opportunities to obtain accreditation or qualifications through volunteering, the amount of awards / certificates received from volunteering and quality and access to training.

The interest in accreditation and training is reflected by one person who said, *"Volunteers should get more accredited workshops."*

**Table showing % of respondents who were undecided or stating training and support received was not relevant**

|   | <b>% Undecided / Not Relevant</b> |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| How well my skills are utilised   | 45                                |
| Opportunities to obtain accreditation or qualifications through my volunteering | 44                                |
| How well organised the volunteering is  | 37                                |
| Access to training /support that is of direct relevance to my volunteering      | 28                                |
| What is expected of me as a volunteer   | 27                                |
| The quality of the training / support   | 25                                |
| The recognition I get for the contribution I make                               | 22                                |
| The amount of awards/certificates I have received for my volunteering           | 21                                |
| The support I receive to carry out my role                                      | 21                                |
| What I can expect from the organisation as a volunteer                          | 21                                |

Due to the importance of capacity building for the Rural Community Development Support Programme and the aim of understanding the possible support needs of rural volunteer involving organisations, the percentage of respondents that provided 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' or 'not relevant' to the questions relating to training and support was further analysed. In each of the areas listed, a 1/5 or more of the respondents did not give a clear response to questions related to aspects of volunteer management one would expect to be in place for all volunteers.

## Impact of Volunteering on Social Capital

| Answer Options                                     | Deemed Relevant (%) |                 |           | Not relevant (%) |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
|  | Increased           | Stayed the same | Decreased |                  |
| My range of friendships                            | 98                  | 2               | 0         | 2                |
| The number of contacts that I can call on          | 95                  | 5               | 0         | 2                |
| My participation in social gatherings              | 85                  | 14              | 1         | 3                |
| My support and information networks                | 92                  | 7               | 1         | 3                |
| A feeling of being included and not alone          | 85                  | 13              | 2         | 2                |
| My willingness to look out for other people        | 83                  | 16              | 1         | 2                |
| Feeling that this is a safe place to live          | 72                  | 26              | 2         | 5                |
| My sense of being part of this community           | 86                  | 13              | 1         | 2                |
| My willingness to get involved in local activities | 85                  | 14              | 1         | 3                |
| My interest in doing more volunteering             | 76                  | 22              | 2         | 3                |

The table above provides results on the impact that volunteering had on social capital. The vast majority of volunteers saw volunteering as relevant to building networks, bonds and trust. In particular the vast majority of this cohort of volunteers reported an increase in the range of friendships, contacts and information networks that they could call on. The findings also show a positive change in people's appetite and motivation for wider civic engagement i.e. willingness to look out for others, to get involved in local action and do more volunteering.

The following quotes reinforce how volunteering builds social capital

*"Being over 70 and being a volunteer has greatly reduced my feeling of isolation."*

*"Volunteering helps to get me out of the house and socialise with people. This is important in a dispersed rural area where isolation is a big factor in people's lives."*

## Opportunities and Interest in Wider Civic Participation

| Answer Options  | Deemed Relevant % |                 |           | Not relevant (%) |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
|   | Increased         | Stayed the same | Decreased |                  |
| Opportunities to take part in local campaigns or community actions  | 76                | 21              | 2         | 6                |
| Opportunities to get involved in environmental awareness and action | 70                | 27              | 3         | 7                |
| My awareness of local groups, projects or clubs                     | 85                | 13              | 2         | 4                |
| My sense of having a say in local matters                           | 81                | 18              | 1         | 6                |
| My interest in developing / leading on community services           | 77                | 21              | 2         | 8                |
| The opportunity I have to develop / lead on community services      | 76                | 22              | 2         | 9                |

Generally, volunteers agreed that volunteering can bring opportunities for building wider civic participation. The majority of respondents agreed that opportunities to take part on local campaigns (76%) and involvement in environmental awareness (70%) had increased.

A very high percentage of volunteers stated that their interest and awareness in wider civic participation had increased, as did their awareness of local groups and projects (85%), sense of having a say on local matters (81%) and interest in developing or leading on community services (77%)

## Impact of Volunteering on Human Capital

### Personal Development

| Answer Options   | Deemed Relevant (%) |                 |           | Not relevant (%) |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
|  | Increased           | Stayed the same | Decreased |                  |
| My confidence in my own abilities                                | 89                  | 11              | 0         | 3                |
| My sense of self-esteem  | 84                  | 15              | 1         | 3                |
| My sense that I am making a useful contribution to the community | 91                  | 8               | 1         | 1                |
| My sense of motivation   | 85                  | 15              | 0         | 2                |
| My willingness to do more in my local community                  | 88                  | 10              | 2         | 1                |
| The opportunity I have to do more in my local community          | 88                  | 10              | 2         | 2                |
| The opportunity to try something new                             | 84                  | 14              | 2         | 3                |
| The opportunity to develop specific skills                       | 74                  | 24              | 2         | 4                |

The vast majority of volunteers deemed the impact of volunteering on personal development as being relevant. To a large extent, volunteers reported that they had seen an increase across all aspects of their personal development. In particular there was a reported increase in respondents' sense of making a useful contribution (91%), confidence in their own abilities (89%), willingness and opportunity to do more in their local community (88%) and being more motivated (85%).

### Skill Development

| Answer Options   | Deemed Relevant (%) |                 |           | Not relevant (%) |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
|  | Increased           | Stayed the same | Decreased |                  |
| My social and communication skills   | 82                  | 17              | 1         | 5                |
| My ability to work as part of a team   | 80                  | 19              | 1         | 3                |
| My ability to make decisions   | 81                  | 17              | 2         | 3                |
| My ability to lead or encourage others                                       | 80                  | 19              | 1         | 3                |
| The opportunity I have to take a lead or encourage others in local community | 80                  | 19              | 1         | 5                |

The vast majority of volunteers deemed the impact of volunteering on their skill development as being relevant. Overall, 8 out of 10 respondents stated that volunteering developed their skills in a

wide range of areas i.e. social and communication skills (82%), ability to make decisions (81%), ability to work as a team (80%), ability and opportunity to lead and encourage others (80%).

The difference that volunteering can bring to personal and skill development has been reflected in the following quote:

*“Volunteering has been an opportunity to make use of my skills, develop an understanding of an important issue in society and work with people of a diverse sector of society.”*

## Health and Well Being

| Answer Options                    | Deemed Relevant (%) |                 |           | Not relevant (%) |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
|                                   | Increased           | Stayed the same | Decreased |                  |
| My physical health and well-being | 65                  | 27              | 8         | 5                |
| My mental health and well-being   | 67                  | 27              | 6         | 5                |

In the vast majority of cases respondents saw the link between volunteering and their health and well being. Of those that saw the relevance of volunteering, 65% reported an increase in both their physical and mental health as a consequence of volunteering. A further 27% stated that their health and well being has maintained / stayed the same since volunteering. A small % (8 percentage or less OR approximately 10 people) said their health had decreased. This response was not validated against other questions where a negative response would also be assumed. Those reporting a decrease in health also reported satisfaction with volunteering and would recommend volunteering to others. As responses do not show the expected positive correlation, this may indicate a response error or health problems which are independent of volunteering.

The following quote reflects the impact that volunteering has brought to one individual:

*“As a retired professional the volunteering role provides me with an excellent opportunity to give something back ..keeps my mind alert & brain cells activated! A sharing of my skills and expertise ..all are transferrable & I learn from others ... A reciprocal process!”*

## Impact of Volunteering on Employability

| Answer Options  | Deemed Relevant (%) |          |          |            | Not relevant (%) |
|---|---------------------|----------|----------|------------|------------------|
|   | A lot               | A Little | Not Much | Not at all |                  |
| My volunteering has increased my ability to get paid work                           | 26                  | 28       | 15       | 31         | 49               |
| Volunteering has improved my chances of being recognised or promoted in my paid job | 24                  | 24       | 14       | 37         | 55               |
| Volunteering has allowed me to bring new ideas / skills to my paid job              | 31                  | 35       | 14       | 21         | 53               |

Approximately half of respondents did not see volunteering as being relevant to employability. Of those that did, approximately 60-80% of respondents reported some degree of positive impact



ranging from 'a lot' to 'not much'. The statement 'volunteering had increased my ability to get paid work' was analysed against age; as expected those aged 60 years and over were much less likely to see volunteering and employability as being relevant to them (60%). Those in the 35-49 year old age group were most likely to see volunteering as increasing their ability to get paid work (52%). The under-representation of young people in the sample may have artificially skewed the age profile against this question (16-34 year olds only made up 7%, n=12), however the results do suggest that those in age groups that one could assume have built up work experience, are benefiting from the skills developed through volunteering.

### Impact of Volunteering on Cultural Capital

| Answer Options  | Deemed Relevant (%) |                 |           | Not relevant (%) |
|---|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
|   | Increased           | Stayed the same | Decreased |                  |
| My understanding of different cultures                                | 64                  | 36              | 0         | 6                |
| Opportunities to express different aspects of my identity             | 59                  | 40              | 1         | 8                |
| The opportunity I have to work with people from different backgrounds | 73                  | 27              | 0         | 5                |
| My tolerance of people from different backgrounds                     | 70                  | 30              | 0         | 8                |

The vast majority of respondents saw volunteering as being relevant to building cultural capital. Approximately 70% of the respondents reported that volunteering had given them the opportunity to work with people from a different background (73%) and to be more tolerant (70%). The majority of volunteers also reported that volunteering had developed their understanding of different cultures (64%) and provided opportunities to express different aspects of their identity (59%).

### Recommend Volunteering to Others

171 of the 172 people surveyed stated that they would recommend volunteering to others.

*"We need Government to understand exactly what volunteers in the community really do and their contribution to their respective communities."*

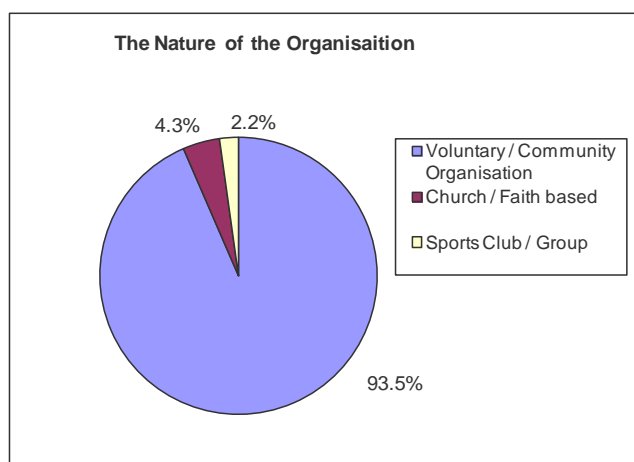
*"People who volunteer in their community can sometimes feel unappreciated. Volunteering is looked down upon in some cases and this can drive people away very fast."*

## Organisational Feedback

The organisations represented in this survey are volunteer involving organisations based organisations working in rural areas across Northern Ireland. The survey was targeted at the Secretary or key contact within an organisation.

The survey was administered through the rural community development support programme delivery bodies. A total of 329 organisations responded to the survey. The number of organisations that it was sent to was not tracked so it is not possible to give a percentage response.

### Profile of Responding Organisations

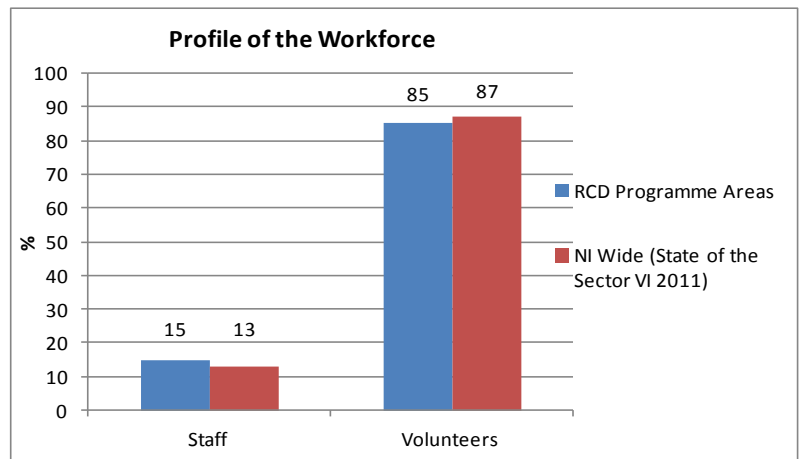
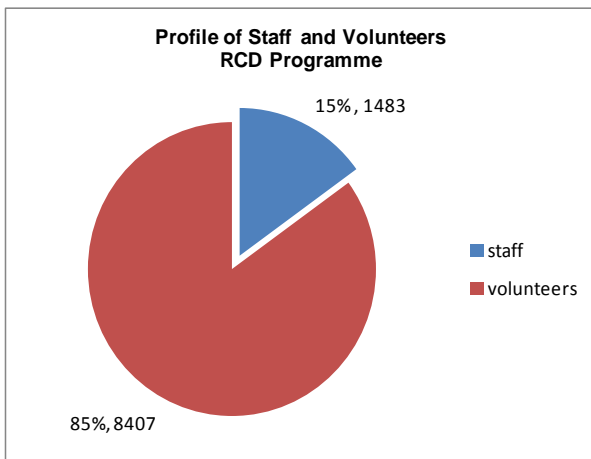


The vast majority of organisations identified as Voluntary and Community Sector (93.5%). A very small percentage responded from a Church/ faith based (4.3%) or as a Sports Club / Group (2.2%).

### Subsector of Responding Organisation (multiple choice q.)

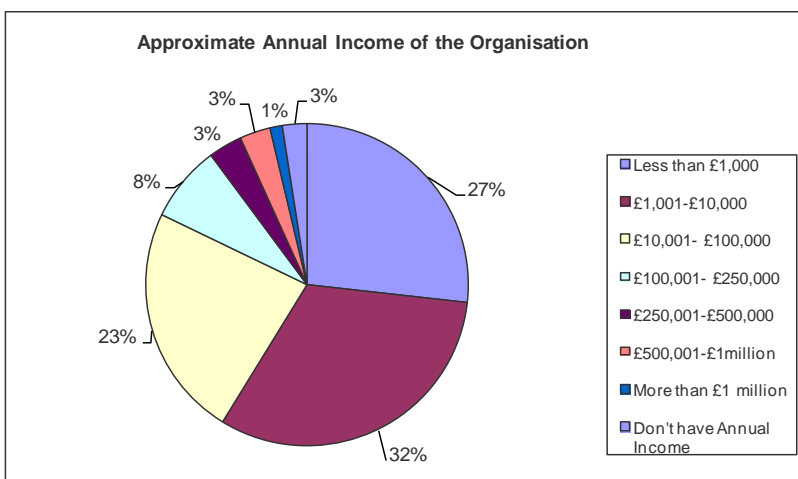
| Answer Options            | %   | (n) |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|
| Health and well being     | 53% | 173 |
| Older people              | 49% | 161 |
| Young people and children | 45% | 148 |
| Advice and information    | 45% | 147 |
| Community Development     | 43% | 141 |
| Education/training        | 37% | 122 |
| Arts / culture / heritage | 35% | 115 |
| Women                     | 32% | 105 |
| Volunteer Development     | 26% | 84  |
| Environment /conservation | 22% | 72  |
| Disability                | 17% | 57  |
| Sport                     | 17% | 55  |
| Housing / homelessness    | 8%  | 27  |
| Church / faith based      | 8%  | 25  |

Responding organisations were involved across a wide range of areas. Over half were involved in health and well being (53%), followed closely by working with age specific groups- older people (49%) and children and young people (45%). Over 40% were involved in giving advice and information (45%) and community development work (43%).



As illustrated in the pie chart above, volunteers accounted for the bulk of the workforce within organisations being supported through the Rural Community Development Programme (85%, N=8407), with the remaining 15% (N=1483) reported as being staff. As illustrated in the bar graph above, in percentage terms the volunteer to staff split in responding organisations is almost identical to the Voluntary and Community Sector as a whole (NICVA, 2012).

The average number of volunteers per organisations was 13<sup>1</sup>. The average number of staff was 0. On further inspection 212 of the 326 organisations reported that they did not have any paid staff (65%). Four organisations accounted for 42% (625 paid staff) of the overall proportion of paid staff.



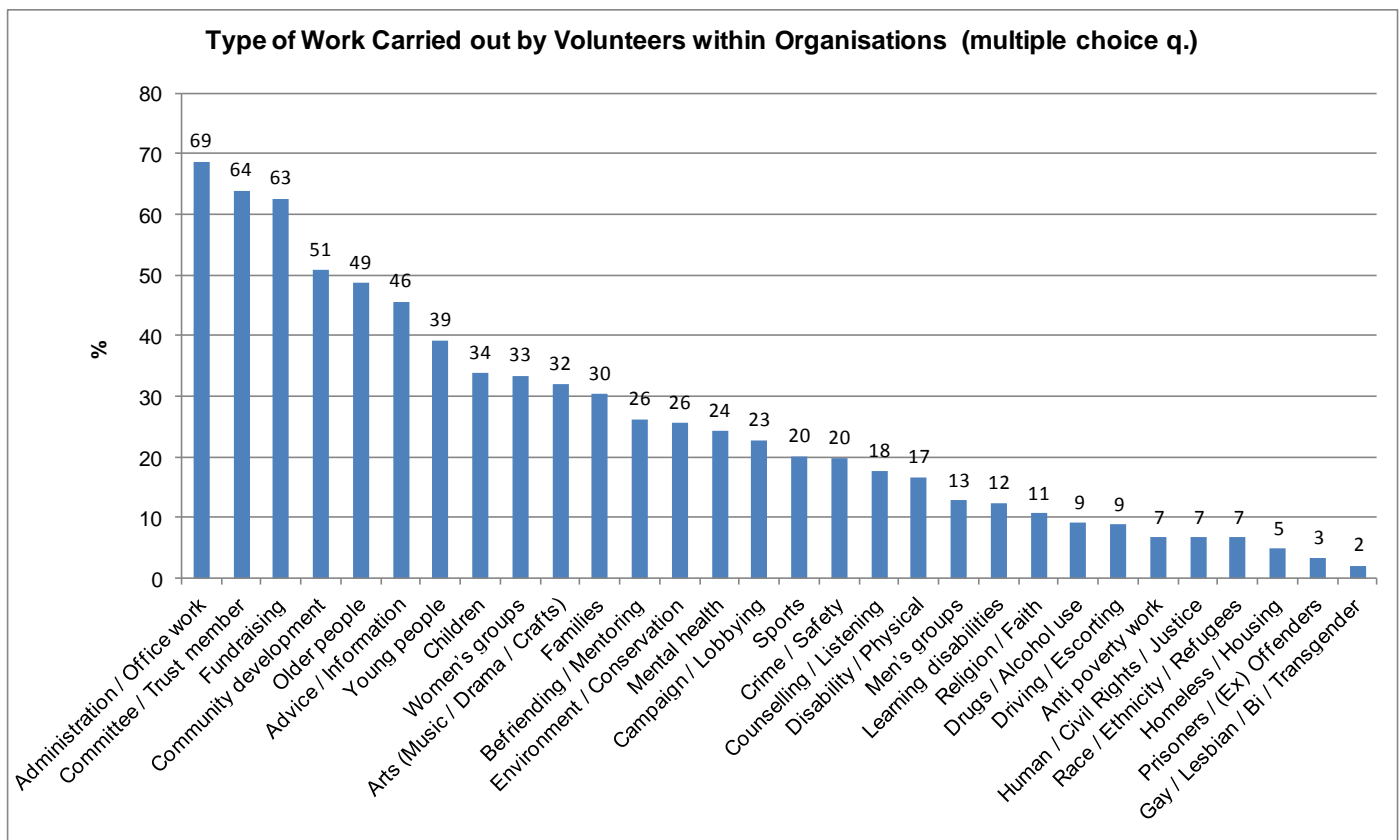
82% of the responding organisations annual income was £100,000 or less. The most common income band overall was £1,001-£10,000 (32%) followed by less than £1,000 (27%). Two percent (n=8) of the responding organisations stated that they did not have an annual income and that it was dependent on funding.

Compared to mapping research on the income of volunteer involving organisations across Northern Ireland, the organisations in this survey were smaller- 59% of

<sup>1</sup> Due to the skewed distribution () of the numbers of staff and volunteers involved in the responding organisations, the median was chosen as providing the most representative average number of staff and volunteers per organisation.

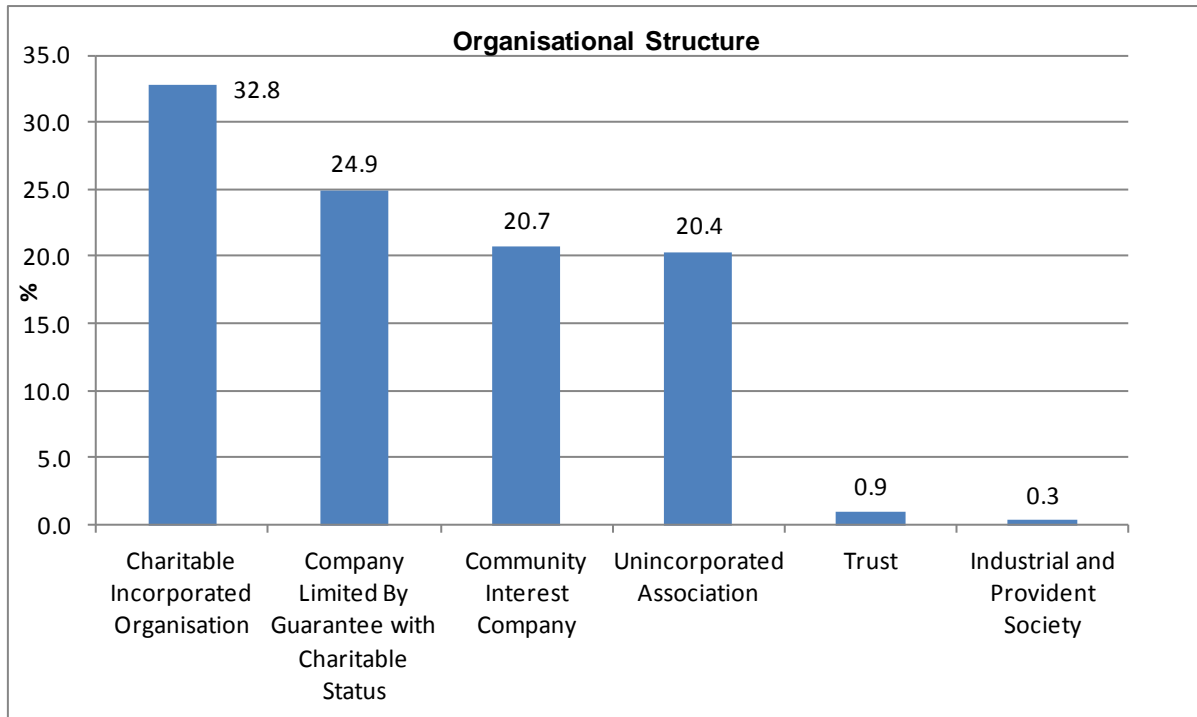
organisations in this survey had incomes of £10,000 or less compared to 45% of a Northern Ireland sample (Volunteer Now 2010).

### Type of Work Carried out by Volunteers Within Organisations



The graph above highlights the range of activities that volunteers were involved in across the organisations surveyed. The most common roles included administration /office (69%), committee/ trust members (64%), fundraising (63%), community development (51%), helping older people (49%) and providing advice and information (46%).

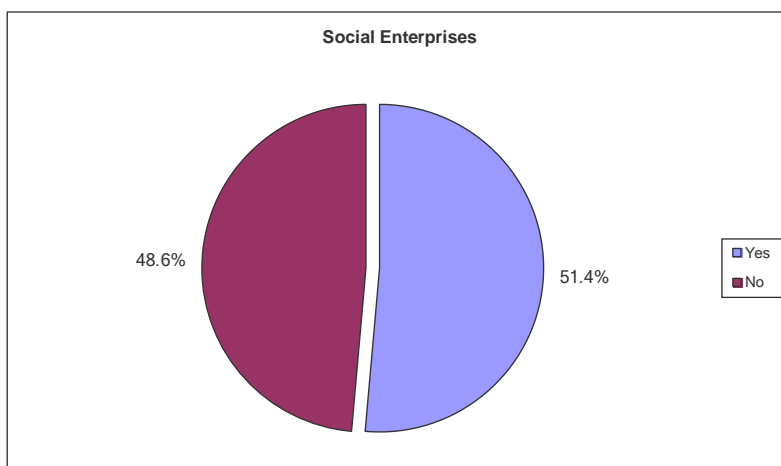
## Organisational Structure



The responding organisations had a range of legal structures. The most common was Charitable Incorporated Organisation (32.8%) followed by Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status (24.9%), Community Interest Company (20.7%) and Unincorporated Association (20.4%). Less than 1% were a Trust or Industrial and Provident Society.

## Social Enterprises

Organisations were given the definition below of a Social Enterprise and asked whether they identified themselves as one. Just over half (51%, 169) of the organisations said they were a Social Enterprise.



*"A Social Enterprise is a business with primary social objectives whose surpluses are re-invested, for that purpose, in the business or in the community rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders or owners."*

## Discussion and Practical Implications

### **Volunteers**

A very small number of volunteers who responded were aged in the younger age bracket 16-34 years of age. Due to lack of specific robust research on volunteering in rural areas it is not known whether this is an accurate reflection of the age profile of volunteers in rural areas. In Northern Ireland the 16-24 age group is the most likely age group to volunteer after the 35-49 age group (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007). It does suggest there is a need to build a better understanding of the age profiling of volunteers in rural areas. This would help to develop measures to involve under-represented groups, improve diversity and offer equality of opportunity. This includes involving people from Black Minority Ethnic Communities (BME) as volunteers which are a growing section of the population in rural communities.

### **Training and Support**

Generally volunteers were satisfied with the training and support they were given. However, there was less satisfaction with opportunities to receive accreditation or qualifications through volunteering (60%) and the amount of awards / certificates received from volunteering (59%). One in five or more of the respondents did not give a clear response to many of the statements relating to training and support. For both these reasons further exploration of the training and support needs of volunteers in rural areas is needed as lack of appreciation and poor organisation can drive volunteers away.

### **Building Employability Skills**

It is also interesting to note that 50% of the volunteers that responded to the survey stated that volunteering had a positive impact on their employability skills. The attraction of accredited training opportunities and more formalised recognition in the form of certificates of achievement could increase the interest in volunteering for some groups for whom this was a key motivation.

### **Building Social Capital**

Promoting and supporting measures to alleviate poverty, social isolation and inequality in rural areas is a key objective of the rural development programme work. The results from this research have shown the positive impact that volunteering has made on the growth of social capital. It also reinforces the importance of community infrastructure for rural populations, the role that volunteers play in sustaining groups and the difference that volunteering makes to individual connectedness and inclusion.

### **Health and Well Being**

A large percentage of the volunteers surveyed reported that their physical and mental health had improved since volunteering. The remainder of the volunteers reported that their health had been

maintained during that time. Taking into consideration the older age profile<sup>2</sup> of the volunteers surveyed and the prevalence of age related health problems, maintenance of health is a good outcome. Official demographic statistics also show that rural communities have a higher proportion of older people in the population and therefore are a greater proportion of the pool of volunteers (60 years old and over). There is a specific body of research which has highlighted the role of volunteering in improving and maintaining health and well being and improving the ability to cope better with health problems (Nazroo & Matthews 2012; Volunteer Now, 2012:2). There is also a considerable amount of evidence based good practice guidance developed on how to effectively recruit, support and retain older volunteers (Volunteer Now, 2011:1).

### **Economic Value of Volunteering**

An annual economic valuation of volunteering was calculated at £452,431.98 for the 157 volunteers who answered the question on hours volunteered per month. The investment in volunteers in the form of paid staff support, training and out of pocket expenses was not collected, for this reason a 'return on investment' ratio could not be calculated<sup>3</sup>. However, based on this rough estimation, it is clear that the economic value from the groups surveyed is substantial, especially if one considers that a large number of the organisations included were volunteer led and therefore would be less likely to have substantial support costs. It would be useful to encourage more rural organisations / groups to measure the impact of their work. There is an increasing drive within the Sector and from Government to do more of this sort of evaluation. Tools such as the VIVA and Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit are relatively easy resources which can help any size of volunteer involving organisation to start evidencing the difference that they make.

### **Opportunities and Interest in Wider Civic Participation**

The majority of volunteers said that volunteering had increased the opportunities available for wider civic participation and their interest in it. In particular, over  $\frac{3}{4}$ 's of the volunteers said that they had a greater interest in leading on community services through their volunteering experience and  $\frac{3}{4}$ 's also reported that volunteering had increased the opportunity they had to develop/ lead on community services. In terms of the rural community development support programme these results demonstrate the opportunity there is to build on leadership potential and harness motivation within rural communities to be civic leaders.

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<sup>2</sup> 41% of the volunteer sample were aged 60 years old and over and of those 13% were aged 70 years old and over.

<sup>3</sup> Further information on the Volunteer Investment to Value Audit is available from the Volunteer Now website- <http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/supporting-organisations/volunteer-impact-assessment-toolkit/volunteer-investment-to-value-audit>

## **Developing Skills, Qualities and Aptitudes**

There is a very strong sense from the volunteers surveyed that volunteering was developing key skills needed and required for effective and sustainable community services, community development work and civic leadership i.e. team work, communication, decision making, ability to lead, interest in contributing to the community. These skills are also transferable and therefore can be used in other areas of life such as in employment and personal life.

## **Organisations**

### **Under represented Groups in the Sample**

A very small number of groups from the faith based or sports sectors were included in the results of this survey. There is a significant amount of volunteering that happens in these subsectors, especially in rural areas where churches/faith based groups and sports clubs / groups are the life blood of the communities. It would be useful to do a specific piece of work to engage with these under-represented groups.

### **Understanding Support Needs with Respect to Volunteer Involvement**

There was not scope in this survey to include questions on application of or interest in volunteer management practices from the perspective of the organisation. This would be a useful inclusion in future research in rural areas i.e. recruitment, supervision, support, training etc. The results show that there are a substantial numbers of volunteers involved in a governance role. It would be useful to get an idea of organisations governance practices to better understand the type of support that they could benefit from. There is a strong good practice framework for governance within the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland which has been endorsed by the Charity Commission here (Developing Governance Group, 2008). However, the volunteer's perspective of training and support offered to them (page 11) does offer some indication of the practices that are in place within organisations. It was clear from the volunteer perspective that generally training, support and opportunities to gain awards and certificates could be improved.

### **Prevalence of Volunteer Led Groups**

A substantial number of the organisations surveyed were volunteer led with no salaried staff (64%, 212 out of 329). This highlights the vital role that volunteers are playing in sustaining groups; without whom these organisations would not exist. Volunteer led groups, sometimes called grass root groups have different characteristics to organisations that have paid members of staff- these groups have a strong focus on group values and priorities, made up of the community within which they are active and for this reason have detailed knowledge of needs, because of their informality, they are able to be more flexible and often more able to act on changing community needs. Unfortunately they are also less likely to be aware of services and best practice that support volunteering and have limited resources available. Interventions are most effective when good practice is tailored to their individual need (Red Foundation, unknown date).



## Supporting Governance Roles

Apart from an administration role, the most common volunteer role was in governance. This raises the importance of supporting groups to become aware of and develop good practice in governance practices i.e. code of good governance (<http://diycommitteeguide.org/>). There are high quality resources in the form of the diy committee guide and code of good governance health check which groups of all sizes can use to plan and implement good practice. There are also organisations that offer support to understand and make best use of these resources.

## Social Economy Sector and Volunteering

Assisting individuals and groups to engage with the social economy sector is a key objective of the rural development programme. This survey has shown that approximately half of the organisations are functioning as a social enterprise and half are not. Northern Ireland based research on the scope, scale and nature of social economy sector has reported that there are nearly as many volunteers as there are paid staff working within it (43% of the workforce are volunteers and 57% paid staff-Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, 2007). The support available from the volunteering infrastructure with respect to good practice in recruitment, support, management of volunteers is very relevant to social enterprises. A recent report produced by Volunteer Now has argued that good volunteer management in the context of a social enterprise makes good business sense because volunteers are providing a key function that impacts on the success i.e. profit making of the business (Volunteer Now, 2012:1)

## Opportunities for Follow- Up of Engaged Groups

Contact details for groups were taken as part of the data collection. In addition to sharing the research report, it would be useful to follow-up with groups to provide information on support available regarding volunteer involvement and management.

## General Methodological Issues

A number of subsectors of organisations were under-represented in this survey. If this survey was to be repeated it would be useful to periodically track the profile of responding groups during the data collection period so that under-represented groups could be specifically targeted to maximise representativeness.

Twenty of the 26 council areas had at least one organisation based in their area that responded to the survey. Some of the councils where there were no responding organisations could be described as being more urbanised i.e. Belfast. In any future work it would be useful to build in a follow-up contact for organisations in council area that were not represented and to consider using a quota control sampling technique which ensures that representation was weighted in line with the proportion of support received from the RCD programme.

Generally there is a lack of easily accessible information on the number of volunteer involving organisations or volunteering levels in rural areas. There are also other pieces of research on volunteering that secondary analysis could be applied to compare and contrast the urban and rural

landscape for volunteering i.e. 2011 Census, Mapping Research (Volunteer Now, 2010), DSD Volunteering Research .

In addition to up to date and relevant quantitative research, more qualitative research is welcomed to gain a more in-depth understanding of different perspective views of volunteering in rural areas. Perspective would include individual experiences of volunteering across a range of different contexts, volunteer led groups and groups with a mix of paid staff and volunteers.

## Conclusion

Capacity building in communities to sustain and build upon an asset base is a necessary investment. This report has shown the wealth of assets (capitals) that are being nurtured and developed through volunteering in rural communities in Northern Ireland. It is the human, cultural, social and physical capitals that are built through people that hold the key to the development of rural communities. It is often a small group of key organisers within groups that are central to mobilising many other people and resources.

It is clear from this report that volunteers are an asset which requires resources to maximise their potential. The report has set out a number of recommendations from both the volunteer and organisation survey results. DARD as the government department responsible for community development in rural areas has a central role to play in steering organisations to available infrastructure support which can help them to build on their capacity, maximise the opportunities to benefit from voluntary action and also to recognise and promote volunteering to individuals in these communities. The existing volunteering infrastructure can offer a wide portfolio of support and guidance, underpinned by a public policy framework (The Volunteering Strategy for NI- DSD, 2012) which is specific to volunteer involvement and which can complement the other work being done through rural community development organisations, Government Departments and public bodies.

The key message from this research resonates with seminal research conducted with rural communities by the Carnegie Trust and which reflects the need to invest in people and organisations to develop community wellbeing and capacity.

*“Vibrant communities are places where people young and old are encouraged and motivated to want to improve their community and enjoy doing so. The role of the individual volunteer, the activist, the shaker and doer (the ‘fiery spirit’) is critical. As too is the collective capacity of the community group. Both need to be supported by community development and volunteer development organisations.” (Carnegie Trust, 2007)*

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## Appendix 1

| Council Area Organisations Based in        | DARD Report |     | Census 2011 |
|--|-------------|-----|-------------|
|  | %           | (n) | %           |
| Fermanagh District Council                 | 10.5%       | 18  | 17.7        |
| Moyle District Council                     | 9.9%        | 17  | 17.0        |
| Antrim Borough Council                     | 8.8%        | 15  | 14.5        |
| Ards Borough Council                       | 7.0%        | 12  | 15.2        |
| Banbridge District Council                 | 6.4%        | 11  | 15.8        |
| Lisburn City Council                       | 6.4%        | 11  | 15.8        |
| Down District Council                      | 5.8%        | 10  | 16.7        |
| Omagh District Council                     | 5.8%        | 10  | 17.3        |
| Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council | 5.3%        | 9   | 14.7        |
| Newry and Mourne District Council          | 5.3%        | 9   | 15.6        |
| Armagh City and District Council           | 4.1%        | 7   | 16.0        |
| Larne Borough Council                      | 4.1%        | 7   | 14.9        |
| Ballymena Borough Council                  | 3.5%        | 6   | 15.8        |
| Ballymoney Borough Council                 | 3.5%        | 6   | 14.8        |
| Craigavon Borough Council                  | 3.5%        | 6   | 13.8        |
| Castlereagh Borough Council                | 2.3%        | 4   | 17.1        |
| Cookstown District Council                 | 2.3%        | 4   | 13.9        |
| Magherafelt District Council               | 2.3%        | 4   | 15.1        |
| Newtownabbey Borough Council               | 2.3%        | 4   | 15.3        |
| Carrickfergus Borough Council              | 0.6%        | 1   | 15.6        |
| Belfast City Council                       | 0.0%        | 0   | 15.8        |
| Coleraine Borough Council                  | 0.0%        | 0   | 17.6        |
| Derry City Council                         | 0.0%        | 0   | 14.2        |
| Limavady Borough Council                   | 0.0%        | 0   | 13.3        |
| North Down Borough Council                 | 0.0%        | 0   | 18.1        |
| Strabane District Council                  | 0.0%        | 0   | 13.6        |

As a form of comparison the percentage volunteering rates from the last census 2011 have been noted for each council area in addition to the number of volunteers that responded within each. The Northern Ireland average volunteering rates was 16%.

Source: NISRA- Labour Market- Economic Activity.

<http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/Theme.aspx?themeNumber=136&themeName=Census+2011>