

Research Briefing Paper

The Impact of Formal Volunteering on the Health
and Well-Being of the 50+ age group in Northern
Ireland

(Version 4)



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Summary of Time Frame for Main Research Activities

This table outlines the time frame for key activities within the research study.

Time	Activities
Organisation shows interest in taking part in the Research	Once recruited organisations will receive volunteer packs- these will include an information sheet, questionnaire, consent form and Free-Post Envelope. An e-mail will be sent from Volunteer Now to inform organisations that the packs are on the way. Organisations asked to complete and return the 'Organisational Information Form'. This information will provide a useful picture of the organisations involved in the research.
March- October 2010	Organisations will offer a volunteer pack to all volunteers who are 50+.
September 2010– April 2012	*Volunteer Now will administer questionnaire 'Time Point 2, 3 and 4' to volunteers.
Mid 2011 & Early 2012	Volunteer Now will distribute preliminary reports to key stakeholders, including volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.
End 2012 – Beginning 2013	Volunteer Now will distribute the overall findings of the study in a full report which will acknowledge the involvement of all key stakeholders. A conference / seminar will be planned to launch to the report, highlight learning and present recommendations.

*As of 1 April 2010, the Volunteer Development Agency merged with 9 volunteer centres to become a new organisation called 'Volunteer Now'.

1.0 Introduction

This briefing paper has been prepared for organisations who are taking part in the Research Study titled: *The impact of formal volunteering on the health and well-being of older people in Northern Ireland.*

The paper will provide organisations with the information they will need to understand :-

- The Purpose of the Research;
- The Research Process;
- The Roles and Expectations of all the main stakeholders i.e. Volunteer Now, University of Ulster, Volunteer Involving Organisations and Volunteers.

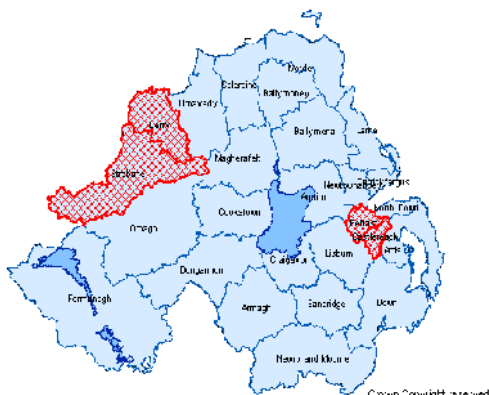
Volunteer Involving Organisations play a key role in this research study and are pivotal to its success. Organisations are the gateway to the volunteers which are of interest to this study. In return, your involvement will provide you with the opportunity to contribute to a Northern Ireland wide research study. Your organisation will be fully acknowledged in any publications and events which come from the research. Organisations will also be given the opportunity to give their views and comment on the preliminary and final report.

2.0 The ‘Unlocking Potential’ Project

This research study is part of a wide range of work which is being carried out by the ‘Unlocking Potential’ Project, 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.

2.1 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% 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 ‘Unlocking Potential’ Project Manager based in the Ormeau Road Office, of Volunteer Now. The project is

supported in Belfast / Castlereagh by the Shaftsbury Square office of Volunteer Now and in L/Derry / Strabane by the Northwest Volunteer Centre. It is the intention to commence rolling the project out across the whole of NI in 2010.

3.0 The Context for the Research

There are a number of important social changes and cultural issues which are driving the need to review volunteer management practices regarding the 50+ age group. Like the rest of the western world, the 60+ age group is becoming an increasing proportion of the Northern Ireland population. Currently about a third of Northern Ireland's total population is aged over 50 years old (n=535,000) and 14% (n=239,347) are aged 65+ years old. Statisticians forecast a 70% increase in people aged 50+ years old between 2007 and 2030 and a 73% increase in people aged 65+ years¹. Against this population projection, research has continued to find an under-representation of older people in volunteering. The 65+ age group are the least likely age group to volunteer in Northern Ireland (17%) which is below the average % involvement in volunteering for Northern Ireland as a whole (21%)².

There is a body of international research which has found a wide range of positive outcomes for older people who volunteer³. However, it is unfortunate that no large scale studies have investigated this important area from a Northern Ireland context.

The 'new old' or 'baby boomer' generation of people were born in the post second world war period (1945-1965), the post war period has witnessed a significant transformation in the world of work, pensions and the welfare state. This new cultural and social environment has provided a different set of opportunities and challenges than were experienced by the generation before them. This has led to a generation with better health, wealth and education and as a consequence a generation with higher expectations, motivations and needs. For all these reasons, this 'new old' group require different things from volunteering, as they do from other aspects of their life. As this group begin re-defining what it means to be 'old' and 'retired', volunteer involving organisations will be required to meet the expectations and needs of this group, in terms of volunteer roles. Organisations which provide volunteering roles and a volunteer

1 NISRA (2006) Northern Ireland Statistical and Research Agency (NISRA) Demography and Methodology Branch, Resident Population Estimates Mid-2006.

² Volunteer Now (2007) It's All About Time: Volunteering in Northern Ireland available from http://www.volunteeringni.org/what_we_do/publications/#Research

³ Volunteer Now (2008) Older People Literature Review, available from http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/publications/#Research

experience which meet these expectations will be in the best position to 'tap into the immense potential and resources of this group'.

3.1 The Impetus for the Research Study

There are many reasons why this research study is very important, not least because there is a lack of Northern Ireland based research on the impact of volunteering on the health and well-being of the older age group. This study will investigate this area which will provide scientifically robust local evidence.

The NI government is currently finalising the first Volunteering Strategy for NI⁴ in 2010; an over-arching objective of this strategy is to increase the volunteer base in Northern Ireland from 282,000 people to 500,000. As an increasing proportion of the Northern Ireland population is over 50, the profile of volunteers in the future will have to include a greater number of older people, if the volunteer base is to increase. Indeed, one of the proposals of this strategy is directly linked to addressing the under-representation of older people in volunteering. Overall, volunteering has very clear links with many of the current public policies relevant to health and ageing in Northern Ireland i.e. active ageing, health promotion, social inclusion and civic engagement. This research has also the potential to identify volunteering as another public health response in the health and welfare of older people.

4.0 The Research Question and Rationale

The question being posed by this research study is -:

“Are there health and well-being benefits from formal volunteering for the 50+ age group in Northern Ireland?”

The rationale for the study is the fact that there is a research gap for a unique perspective on the impact of volunteering on the health of the 50+ age group which focuses on the specific cultural context that is Northern Ireland, an older age group and the use of a longitudinal design. It is less common to see the use of a longitudinal design because it is more complex. However, this design does not have the limitations that are found in snap shot, cross sectional research designs.

⁴ Volunteering Strategy Consultation Document <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/consultations-join-in-get-involved.htm>

4.1 Personnel Involved in the Research Study

There are a number of individuals who will play a key role in the research process. Together these individuals have a wide range of skills and experience which continues to provide valuable support and advice to the research study. These people are:-

Staff from the University of Ulster -Professor Maurice Stringer- Director of the Psychology Research Institute and Dr John Mallet- Lecturer in School of Psychology.

Staff from Volunteer Now- Christine Irvine- Policy and Information Officer; Denise Hayward – Director of Policy and Information; Billy Eagleson – Manager of ‘Unlocking Potential’ Project and Ciaran Rice – Administration Officer.

There are also **two advisory groups** which provide invaluable support to the ‘Unlocking Potential’ Project and its work. The ‘Overall Advisory Group’ is chaired by an Ex-Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Clive Gowdy and includes representatives from the Voluntary and Age Sector organisations, partner pilot volunteer centres and Agency staff. The ‘Research Reference group’ is chaired by the former Director for Voluntary Action Studies at the University of Ulster, Professor Arthur Williamson and includes representatives from Queens University, Belfast, the Centre for Ageing Research Development in Ireland (CARDI) and Changing Ageing Partnership (CAP).

In particular, the University of Ulster has a reputation for carrying out high level research; the Psychology Research Institute has a great deal of experience in working on a wide range of large scale, health related studies. Volunteer Now has carried out / commissioned the most comprehensive research studies on volunteering in Northern Ireland i.e. It’s All About Time (2007) and Making the Connection (2009)⁵. Over the last 20 years, it has become the centre of expertise in the development and promotion of volunteering in Northern Ireland. The contact details of the key members of staff that you can contact are at the back of the report.

4.2 Methodology

This study will involve asking volunteers to complete a questionnaire at four time points. Volunteers will be asked to complete an initial questionnaire followed by an additional three questionnaires 6 months, 12 months and 18 months later. We are interested in recruiting both ‘new’ and ‘existing’ volunteers.

⁵ All of Volunteer Now’s publications can be found at [http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what we do/publications/#Volunteer Management](http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/publications/#Volunteer Management)

New Volunteers- those who are just beginning to volunteer with an organisation i.e. have just completed their induction / those who have not started to actively volunteer (i.e. they do not have to be completely new to volunteering, just starting a new role)

Existing Volunteers- those who have been actively volunteering for some time.

A target sample of 400 to 600 volunteers will be recruited at Time Point 1 (March – October 2010). It is largely through volunteer involving organisations that the study will gain access to this sample of volunteers. The study is actively recruiting organisations from across Northern Ireland thereby making the findings as representative as possible.

4.2.1 Time Frame for the Questionnaires

This table graphically represents the time frame for the study.

March '10- October'10	September '10- April '11	March '11- October'11	September'11- April '12
Baseline Questionnaire 1	6 months Questionnaire 2	12 months Questionnaire 3	18 months Questionnaire 4

Organisations invite 'new' and 'existing' volunteers to complete Time Point 1 questionnaire

*Volunteer Now follow-up with volunteers who complete and return Time Point 1 questionnaires at 3 further time points. *Participants can withdraw from the study at any time.*

4.3 Role of the Volunteer Involving Organisations

Volunteer Involving Organisations play a key role in this research study and are pivotal to its success. Organisations are the gateway to the volunteers which are of interest to this study. For the necessary statistical analysis to be complete there is a requirement for a sample size of 400-600 volunteers.

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There are a number of specific expectations of organisations with regard to administering the questionnaires:-

- Organisations will provide a Key Contact for the study. Having consistency in the relationship between Volunteer Now and the organisation will help the study run smoothly.
- Organisations will keep us informed of changes that may affect the research i.e. if the key contact details change or a volunteer leaves a role.
- Organisations will provide a volunteer pack (A4 Envelope) to each volunteer who is 50 or over. This pack will contain all the information that volunteers will need to take part in the research i.e. information sheet, consent form, questionnaires and free post envelope. *The key contact at your organisation will be provided with pack(s) of questionnaires in the post. An e-mail will be sent to inform you that the packs are on their way to you.*
- Organisations will complete a short 3 page questionnaire. It will ask some questions about your involvement of volunteers. This questionnaire will also ask you to give an approximation of the number of volunteers that you anticipate recruiting during the recruitment period. This information will be used to decide how many questionnaires to send to you in the post.
- Organisations will provide the volunteer packs to new and existing volunteers who are 50+.
- Volunteer Involving Organisations are still being recruited on to the research study until October 2010. If you know of a volunteer involving organisation who may be interested in taking part in the study, especially those who are recruiting new volunteers, let them know about this research study.

4.4 Role of Volunteer Now and the University of Ulster

Both Volunteer Now and the University of Ulster have a range of activities to complete as part of the research study.

4.4.1 Volunteer Now Staff will:-

- Act as the main point of contact for organisations. The contact details for key members of staff are at the back of this report.
- Volunteer Now will co-ordinate the timing and delivery of questionnaires at Time Point 2, 3 and 4 which are 6 months, 12 months and 18 months after a person completes the first questionnaire.

- Volunteer Now will work closely with the University of Ulster on the analysis of the findings.
- Volunteer Now will be responsible for ensuring that personal contact details of the volunteer participants are stored safely and securely.

4.4.2 The University of Ulster Staff will:-

- Take the primary role in research related direction and guidance. Dr John Mallet will be the overall Chief Investigator of the study. This includes ensuring that ethical standards set by the University of Ulster Ethics Committee are adhered to.
- University of Ulster staff will conduct sophisticated statistical analysis on the data collected.

4.5 Criteria for Volunteer Participants

There are a number of criteria that volunteer participants need to meet in order to be eligible for the research study-

- Participants must be aged 50 or over.
- Participants should have read and signed a consent form within the volunteer pack.
- Participants agree to complete 4 questionnaires over an 18 month period OR as long as they are involved as a volunteer with your organisation.

4.6 Method of Completing the Questionnaires

At Time Point 1 participants will be asked to complete and return their hard copy questionnaire in the post using a Free Post Envelope. Full information and instructions for volunteers will be provided in the information sheet which will be contained in the volunteer pack. Participants will be given the option of completing the Time Point 2, 3 and 4 questionnaires by post, e-mail or by telephone as this will be administered solely from Volunteer Now.

4.6.1 Assistance with Completing Questionnaires

It is understood that some participants may require assistance in order to complete the questionnaires. Under such circumstances organisations are asked to contact Volunteer Now staff to organise suitable arrangements.

4.6.2 Questionnaire Content

The questionnaire will contain questions on the following general areas i.e. demographic information, volunteering experience and contact information. The contact information sheet will be the only sheet in which personal details are requested. This sheet will be removed from the rest of the questionnaire once returned to Volunteer Now and stored securely.

There are six health & well-being measurements that will be included within the questionnaire. These questions have been chosen for their focus on mental health, physical health, significant medical problems, quality of life, social support and attitudes to ageing. The GHQ-12, WHOQOL-BREF, Lubben Social Network Scale and the Attitudes to Ageing scale are standardised Questionnaires which have been tested for reliability and validated.

Mental Health

The **GHQ-12** (General Health Questionnaire) is a short screening tool for measuring psychological well being.

Physical Health

There are three questions regarding frequency of low, moderate and vigorous **physical activity** over the previous 7 days. Participants will be asked their **height and weight** in order to get an idea of the Body Mass Index (BMI). This is a useful measure for indicating whether someone is a healthy weight.

Significant Medical Problems

Participants will be asked if they have been diagnosed with any significant medical conditions i.e. high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, chronic lung disease, heart attack, stroke or arthritis / rheumatism.

Quality of Life / General Well Being

The WHOQOL-BREF provides an overall indication of QOL and general health and has been tested and validated by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The scale covers 6 different domains which include physical, psychological, level of independence, social relations, environmental and spirit/ mood.

Social Support / Social Isolation

The Lubben Social Network Scale is a short scale designed to gauge social isolation in older adults by measuring perceived social support received by family and friends. It measures the size, closeness and frequency of contacts from family and friends.

Attitude to Ageing

Attitudes to Ageing (AAQ) has been tested and validated by the WHO. It is a 24 item scale which asks a range of questions about getting older. The main areas include psychological growth, psychosocial loss, and physical change. It is designed to measure the impact of ageing interventions, volunteering being the intervention in the context of this study. New scale developed since 2006 by the WHO.

4.6.3 Piloting of the Questionnaires

As is best practice for conducting survey based research the questionnaire has been piloted with a group of older people. The piloting process involved asking people to complete the questionnaire and to give their opinion on the length of the questionnaire, the look of the questionnaire i.e. the font size and style used, their understanding of the questions and sensitivity towards any questions. The pilot group were asked their views on the appropriateness of the prize draw as an incentive and whether this would influence whether they would complete the questionnaires or not.

4.7 Ethical Approval

The design of the research study has been approved by the University of Ulster Research Ethics filter committee. This process has been very useful as it provides all parties with the confidence that the research is being conducted appropriately and ensures the protection of all stakeholders i.e. Volunteers, Volunteer Involving Organisations, the University of Ulster, and Volunteer Now. For further information on research governance and research ethics at the University of Ulster go to www.ulster.ac.uk/research/rg.

4.8 Storage of Information

The completed questionnaires will be returned directly to one contact at Volunteer Now. Volunteer Now will be responsible for the secure storage of participant's personal details. The personal details will be included on the last page of the questionnaire; this sheet will be removed from the completed questionnaires and stored securely at the Volunteer Now Ormeau Road office. Each questionnaire will be coded with a unique Identification number which will correspond with the personal information sheet to

enable matching. The University of Ulster will only receive questionnaires with an anonymous code attached in order to match data across the 4 time points.

4.9 Feedback

Any information regarding the research will be sent to the key contact of each organisation. The research team will occasionally send you out an email to keep you up to date on what is happening with the research study. Summary Interim findings from the study will be produced on the 6 month and 12 month findings. These should be available in Mid 2011 and Early 2012 respectively. It is planned that the overall final report will be available in Late 2012 – Early 2013. This will be available in both electronic and hard copy. In order to launch the report and ensure that the findings and recommendations are disseminated as widely as possible a conference / seminar will also be arranged.

5.0 Incentives for taking part in the study

The main incentive for everyone involved in the study is the fact that they are making a valuable contribution to informing the discussion on the impact of volunteering on the health of the 50+ age group. The findings will help to raise the profile of volunteering and will also be used to inform public policy.

Organisations will also be offered the opportunity to access Older People Volunteering Training. This training has been developed from research conducted with older people last year. The aim of the training is to raise awareness of the benefits of involving older volunteers and to provide information on how to recruit and support older volunteers. If you are interested in booking on to this training email ciaran.rice@volunteernow.co.uk

Organisations will also be given access to a one day research event facilitated by the University of Ulster. The content of the event will include information on research techniques, how to access research funding and ways of accessing opportunities to collaborate with a university.

Volunteers will be entered into a prize draw for vouchers worth £50 each time they complete and return a questionnaire. Volunteers who complete and return questionnaires at each of the four time points will be entered into a further prize draw for vouchers worth £200.

6.0 Frequently Asked Questions

Will volunteers be removed from the study if they do not complete one of the time points?

Volunteers will not be automatically removed from the study if they are unable to complete a questionnaire at one of the time points. The sample size chosen for the study has been chosen with an expectation that there will be some level of non-response at each of the 4 time points.

Some volunteer roles only last for 6 months, does this mean that these volunteers cannot take part in the study?

The study will be accepting volunteers who are intending to stay with a volunteer role for a shorter period than the 18 months that the study is running. Again, it is expected that not everyone will remain engaged for the full period that the study is running.

What if a volunteer requires assistance with completing the questionnaire?

It is not advised that a staff member or volunteer from the volunteer involving organisation assists the volunteer participant in completing the questionnaire. However, where the volunteer feels comfortable they could ask a family member or friend to help them. Alternatively, a member of the research team can be contacted to make arrangements to assist any volunteer participant.

7.0 Research Team Contacts

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