



# It's all about Time

Volunteering in Northern Ireland 2007  
*Summary Report*

**It's All About Time** gives a comprehensive insight into volunteering in Northern Ireland in 2007. It describes the numbers of people volunteering, what they are doing and their experience as a volunteer. It also provides detailed information from organisations that involve volunteers as to their experiences and practice. The report was commissioned by the Volunteer Development Agency on behalf of the Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) within the Department for Social Development which funded the work and it will inform the development of a Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland being led by the VCU.

**Background and Methodology** The first survey into volunteering in Northern Ireland was carried out and published in 1995<sup>1</sup> by the Volunteer Development Agency. This report produced the first comprehensive picture of volunteering in Northern Ireland. It was followed up in June 2001 when the *Volunteering in Northern Ireland 2001* report was published by the Volunteer Development Agency. In 2001 the Agency also published a report into volunteering within organisations in the voluntary and community sector. *Volunteering in Organisations 2001* was the first attempt to look at the various policies and procedures that existed amongst voluntary and community organisations in order to recruit, manage and generally engage with volunteers.

This third survey of volunteering in Northern Ireland follows the same format and methodology as employed for the 1995 and 2001 surveys. On this occasion a total of 1,020 individuals across Northern Ireland were surveyed by Millward Brown as part of their omnibus survey during January 2007. In addition a sample of 3,045 organisations was also surveyed as a repeat of the *Volunteering in Organisations 2001* report. The report *It's All About Time* is a combination of both studies and describes the extent and scale of volunteering in Northern Ireland in 2007 as well as describing the experiences of volunteers, the impact of volunteerism on organisations and why some individuals choose not to volunteer. It is based on the results from face to face interviews with 1,020 individuals across Northern Ireland and the responses from 745 (24.4% response rate) organisations that involve volunteers.

The full report is available to download from [www.volunteering-ni.org](http://www.volunteering-ni.org)

**Definitions** Volunteering, as defined here, refers to both volunteering through organisations and volunteering carried out in more informal ways, often at a neighbourhood level but outside the family. The definition used in this report and in the 2001 and 1995 surveys is as follows:

*"Volunteers and volunteering refer to individuals and the work or action they undertake for the benefit of others or the community (outside the immediate family), undertaken by free choice and not directly in return for wages."*

All three reports examining volunteering in Northern Ireland have included both formal volunteering within organisations and informal volunteering carried out

<sup>1</sup> Volunteer Development Agency (1995) *Volunteering in Northern Ireland*, Williamson and Associates, Belfast

<sup>2</sup> Source NISRA estimated population 30th June 2005

<sup>3</sup> Estimates based on the Northern Ireland population aged over 16 (1,343,174). Source NISRA estimated population 30th June 2005

<sup>4</sup> Average hourly wage in 2006 was £11.49 (Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings)

on behalf of people outside an individual's immediate family. The definitions of both types of volunteering are as follows:

### Formal volunteering

*"Unpaid voluntary work carried out with, or under the auspices of, an organisation."*

### Informal volunteering

*"Unpaid or voluntary work carried out outside organisations, often at neighbourhood level, but outside the immediate family."*

**Objectives of Research** There were two clear aims associated with this research project:

- a) To undertake a large scale population based survey, based on interviews with individuals, to provide credible baseline information regarding the quantity and range of volunteering and community involvement undertaken by individuals in Northern Ireland. To track trends in volunteering such as motivation and attitudes and to benchmark against earlier reports completed in 1995 and again in 2001.
- b) To provide an understanding of current good practice and needs of organisations in relation to volunteers and highlight significant issues around volunteering. This part of the research will provide a follow up to the Volunteering in Organisations survey completed in 2001 and will include an analysis of trends as well as exploration of new issues.

### Estimates of total numbers of volunteers (1995 to 2007)<sup>2</sup>

	FORMAL VOLUNTEERS POPULATION ESTIMATE	INFORMAL VOLUNTEERS POPULATION ESTIMATE
<b>2007</b>	282,067	470,111
<b>2001</b>	358,493	759,000
<b>1995</b>	200,000	600,000

### Formal Volunteers

- 21% of individuals surveyed are formal volunteers (in 2001 this figure was 29% and in 1995 it was 18%). This equates to an estimated 282,067 individuals aged over 16 years old who have volunteered for an organisation over the previous 12 months<sup>3</sup>.

- Individually formal volunteers give an average of 13.4 hours each month. In 2007 the overall economic value of formal volunteers contribution, based on the Northern Ireland average hourly wage,<sup>4</sup> is £504 million.
- Females are more likely than males to be formal volunteers. As a proportion of all formal volunteers six out of every ten are females (61%).
- Individuals aged between 35 and 49 years old and those aged between 16 and 24 years old are the most likely to volunteer.

- Just under one third of all formal volunteers are engaged with a voluntary or community organisation which equates to an estimated 87,723 individuals. The

## TRENDS

### Formal Volunteers

- ☛ Numbers of formal volunteers involved in churches or religious organisations continues to decline.

- ☛ Volunteers are tending to focus their time on one organisation and more volunteers are giving less time per month.

next most common type of organisation volunteers are engaged with is the church or religious bodies (70,799).

- The most common types of formal voluntary activities undertaken by respondents were raising or handling money (32%) and helping to organise or run an activity or event (26%).

- 16-24 year olds are more likely to volunteer for organisations that are involved in sports or exercise based activities, whereas 35-49 year olds are more likely to formally volunteer when it relates to organisations involved in children's education (schools).

- Almost three quarters of all formal volunteers (74%) give time to organisations at least once a month (in 2001 this figure was 62% and in 1995 it was 61%).

- Personal contact through word of mouth, through someone already volunteering in a group, through the church or religious organisation or through friends or family are the main ways through which individuals found out about volunteering opportunities.

## TRENDS

### Formal Volunteers

☞ Older volunteers (50+) are most likely to volunteer once a week and give more time than any other age group despite the group 65+ being least likely to volunteer.

#### Type of organisation respondents volunteered with

	%	ESTIMATE OF VOLUNTEERS
Voluntary and community sector	31.1	87,723
Church/religious body	25.1	70,799
Sports club	13.2	37,233
Other	12.7	35,823
Public sector (e.g. hospital, nursing home, etc)	10.4	29,335
Private sector	4.2	11,847
Don't know	2.4	6,769
Political party	0.9	2,538
Trade union	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>282,067</b>

Base: 212 (all formal volunteers)

### Informal Volunteers

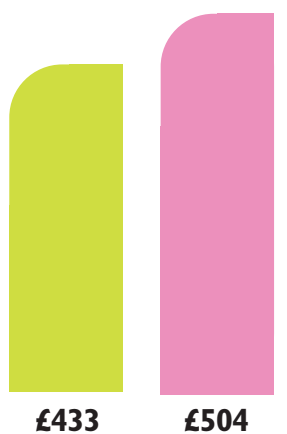
- Informal volunteers accounted for 35% of the individuals surveyed of which almost a third were also formal volunteers (31%). This equates to an estimated 470,111 individuals who over the last twelve months have been engaged as informal volunteers. An estimated 145,734 individuals are both formal and informal volunteers.

- The estimated number of informal volunteers has fallen from 600,000 in 1995, to 470,111 in 2007.

- In 2007 the average number of hours informal volunteers gave has increased from eight hours to nine hours per month when compared to 2001. In 2007 the overall economic value of informal volunteers contribution is £433 million.

- Those informal volunteers in the younger age brackets are more likely to be involved in baby sitting or caring for children than those who are older. However, those individuals who are aged over 65 years old and those who are aged between

## Economic Value of Volunteering in 2007



Value of Formal Volunteering (£ million)

Value of Informal Volunteering (£ million)

Overall value: £937 million

50 and 64 years old are more likely to keep in touch with someone who has trouble getting out and about.

- Looking at the activities that are undertaken the most often (once a week), the results from this survey found that 70% of informal volunteers who sit with or provide personal care (e.g. washing, dressing) for someone who is sick or frail do so on a weekly basis.
- Two thirds of all informal volunteers (66%) give between one to five hours over a period of four weeks compared to 54% in 2001.
- The overwhelming reason as to why informal volunteers helped out was that individuals wanted to get involved.

### What do Formal Volunteers Do?

- Just under one third (31%) of respondents were engaged with a voluntary or community organisation.
- In terms of activities undertaken by formal volunteers, in 1995, almost 40% of respondents stated they helped out in a church or religious body. In 2001, 35% of individuals stated they helped out in a church or other religious organisation. In 2007 13% of formal volunteers said that their volunteering activity had been helping out in a church or religious organisation.
- 30% of formal volunteers in 2001 volunteered for an organisation involved in sport and recreation. In 1995, 23% of formal volunteers engaged with an organisation involved in sports or recreation. In 2007 this has remained the most common activity of the organisation that individuals volunteer with.
- In 1995, 59% of formal volunteers were involved with a single organisation. In 2001 this figure was 65%. In 2007 this has risen to 75%.
- 35% of formal volunteers in 2007 volunteer between 1-5 hours every month. In 2001, 29% of formal volunteers gave between 1-5 hours per month. In 1995, 25% of formal volunteers gave between 1-5 hours per month.

### Views of People who were not Volunteering

- In 2001, 17% of non-volunteers stated they would be willing to do some unpaid work if they were asked. The same result was achieved in 2007 with 17.5% of non-volunteers stating they would be pleased to help if directly asked.
- People who are not volunteering are more likely to be male, over 65, not married and with no children.
- 38% of non-volunteers indicated that their work commitments prevented them from becoming involved in volunteering.
- 28% of people not involved in volunteering had never thought about it.

### Motivation, Benefits and Barriers

- 50% of formal volunteers got involved because they wanted to improve things or help people. The next most common motivating factor (28%) was that the cause was really important.

## TRENDS

### People not volunteering

- ☞ *Over a quarter of people not volunteering had never thought about getting involved.*
- ☞ *The pressure of work commitments is the single most common reason why individuals do not become more involved in voluntary activities.*

- 74% of formal volunteers in 2001 felt that personal enjoyment was the major benefit of being a volunteer. In 1995, 81% of formal volunteers cited enjoyment as the major benefit of volunteering. In 2007, 73% of formal volunteers stated personal enjoyment was a very important benefit of volunteering.
- In 1995, 61% of formal volunteers got satisfaction from seeing the results of their voluntary activity. In 2001 this figure had fallen slightly to 55%. In 2007, 74% of formal volunteers stated this to be the main benefit of being a volunteer.
- Two thirds of formal volunteers (66%) feel that their efforts are appreciated by the organisation they volunteer with.
- Almost half (48%) of all formal volunteers have reported a family member who has been involved in some type of voluntary activity over the last five years. Almost a quarter of all informal volunteers report a similar situation with only 6% of non-volunteers stating that a member of their family had volunteered over the past five years.
- Approximately one quarter of all volunteers (formal and informal) would like to spend more time volunteering.

## TRENDS

### Motivation

- ☛ *Volunteers are motivated by wanting to improve things.*
- ☛ *Volunteering gives enjoyment and satisfaction.*
- ☛ *Family role models are significant in encouraging volunteering.*

- 45.3% and 45.1% of formal and informal volunteers, respectively, if they were directly asked to volunteer, would be pleased to help some more.
- The pressure of work commitments is the single most common reason why individuals do not become more involved in voluntary activities.
- Approximately a third of all formal and informal volunteers feel the fact they are doing enough already precludes from becoming more involved.
- Overall respondents felt that articles/advertisements in local newspapers would be the most useful way to promote volunteering opportunities. This is followed by word of mouth (friends/family) as being perceived as an effective way of promoting volunteering opportunities.

### Civic and Social Engagement

- 58% of formal volunteers aged between 25 and 34 years old voted in the last General Election whereas 48% of non-volunteers in the same age bracket voted.
- 15% of formal volunteers have attended a public consultation event/meeting/forum whereas only 2% of non-volunteers stated they had done the same.
- Almost three quarters of all formal volunteers have stated that their circle of friends/networks have increased as a consequence of formal volunteering.
- 56% of formal volunteers have attributed an increased contact with other communities/religions to their engagement in volunteering.

### Volunteer Experiences of Management Systems

- Three out of every ten formal volunteers had to go through an interview or a chat prior to becoming a volunteer.
- Those individuals who volunteer with a public sector organisation are more likely to have had to complete a pre-employment consultancy (police record) check (68%), complete an application form (55%) and attend an interview (55%).
- In 2001, 25% of all formal volunteers had to complete an application form. In 2007, this figure is unchanged.

## TRENDS

### Civic and Social Engagement

- ☛ *Volunteering increases peoples' friendship networks.*
- ☛ *Volunteering can contribute to an improvement in cross community relations.*
- ☛ *Volunteers vote more than non-volunteers.*
- ☛ *Volunteers are more likely to engage in all forms of civic engagement than non-volunteers.*

- 46% of formal volunteers in 2001 had a named person to go to for support. In 2007 this figure had fallen to 36%.
- Overall this survey found that 19.1% of all formal volunteers are engaged with organisations that cover expenses. In 2001 this was 23%.
- 60% of formal volunteers do not claim out of pocket expenses even though they can and the most common reasons given are they didn't get around to it (23%) and that they viewed it as a form of donation (18%).
- A third of all formal volunteers (34%) stated in 2007 that they had received training from the organisations they volunteered with.

### Volunteers' Attitudes

- Just under half of all formal volunteers (49%) strongly agreed that many organisations could not survive without unpaid workers. Almost a third of individuals (30%) who decide not to volunteer, strongly agree with the statement that volunteers are integral to the survival of many organisations.
- Very few respondents (7%) feel that the divisions in Northern Ireland society are in themselves a reason why individuals cannot become more involved in voluntary activities. 39% of formal volunteers consider being involved in unpaid work can contribute to an improvement in cross community relations.
- In 1995, 15% of volunteers agreed that organisations that involved volunteers were amateurish. In 2007 this has fallen to just 10% of all respondents.
- 63% of all respondents in 1995 felt that engaging in unpaid work helps people to take an active role in democratic society. In 2007 the number of respondents agreeing with this statement has increased to 70%.
- A consistent number of respondents over the 12 years have felt that everyone has a moral responsibility to do unpaid work at some time in their life (1995, 45%; 2001, 49%; 2007, 47%).

## TRENDS

### Volunteers' Attitudes

- ☛ *Almost half of volunteers feel that everyone has a moral obligation to do voluntary work at some time in their life. This has stayed constant since 1995.*
- ☛ *Fewer volunteers feel that organisations which involve volunteers are amateurish.*
- ☛ *Increasing numbers of volunteers feel that engaging in unpaid work helps people take an active role in democratic society.*

## Volunteering from an Organisational Perspective

- 77% of organisations stated they could not operate without the support of volunteers.
- 38% of organisations stated that in the last five years the number of volunteers involved in their organisation has increased. 42% of organisations have reported a decrease in the level of volunteers in the last five years.
- The most common type of volunteering is organising or helping to run an activity with 79% of organisations stating that this is one of the main roles undertaken by volunteers. The second most common volunteering activity is leading a group or being a member of a committee or a trustee.
- 84% of all organisations stated that volunteers are very committed/flexible and enthusiastic and 81% of all organisations stated that volunteers bring new/additional skills to the organisation.

## TRENDS

### Organisational Perspective

- ☛ *Over three quarters of organisations stated they could not manage without volunteers.*
- ☛ *Organisations are finding it harder to recruit volunteers.*
- ☛ *Organisations report having a volunteer manager has a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of volunteers.*

- The top three methods used by organisations to recruit volunteers are through personal contact, word of mouth and local newspapers.
- 14% of organisations believe that the 2005 Year of the Volunteer either greatly increased or made some increase on the number of individuals who approached them wanting to volunteer.
- Organisations stated that they felt the most common reason why individuals do not volunteer is that they have insufficient time.
- In relation to how the recruitment of

volunteers could be made easier, 38% of organisations believe that local volunteering campaigns would be beneficial. In addition 37% of organisations stated that if more resources became available to cover the activities of volunteers this could make it easier to recruit volunteers.

- 31% of organisations that involve volunteers have a budget which covers volunteer activities and expenditure. The average volunteer budget is £7,877 which could include staff costs, volunteer expenses, equipment etc.
- 61% of organisations stated that having a dedicated volunteer manager (paid or unpaid) has had a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

### Organisational attitudes to Volunteers

- In 2007, 67% of organisations agreed with the statement that volunteers bring special qualities to an organisation, this compared to 73% in 2001.
- 31% of organisations thought it was hard to draw a line between the role of a volunteer and the role of paid staff; in 2001 this was 40%.
- In 2001, 15% of respondents said they involved volunteers to save money, in 2007 this was 23%.
- 59% of organisations think that volunteers are becoming harder to recruit because people do not have the time or inclination.
- Most organisations (79%) have an interview/informal chat with potential volunteers.



## TRENDS

### Organisational Attitudes to Volunteering

- ☛ Most organisations felt that even if they had all the money in the world they would still involve volunteers.
- ☛ More organisations report involving volunteers to save money than in 2001.

#### Volunteer Management Practice in Organisations

- In 2001 48% of organisations undertook a criminal record check in 2007 this was 59.5%
- Having an induction and a named person to go to for support are the most prevalent types of volunteer management practice.
- 82% of organisations involved in this research reimbursed out of pocket expenses. This figure was 81% in 2001.

#### Formal Application and Monitoring Processes

	% YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Ask new volunteers to complete an application form	53.0	47.0	1.0
Interview/informal chat with potential volunteers	78.8	20.3	0.9
Ask new volunteers to provide references	49.8	47.9	2.3
Undertake a POCNI <sup>5</sup> check	59.5	37.6	2.9
Require new volunteers to undergo a trial period	43.6	52.3	4.1

Base: 677 (all respondents which involve volunteers)

#### Volunteer Management Provided to Volunteers

	% YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
An induction with regard to the organisation	84.5	13.6	1.9
A named person to go to for support	81.5	16.1	2.4
Training to carry out their role	76.2	20.5	3.3
Copy of/information about child protection policy	71.7	24.9	3.4
Support and/or supervision meetings	69.3	26.9	3.8
Copy of/information about health and safety regulations	68.9	27.1	4.0
Copy of/information on equal opportunities policy	61.3	33.6	5.1
Copy of/information about insurance cover	56.7	37.5	5.8
A written role description	53.4	42.4	4.3
A written volunteer agreement	38.6	55.4	6.0

Base: 677 (all respondents which involve volunteers)

<sup>5</sup> The Protection of Children (NI) Service [POC (NI)]  
[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hss/child\\_care/child\\_protection.htm](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hss/child_care/child_protection.htm)

**Conclusion** This report examines the trends and key messages that have emerged from this research and from the information gathered over the past 12 years into volunteering in Northern Ireland. This research found that young people are motivated to become volunteers by the cause, whereas older people tend to cite having more time to spare as the reason for them getting involved. Younger people also expressed their desire to improve their careers and develop new skills through voluntary activity more than any other age group. This research also found that individuals are still prepared to volunteer but they are giving less time than in the past. There appears to be a trend developing whereby individuals are becoming more selective in the amount of time they are committing in order to fit their voluntary activities around their lifestyle.

Individuals who choose not to volunteer also raise a number of interesting challenges for organisations and policy makers alike. There appears to be a significant pool of non-volunteers who would be pleased to help if they are directly approached. This is extremely important given the static nature of voluntary activity over the past 12 years and the reliance of organisations on volunteers. Equally there are a significant number of individuals who have never volunteered because they have never considered becoming involved. Nevertheless the crux of the issue is that significantly more people choose not to volunteer than do so, therefore ways must be sought to encourage non-volunteers to become more involved.

This report also examines the attitudes of individuals and organisations towards volunteering. From the perspective of organisations which involve volunteers the attitudes towards the value, impact and contribution individuals make is extremely positive. It is not overstating the value organisations place in the contribution individuals make when 77% of respondents stated the organisation could not operate without the support of volunteers. This was a view also held by individuals when asked if they felt organisations could not survive without volunteers. This is an incredibly important finding when set against the wider environment where the overall number of volunteers is essentially static and those who do volunteer are being more selective in terms of how often they volunteer.

As society changes, how organisations engage with volunteers and attract new volunteers must therefore also change. This research has highlighted a number of trends that when set against the static nature of volunteering in Northern Ireland point to a pivotal moment in the promotion and recognition of volunteering. Things can continue as they are and, at best, the situation will remain the same and small gains made through volunteering initiatives will continue to be achieved, but for a large portion of the population, volunteering will not be a viable option. The alternative is the development of a strategy that will foster an environment in which organisations can be adequately resourced and supported to adopt more flexible and innovative ways of tapping into a large pool of potential volunteers.





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