



Making the Connection 2:

A Further Exploration of the Attitudes, Lifestyle and Volunteering Activity of the 50+ Age Group in Northern Ireland

VOLUNTEER **NOW**
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Volunteer Now 2011

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Thanks also to Millward Brown Ulster for the high quality of work carried out when conducting the fieldwork.

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1.0 Introduction

This report is a follow-up to the 'Making the Connection' report which was produced in 2009. Both reports have a focus on understanding the 50+ age group in Northern Ireland in terms of their volunteering experience, attitudes towards it and susceptibility to volunteering imagery but they have also focused interest in a broader sense on understanding their lifestyle choices, availability of free time and voting patterns. These reports have added a great deal to providing an up to date picture of the volunteering patterns of this age group. A group which is growing as a proportion of the overall population of NI and one that is therefore going to gain increasing influence in shaping the political, economic, social, cultural and general civic landscape here.

The 'Unlocking Potential Project' is a five year initiative which began in 2008. It is funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and managed by Volunteer Now. 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. It is planned that over the course of the 5 years, the project will be informed by ongoing pieces of primary and secondary research, which will be used to inform the shape and direction it takes. This research report is one of a number of pieces of work that have been completed. The full range of research reports that the project has carried out can be found by going to [http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what we do/Unlocking Potential/](http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/Unlocking_Potential/)

1.1 The Unlocking Potential Project

The project has a number of specific objectives which are listed below:-

- To challenge attitudes and raise awareness of the contribution and benefits of volunteering;
- To increase the number of older volunteers over the next five years (*50-64 year olds by 5% and the number of 65+ years olds by 10%*). 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.

Volunteer Now commissioned Millward Brown Ulster to carry out a telephone survey amongst the over 50's in Northern Ireland. A similar survey was carried out in 2009 with the same target group which resulted in a report titled 'Making the Connection: Volunteering by the over 50's in Northern Ireland'. The focus of the questions in the 2009 survey was on different themes and the methodology included 6 focus groups. In 2009, the key themes included 50+ year olds lifestyle and availability of free time, caring

responsibilities, volunteering imagery, marketing and advertising and volunteer activity and participation. The 'Making the Connection' Report (2009) is available to download from http://www.volunteering-ni.org/what_we_do/Unlocking_Potential/. The aim of this second survey was to explore some of the issues raised in the 'Making the Connection' report, but also to investigate some new areas. For this reason reference will be made to the findings from the 2009 Survey where it is felt to be useful.

1.2 Methodology

The fieldwork and data analysis was conducted by Millward Brown Ulster through their Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing facility. The fieldwork was carried out during October 2010. In total 350 telephone interviews were completed across Northern Ireland. The sample was based on a quota controlled sample to mirror the makeup of population by age. The report was written within Volunteer Now.

The following headings outline the main themes that the survey considered and also reflects the layout of this report.

- Investigate awareness of Age Awareness Week;
- Attitudes to volunteering;
- Barriers to considering voluntary work; and
- Participation in voluntary activities

The responses from the telephone survey have been illustrated through graphs. For each question there is a breakdown of responses by the respondents volunteering status i.e. formal volunteering, informal volunteering, both formal and informal volunteering, don't volunteer but would consider it and don't volunteer and would not consider it. For some responses a breakdown by the following age categories is also provided. The age categories used were 50-59, 60-69 and 70-79.

2.0 Summary of the Main Findings

2.1 Awareness of volunteer related advertising

- The majority of respondents had not heard of Age Awareness Week (68%).
- Awareness amongst informal volunteers was well above the average for the sample (42%) and was double the rate of those only involved in formal volunteering (21%).
- Only 5% of respondents had taken part in Age Awareness events. All of those who had taken part in events were currently volunteers.
- Over a quarter of respondents had seen advertising or media campaigns to promote volunteering (28%) and 68% thought it appealed to their age group. Volunteers were more likely to recall advertising than non-volunteers (36%). The most common source recalled was advertising through Volunteer's Week (18%).

2.2 Older People and the Internet

- Just over half of respondents claimed to use the internet (55%).
- There was a sharp decline in internet usage with age- 68% of people in their 50's said that they used the internet compared to 28% for those in their 70's.
- There was low awareness of the Volunteer Now website by respondents (12%). Awareness was higher for those currently involved in volunteering. A quarter of those who used the internet also used social media websites (26%).

2.3 Voting and Volunteering

- The majority of respondents in this survey stated that they had voted in the Westminster elections in 2010 (81%) which was well above the average reported turnout of 58%.
- Volunteers were more likely to say that they had voted in the Westminster Elections compared to non-volunteers.
- The majority of the respondents didn't feel that elected representatives understood older people's issues (58%).

2.4 Participation in Voluntary Activities

- Overall, 66% of respondents volunteered in some capacity; 59% volunteered informally and 36% volunteered formally. Of the 34% who did not currently volunteer, 25% would not consider it and 9% would consider it. Of those who would not consider it, 48% gave health as the main reason.

- Between the 2009 survey and this follow-up one volunteering rates are reported to have increased. Formal volunteering rates have increased from 33% to 36% and informal volunteering rates have increased substantially from 41% to 59%.
- Formal volunteers gave around 21 hours a month. Like the overall population; people who were working part time were more likely to formally volunteer than those who were working full time or not working¹.
- Informal volunteers committed nearly 10 hours per month. People in full time retirement were more likely to informally volunteer than those who were still in employment. The key activity for most informal volunteers was keeping in touch with someone less able to get out themselves (38%) followed by giving advice (21%).

2.5 Enablers to Formally Volunteer

- The following table rates the various potential positive options in terms of strongly encouraging consideration of volunteering for an organisation i.e. formal volunteering (i.e score 5 or 4)

Activity	% Score at 5 or 4
A chance to try out volunteering	58%
Having a chat on face-to face basis with someone within organisation	55%
Having a chat with an existing volunteer	49%
Having a chat by phone with someone within organisation	43%

- Well over half of respondents found at least one statement which they thought was encouraging (56%). Flexibility (36%), belief that personal or professional skills would be of benefit (33%) and the fact that the time demands would not be too much (33%) were also be key drivers in encouraging consideration of formal volunteering.

¹ In It's All About Time- employment categories included working full time, working part-time, full time education and not working. Not working included economically inactive as well as people in retirement.

2.6 Barriers to Formally Volunteer

- The following table rates the various potential barriers in terms of strongly discouraging consideration of volunteering for an organisation (i.e score 1 or 2)

Activity	% Score at 1 or 2
Registering On-line	47%
Completing an application form	38%
Attending an interview	31%
Being subject to criminal record check	20%

- 34% of respondents said that there was nothing stopping them from formally volunteering, they were just not interested in it. Those in their 70's were much more likely to give this as an answer than those in their 50's or 60's.

2.7 Health, Well Being and Volunteering

- The majority of respondents stated that getting involved in volunteering had increased their social interaction with people from different age groups (69%).
- Overall, 79% of respondents were satisfied with their life at present. Volunteers were more likely to say that they were satisfied with their life compared to non-volunteers, especially non-volunteers who would not consider volunteering.
- The majority of respondents felt that their general health was 'good' or 'very good' (68%) and 14% described their health as 'poor'. Those who didn't currently volunteer but would consider it were most likely to state that their health was good (84%). Over a quarter of respondents suggested that their health would 'to some extent' prevent them from considering volunteering (28%).
- Overall, 75% of respondents described their life as either very active or quite active. Volunteers were more likely to say that they were active than non-volunteers.

Health concerns were an issue amongst those who did not volunteer. Of those who wouldn't consider volunteering:-

- 26% described their health as poor;
- 46% were not active;
- 48% suggested their health would prevent them volunteering;

- 16% were not satisfied with their life at present.

It was also clear that there were other barriers apart from health which were preventing non-volunteering groups from doing so; 88% of those who do not volunteer but would consider it stated that their health was not a reason.

The most pertinent findings along with the issues / questions they raise have been considered further in the discussion section of the report.

**Billy's one good reason:
he loves gardening**

Billy Thompson
volunteer gardener

VOLUNTEER!

All you
need is one
good reason to
volunteer. It's fun,
satisfying and on
your terms.

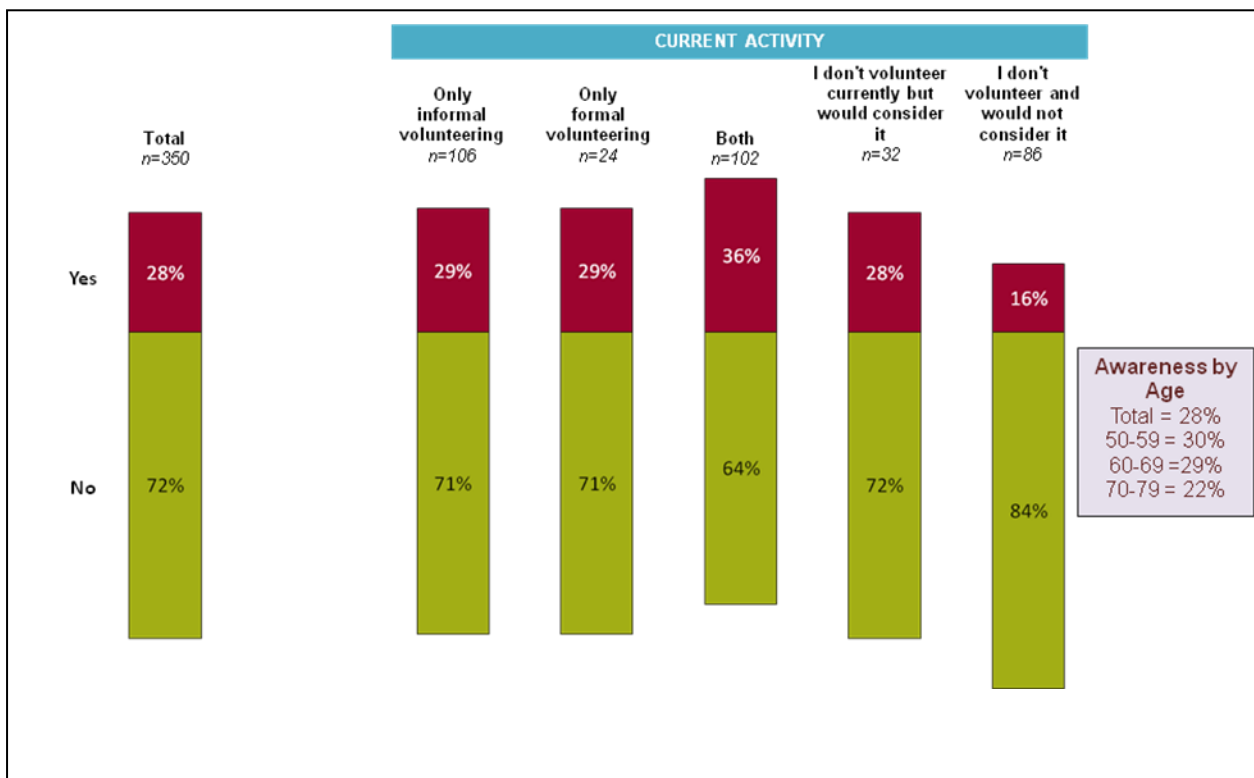
**Awareness of Volunteer
Related Advertising**

3.0 Awareness of volunteer related advertising

Age Awareness Week is celebrated every year, at the end of September- beginning of October. It includes a programme of events in venues across Northern Ireland which focus on exploring issues relevant to the older age groups. ‘Learning and volunteering’ was one of the main sub-themes from the 2010 event. Under this theme the ‘Unlocking Potential’ Project hosted its ‘One Good Reason’ volunteering action day on Wednesday 29th September and was aimed at people aged 50 and over. It offered people living in Ballymena, Belfast, Derry / Londonderry and Newry the opportunity to take part in volunteering. The Action Day was promoted under the ‘One Good Reason’ campaign branding and was promoted widely across Northern Ireland in the lead up to the day through media advertising i.e. Radio, Public Buses as well as leaflet advertising.

Interestingly, although informal volunteers were twice as likely as formal volunteers, to have heard about the week, formal volunteers were 4 times more likely to have attended or taken part in events (20%). Previous research has found that people who formally volunteer are more likely to be involved in wider forms of civic participation (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007).

Have you recently seen any advertising or media campaigns to promote volunteering? [Base: All Respondents n=350]

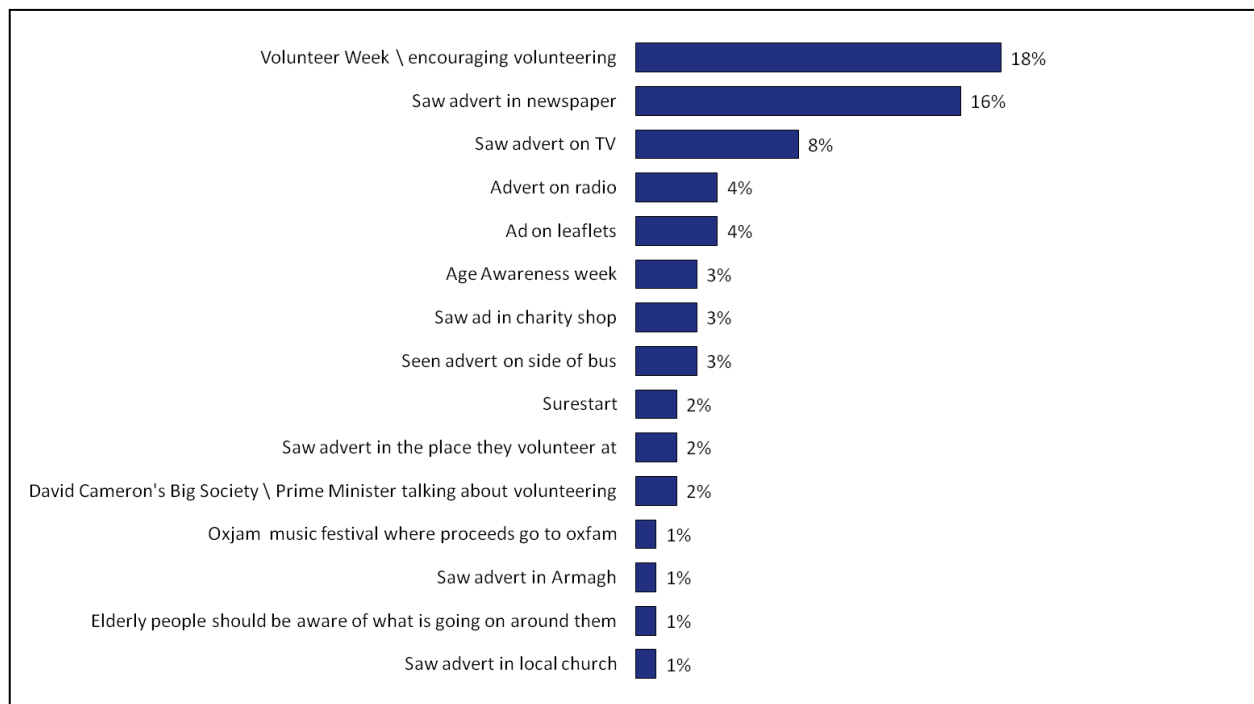


Just over a quarter of respondents claimed that they had recently seen advertising or media campaigns to promote volunteering (28%).

Respondents who volunteered both formally and informally were most likely to say that they had seen advertising (36%). Respondents who didn't volunteer and would not consider it were the least likely to have said they had seen advertising (16%).

Levels of recall of advertising or media campaigns to promote volunteering were greatest for those in their 50's, with 30% of this age group remembering having seen something about volunteering. Recall declined with age; recall by those in their 70's was 22%.

Can you recall details about this advert? [Base: All aware of advert n=98]

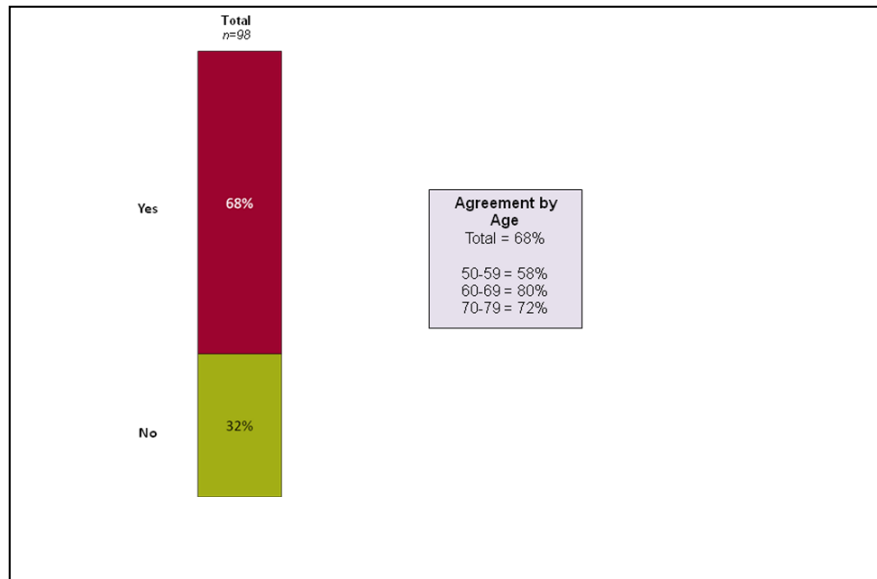


Respondents who had stated that they had seen advertising were able to recall a wide range of sources which were advertising volunteering, although people were unable to give specific detail about what they had seen.

The most common sources recalled were advertising through Volunteer's Week (18%); a week long programme of events celebrating and promoting volunteering during 1-7 June each year, this was followed by advertising in a newspaper (16%). Others sources that were mentioned included adverts on the TV (8%), radio (4%) and leaflets (4%).

Only 3% of respondents mentioned seeing specific advertisements about Age Awareness Week.

Do you feel these campaigns appealed to people of your age group? [Base: All aware of advert n=98]

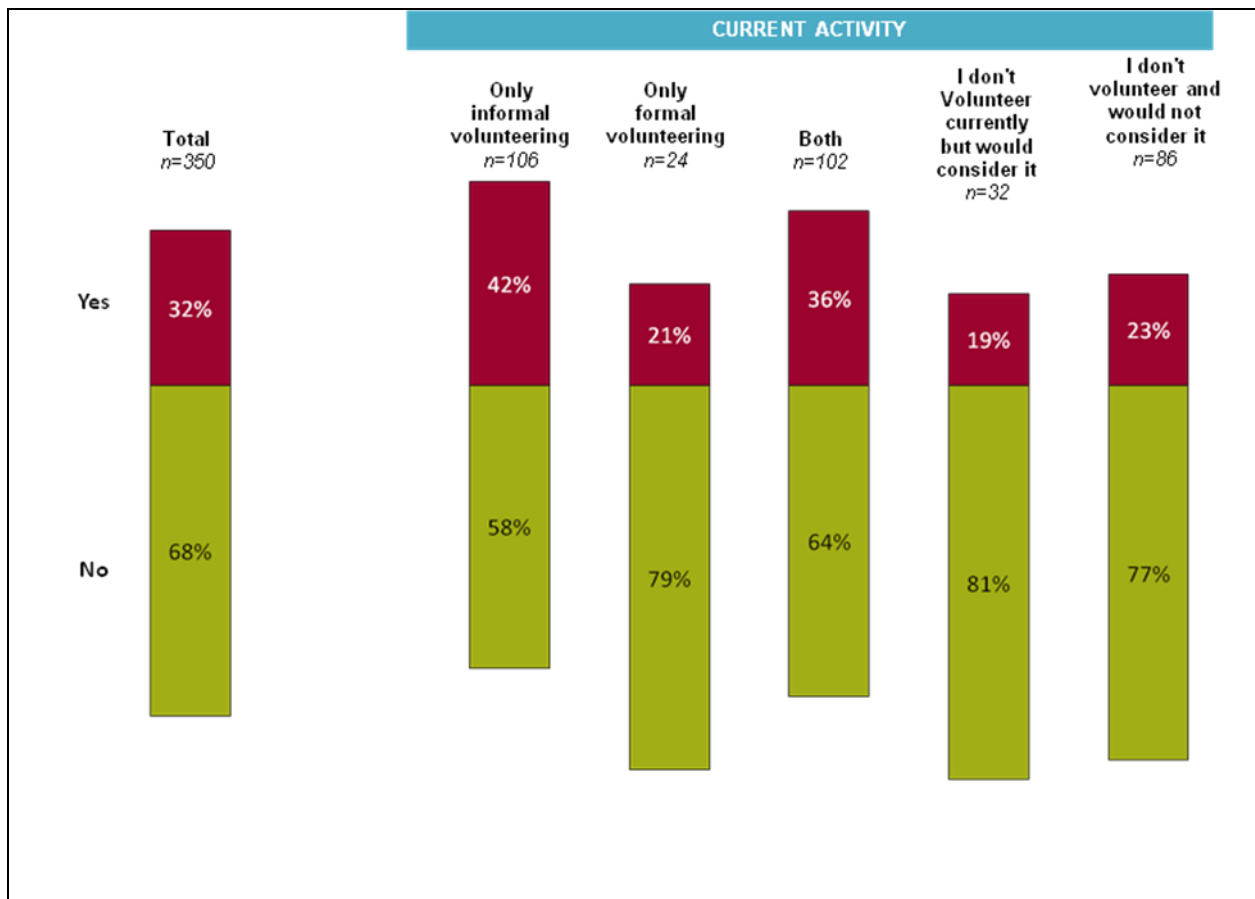


Overall, the majority (68%) of respondents who had seen advertising promoting volunteering felt it was appealing to people of their age group. As a breakdown by age, those aged 60-69 were most likely to agree with this statement (80%) and the 50-59 age group least likely (58%).

Although respondents did not specifically recall having seen the 'One Good Reason' Campaign of the Unlocking Potential Project, those in the 60-69 age group were the most likely group to agree that the advertising was appealing to their age group.

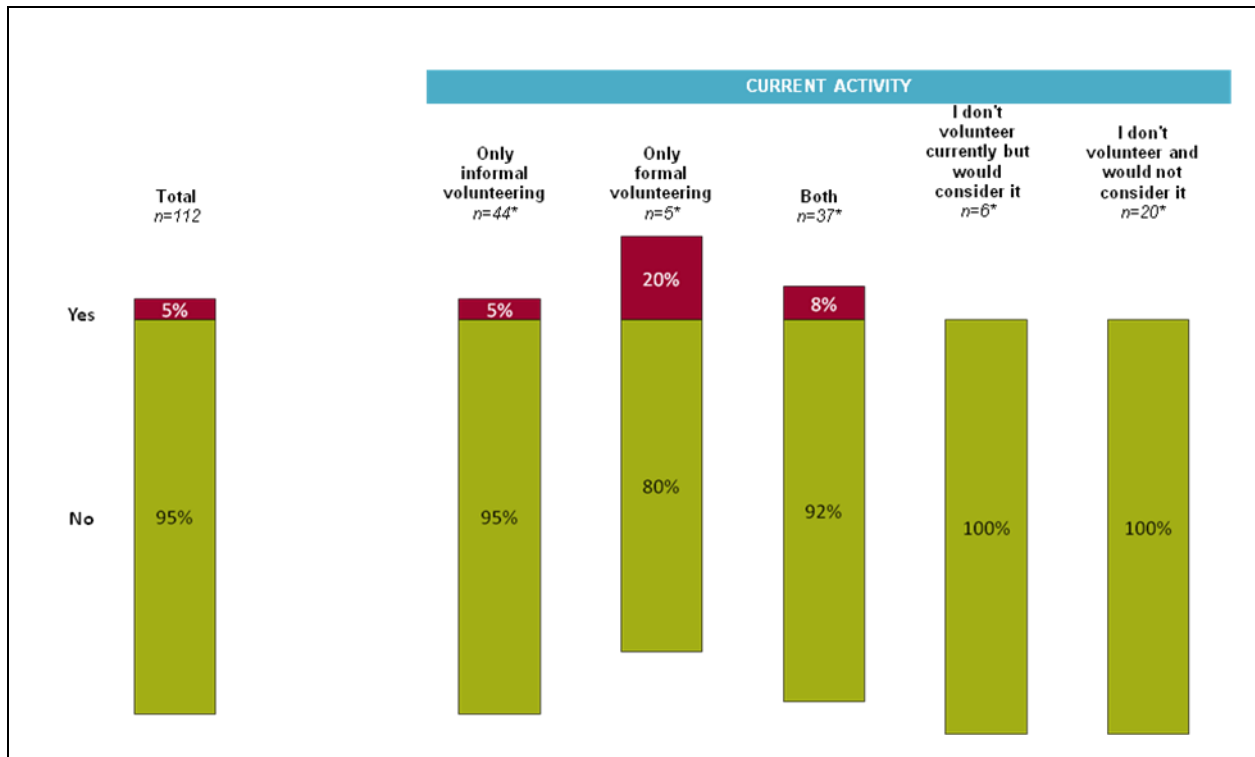
This survey was sent out a week after Age Awareness week was held. Therefore it could be assumed that recollection of seeing advertising or attending events would have been easier.

Were you aware that last week was Age Awareness Week? [Base: All Respondents n=350]



Respondents were asked if they were aware of Age Awareness Week, 68% of people had not heard of it and 32% had. Awareness amongst informal volunteers was well above the average for the sample (42%) and was double the rate of those only involved in formal volunteering (21%). Those involved in both formal and informal volunteering also had an above average awareness of the week (36%). Generally, there was little variation in knowledge of Age Awareness Week across age groups.

Did you attend or take part in any of the Age Awareness Week events? [Base: All Aware of Age Awareness Week n=112]



* some of the sub samples are very small.

A small % of the respondents who knew about Age Awareness Week, had taken part in events (5%). All of those who had taken part in events were currently volunteers. None of the non-volunteers attended any of the events. Although there were a very small number of people who had been involved in Age Awareness Week, those in their 50's (9%) were more likely to have attended an event compared to those in their 60's (3%) or 70's (4%).

**Sean's one good reason:
he loves talking**

VOLUNTEER!

**All you
need is one
good reason to
volunteer. It's fun,
satisfying and
on your terms.**

Older People and the Internet

4.0 Older People and the Internet

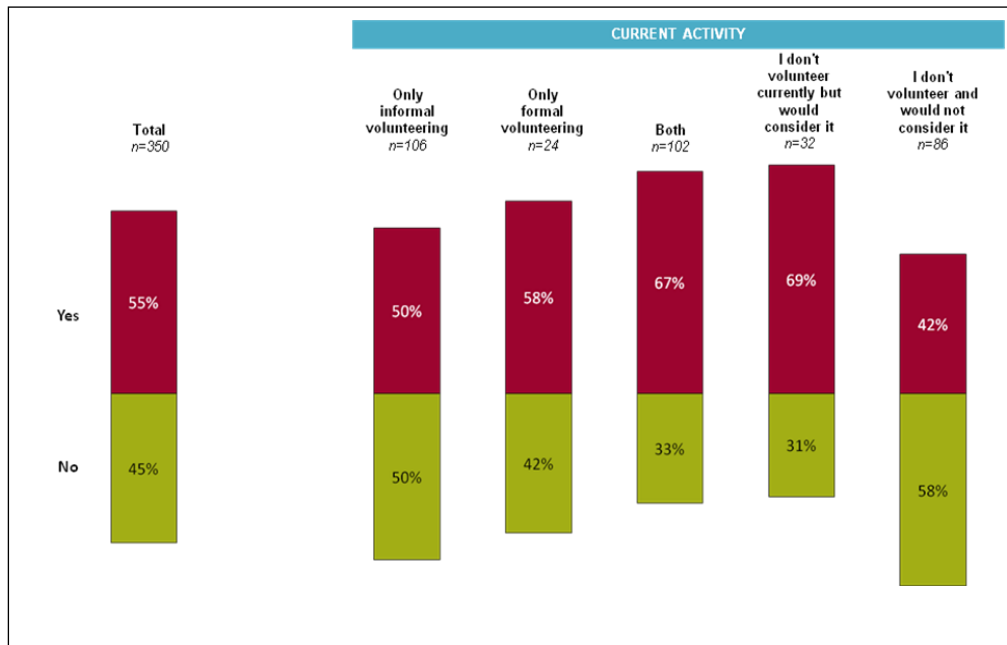
In Northern Ireland 70% of the population use the internet, which is the same as the UK overall (71%). Statistics also show that there is very little difference in internet usage between urban and rural areas here (72%, 69% respectively) (Ofcom, 2010:1). In respect of age, the 60+ age group is a growing and active internet user group. Unlike the generation that came before them, many of today's 60+ year olds have been exposed to the computer, within their working life or home life. This previously unknown group of internet savvy 60+ year olds have been given the label of 'silver surfers'.

Although many older people are now internet users, it is clear that a 'digital divide' still exists between groups that own and use information and communication technology (ICT) and those who do not (BECTA, 2001). A wide range of factors come together to determine whether someone uses the internet, these include educational attainment, socio-economic grouping and age. In terms of age, generally patterns of internet usage have been shown to decline as people get older (Hill et al., 2008). The 70+ age group is the least likely age group to use computers and the internet compared to those in their 50's. Furthermore whilst 73% of adults in the UK can access the internet at home, this falls to 23% for those aged 75+ (BECTA, 2001). It is expected that this pattern of decline of internet usage with age, may reduce as people who are exposed to computers and the internet from a younger age move into their 60's.

The type of activities which the older age group use the internet for has also been an area of interest. Ofcom has found that the breadth of activities that the internet is used for varies with age. People in the 50+ age group are more likely to use the internet for a limited number of activities; the most popular being keeping in contact with relatives by email (Ofcom 2010:3). Research has shown that generally people in Northern Ireland are more cautious than the rest of the UK when it comes to trusting the internet by entering personal details online (Ofcom, 2010:2). The 50+ age group are more likely to use websites of organisations that they can 'identify' with and 'trust'. However, it has been said that as older people become more adept at using the internet, some do gravitate towards using it for more altruistic reasons, which could include accessing information about volunteering.

This section of the report introduces some new information on the rates of older people using the internet, including social network sites and the Volunteer Now website.

Do you use the internet? [Base: All Respondents n=350]

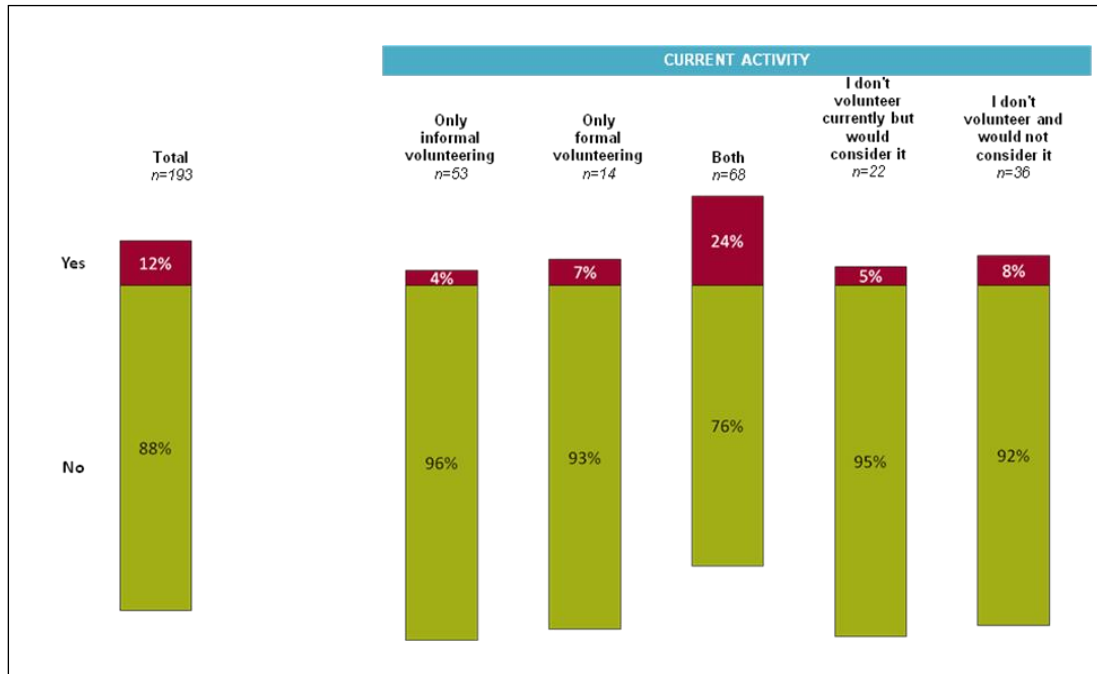


Overall, 55% of respondents stated that they used the internet. This challenges the stereotypical opinion that older people are not engaging with the internet.

Like patterns of internet usage reported from Ofcom, this survey also found a sharp decline in internet usage between people in their 50's and 70's- 68% of people in their 50's said that they used the internet compared to 58% of those in their 60's and 28% of those in their 70's (Ofcom 2010:3). This pattern may in part be explained by the fact that internet usage has become part of mainstream society in the last 10-15 years, so people who are now in their 50's are more likely to have had access to the computer and the internet through their work or home life and will likely cause some increase in rates of internet usage as they move into that age bracket.

There was no clear relationship between internet usage and volunteering status. Respondents who were involved in both formal and informal volunteering (67%) and those who were not volunteering but would consider it (69%) were the most likely groups to use the internet. Respondents who didn't volunteer and would not consider it were, by far, the least likely group to use the internet (42%)

Are you aware of the Volunteernow.co.uk website, the site that promotes volunteering opportunities in Northern Ireland? [Base: All who use the website n=193]

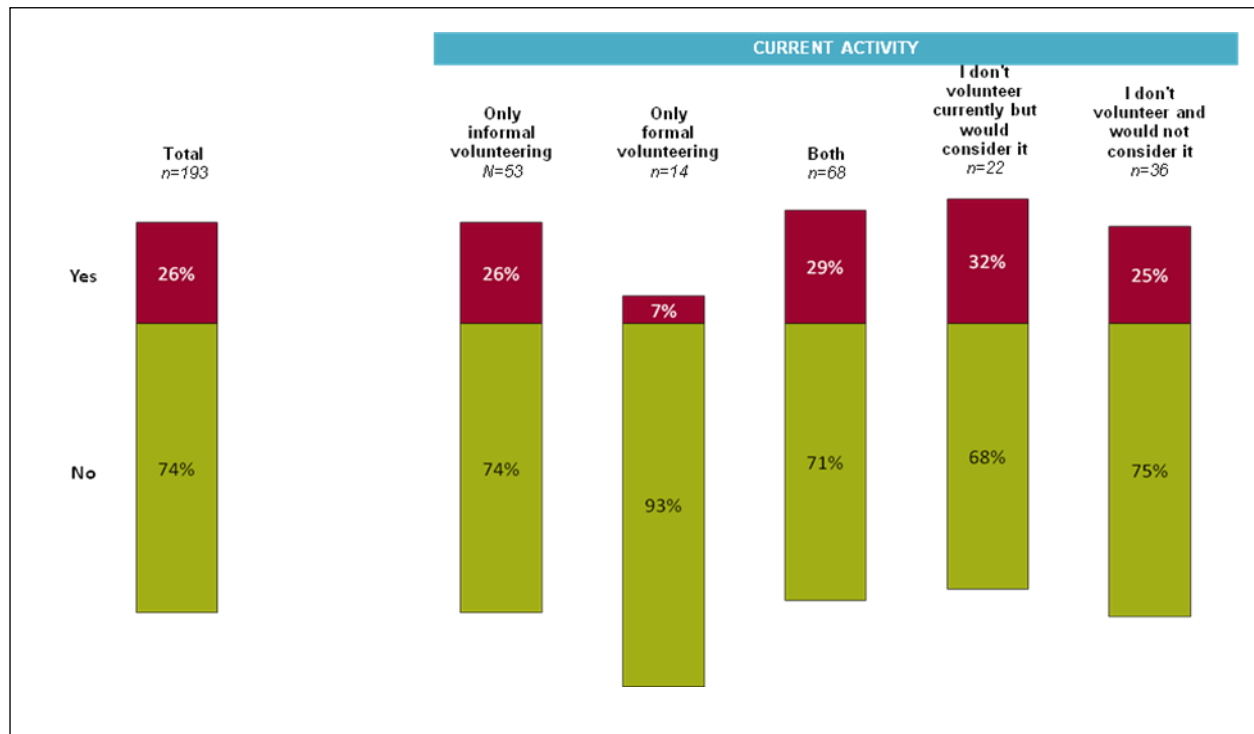


Respondents were asked if they were aware of the www.volunteernow.co.uk. This is a Northern Ireland wide volunteering database which advertises approximately 3000 volunteering opportunities. The website helps individuals to search for suitable volunteering opportunities that organisations are recruiting for.

In this survey, only 12% of internet users were aware of the Volunteer Now website. Although awareness was low across all age groups, those in their 60's (17%) were more likely to be aware of it than those in their 50's (10%) or 70's (4%). This may be in part to due to the fact that the One Good Reason Campaign, which promoted the website, was targeted at those in their 60's.

There was a low awareness of the Volunteer Now website between volunteer and non-volunteers groups. Almost a quarter of respondents who were involved in both formal and informal volunteering were aware of it, which was significantly higher than any other sub group (24%).

Do you use social media websites like Facebook or Twitter? [Base: All who use the internet n=193]



* nb: small bases for some subgroups

Just over a quarter of the respondents who stated that they were internet users also used social media websites such as Facebook or Twitter (26%). Approximately 30% of those in their 50's and 60's used social media websites compared to only 17% of those in their 70's. Generally, there was very little difference in usage of social media websites between volunteers and non-volunteers, apart from the fact that only 7% of formal volunteers stated that the used these sites. Overall, respondents who didn't volunteer but would consider it were the most likely group to use social media websites (32%).

Rosemary & John's one good reason:
they love gardening

VOLUNTEER!

All you need is
one good reason
to volunteer. If you're
over 60 then why not
enjoy a great day out
at our free volunteer
taster day:

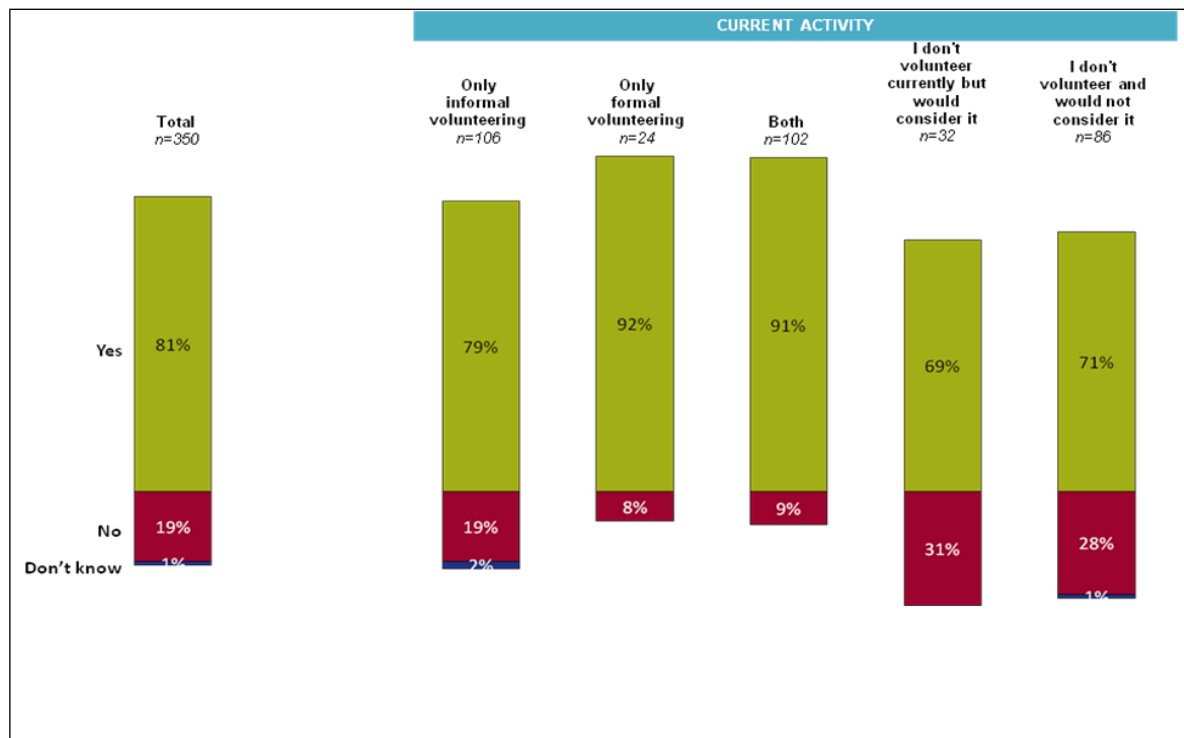
Voting and Volunteering

5.0 Voting and Volunteering

Although the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland does not hold demographic information on voters, other surveys and polls have shown that older age groups are generally the most likely group to vote (Office of National Statistics). As the proportion of the 50+ age group increases in line with population estimates, the older age group will continue to be a very powerful group of people in party political terms. In Northern Ireland, ongoing surveys by ARK would suggest an improving picture in terms of how older people are perceived and respected in society generally. However, public perception of how older people (50+) are represented by authorities and politicians in Northern Ireland remains poor; 54% of the Northern Ireland population do not believe they have adequate representation (Gray, 2009).

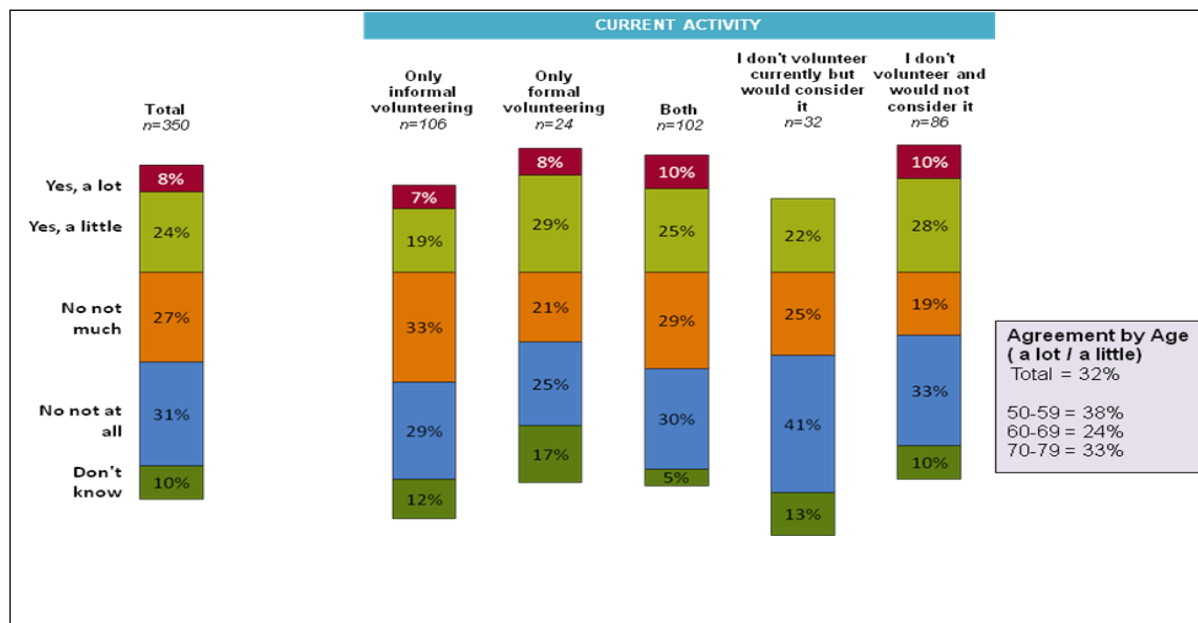
There is a range of research which has also reported a positive relationship between volunteering and engagement in civic activities, including voting, signing a petition, attending a public consultation etc. (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007). In this survey we wished to find out whether older people had voted in the most recent West minister elections and to gather their views on how well elected representatives understood the issues which they face. These are very pertinent questions with the Assembly Elections looming in May and with older people representing an increasingly large proportion of the electorate.

Did you vote in this year's Westminster Elections? [Base: All Respondents n=350]



The majority of respondents in this survey stated that they had voted in the Westminster elections in 2010 (81%). This is well above the 58% average reported turn out across the eighteen Northern Ireland constituencies (range: 51%- 69%)². When the voting patterns of volunteer and non- volunteers were compared, it showed that volunteers were much more likely to say that they had voted compared to non-volunteers; 9 out of 10 formal volunteers said that they had voted compared to 7 out of 10 non-volunteers who would not consider volunteering.

Do you feel that elected representatives, like MP's and local councillors, understand the issues which older people face? [Base: All Respondents n=350]



Overall, the majority of the respondents didn't feel that elected representatives understood older people's issues (58%). There was no real difference in the answer to this question when current activity and age were considered. This is very similar response to that found in the Ark research which found that 54% of the general public did not believe that they have adequate representation by Northern Irish politicians (Gray, 2009). Viewing older people as passive voters, who tend to vote for the same party without considering the policy manifesto of that party, is out dated (Cardi, 2011). There is ongoing evidence to suggest that older people are more likely to lobby and

² Electoral Office Statistics- Westminster Parliamentary Election 2010 Results

<http://www.eoni.org.uk/index/elections/westminster-parliamentary-election-2010/westminster-parliamentary-election-2010-results.htm>

take part in public meetings, when policy decisions affect them directly. The 'Can't Eat or Heat' Campaign is a good example of this, 100's of older people came together as political activists when there was growing concern about the gap between pensions and the cost of living. The rise of the first Pensioners Parliament in Northern Ireland in 2011 is another example of the increasing political mobilisation of older people.



Participation in Voluntary Activities

6.0 Participation in voluntary activities

It is important to gather information on volunteering rates and monitor change in volunteering activity, as it helps to inform how the support infrastructure works and what actions it needs to take to develop volunteering and increase the number of volunteers. The last Northern Ireland wide survey on volunteering was published in 2007. It reported a clear under-representation of the 65+ age group in both formal and informal volunteering. 'Formal volunteering' describes unpaid work which happens under the auspices of an organisation. In this report, 17% of this age group reported to volunteer formally compared to 21% of the overall population. 'Informal volunteering' describes unpaid activities which happen outside of an organisation, at neighbourhood level, but outside of ones immediate family. In the 2007 survey, 27% of the 65+ age group volunteered informally compared to 35% of the overall population (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007).

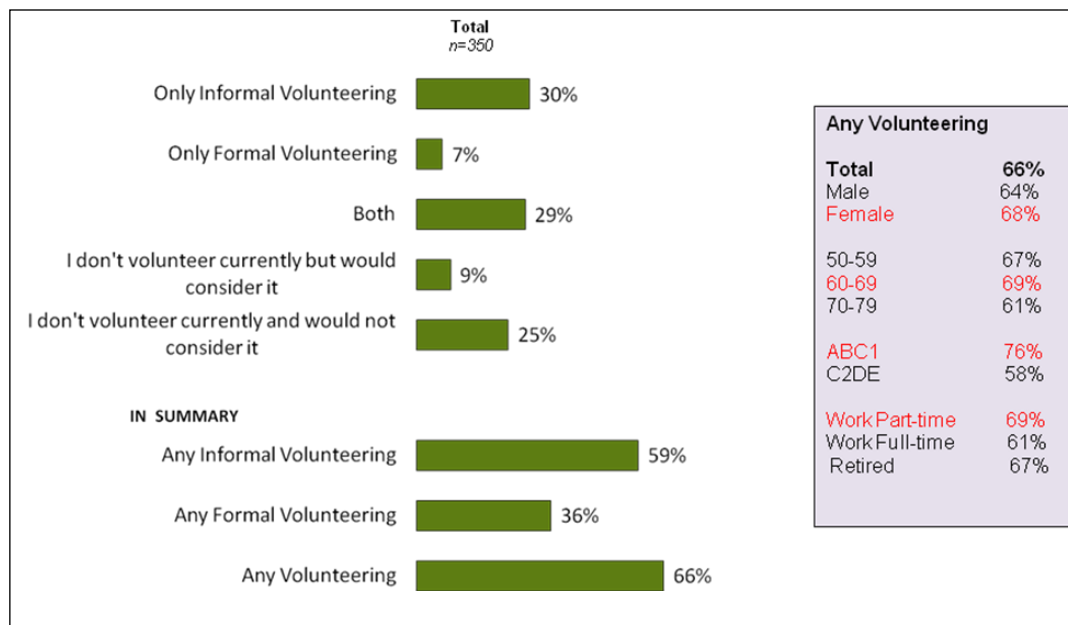
In less than 20 years, more than a quarter of the population will be over 60³. People currently in their 50's and early 60's are a very different generation of people than the one that came before them, so much so, that they have been labelled the 'baby boomer generation'⁴. Baby Boomers were born during the 20 years after the Second World War (1946-1964) when society experienced a transformation in health, wealth and education. As a consequence of these differences the baby boomer generation have greater expectations, different motivations and needs than the previous generation. It is also the case that this cohort of 50+ year olds will require different things from volunteering, as they do from other aspects of their life (Volunteer Development Agency, 2009:2). Since 2008, the 'Unlocking Potential' Project has been gathering up to date information on the volunteering activity levels of the 50+ age group. This work has also involved getting the views of both volunteers and non-volunteers with regards to their opinions of volunteering but also more broadly to explore their lifestyle and attitudes to a range of issues which help to understand their motivations and actions.

Overall, this section of the report offers some new information on the involvement of the 50+ age group in both formal and informal volunteering. This includes finding out how encouraging or discouraging specific volunteer management practices are. It has also focused on the non formal volunteers and explored if there are things which would encourage people to volunteer formally.

³ Source: NISRA www.nisra.gov.uk/demography

⁴ Born in the post World War 2 period (1945-1965)

Which of the following best describes your current activity? [Base: All Respondents n=350]



In summary, 66% of respondents were volunteering in some capacity; 59% volunteered informally and 36% volunteered formally. When broken down, the survey found that 7% of respondents were volunteering formally only and 29% were volunteering both formally and informally. Those respondents in their 50's and 60's were only marginally more likely to volunteer than those in their 70's (67%, 69% and 61% respectively). Furthermore, there was very little difference in volunteering activity rates by gender, 68% of females and 64% of males. The difference in volunteering by socio-economic groups and by type of volunteering was also relatively small compared to total population differences found in other research⁵, however, this area does deserve further exploration. What did become obvious in this study was the change in the type of volunteering that people were involved in as they got older.

6.1 Volunteering Activity by Age Category

Those people in their 70's were much more likely to be involved in informal volunteering than formal volunteering. The table below also illustrates that the survey found a substantial fall off in formal volunteering between those in their 60's and 70's. The same

⁵ The last population based survey of volunteering in NI found a 26% difference in formal volunteering rates between people in the ABC1's and DE categories (39%-13%), however only a 11% was found in Informal volunteering rates (39%-28%) Source: Its All About Time (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007).

drop off was not apparent for informal volunteering; in fact informal volunteering rates changed very little.

Volunteering Activity by Age Category

Age Category	Any Formal Volunteering	Any Informal Volunteering
50-59	36	59
60-69	40 (-4%)	62 (-3%)
70-79	29 (-11%)	57 (-5%)

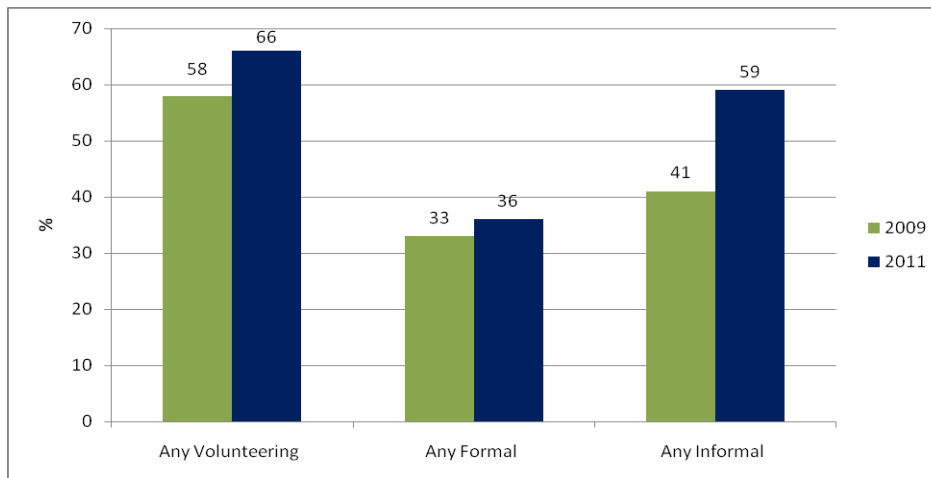
Interestingly, work commitments did not seem to have a major impact on volunteering rates; although people who were working full time (61%) were slightly less likely to volunteer than those who were working part-time (69%) or retired (67%).

6.2 Comparison of Volunteering Activity Levels

A question on current volunteering activity status was included in the 2009 report and in this follow-up one⁶. The graph below outlines the difference in response to this question based on the total % of respondents that were involved in any volunteering, formal volunteering and informal volunteering. Overall, volunteering rates are reported to have increased. Formal volunteering rates have increased from 33% to 36% and informal volunteering rates have increased substantially from 41% to 59%. The vastly increased rate of reported informal volunteering rates between the two reports may be due to the fact that in the recent survey people were given two opportunities to identify themselves as an informal volunteer. One based on a specific question (*'do you volunteer informally?'* i.e. *activities outside of one's family such as shopping for a neighbour, cutting someone's grass, regularly giving someone a lift or even bringing someone's bin in*) and one where respondents were also given a fuller list of 12 types of informal volunteering activities and were asked to state if they did any of them. The latter picked up people who would not identify with the terms 'unpaid work' or 'informal volunteering'. Rochester et al. (2010) have raised the issue of the methodological basis from which volunteering rates are made and how comparing volunteering rates should be made with caution, if the research design differed in any way i.e. how questions are phrased/worded.

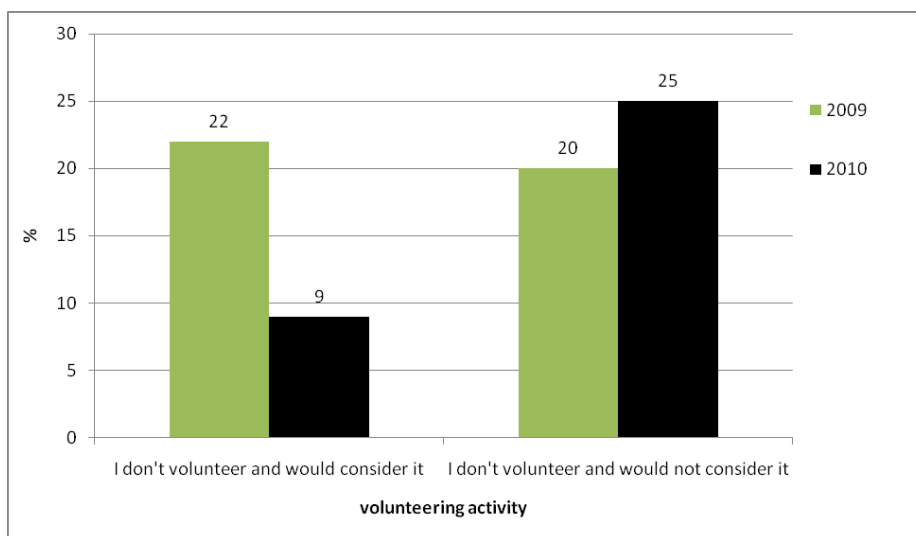
⁶ Which of the following best describes your current activity? Informal volunteering, Formal Volunteering, I volunteer both formally and informally, I don't volunteer but would consider it, I don't volunteer but would not consider it,

Volunteering activity rates - a comparison of 2009 and 2011 Reports



Base: n= 350 for both 2009 and 2011 reports.

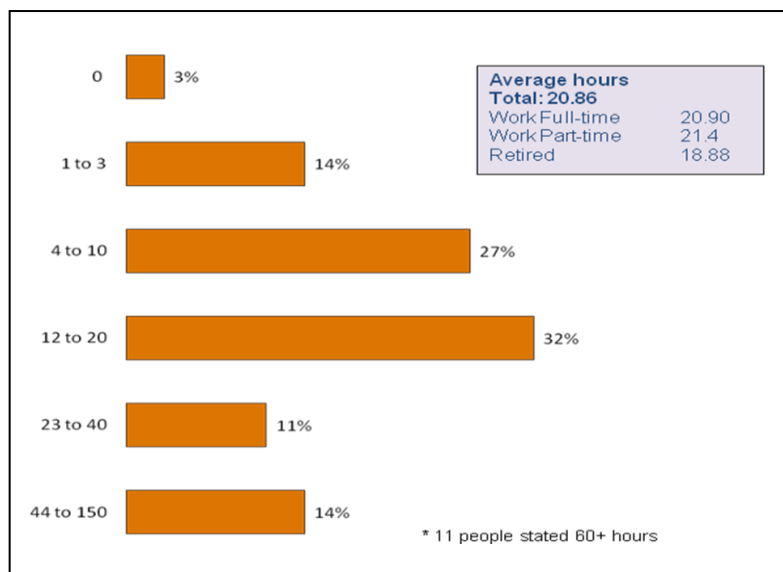
Intention of respondents who don't currently volunteer- A comparison of 2009 and 2011 reports



Between the 2009 and 2011 reports, the percentage of respondents that reported to not volunteer but would consider it, fell from 22% to 9%. This may, in part, be explained by the overall increase in volunteering rates from 58% to 66%.

There was a 5% increase between the 2009 and 2011 reports with regards to the percentage of people who stated that they don't volunteer but would consider it from 20% to 25%.

About how many hours do you normally spend on formal volunteering activities each month? [Base: All who volunteer formally n=118]



Respondents who stated that they volunteered formally, were asked to indicate how many hours they spent volunteering each month. On average, formal volunteers committed just under 21 hours a week to their activities. Previous research has also shown that on average the 65+ age group were volunteering between 21-40 hours per month (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007). This survey found that a small

minority of older people were volunteering up to 60 hours per month, which is equivalent to someone working 3 hours per day from Monday to Friday.

Respondents who were in employment were slightly more likely to give more time formally volunteering than those who were retired. Also, those people who were working part time were more likely to formally volunteer than those who were working full time or not working⁷. Across the total population of Northern Ireland, a similar relationship between formal volunteering and employment status has been found; people in part time employment are more likely to volunteer than those who are not working. However, this relationship was much more pronounced in the general population than it is with this sample of older people (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007).

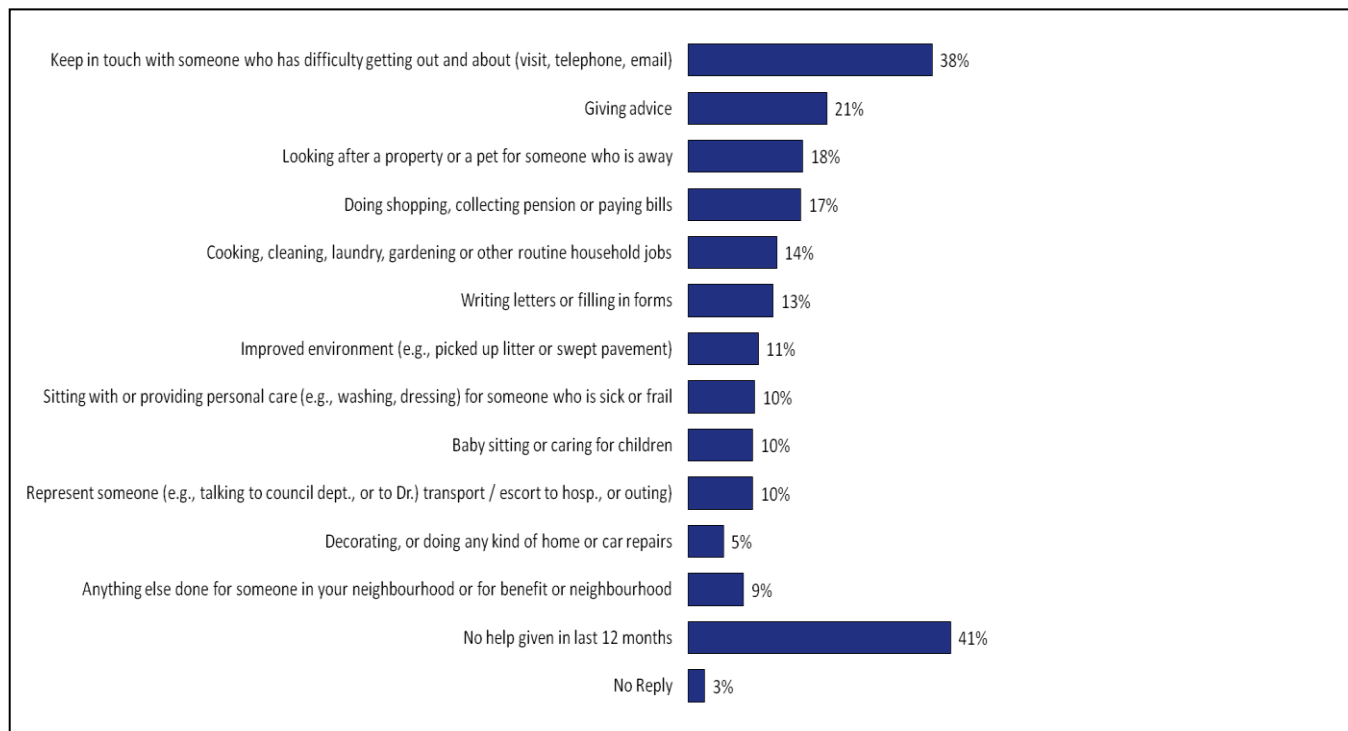
6.3 A Focus on Informal Volunteering

Often within volunteering literature, the focus tends to be on the formal volunteering that happens under the auspices of an organisation. However, informal volunteering is an equally important type of civic engagement, and one which people in their older years are likely to be involved in (See [‘Volunteering Activity by Age Category’](#) section above).

⁷ In It’s All About Time (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007)- employment categories included working full time, working part-time, full time education and not working. Not working included economically inactive as well as people in retirement.

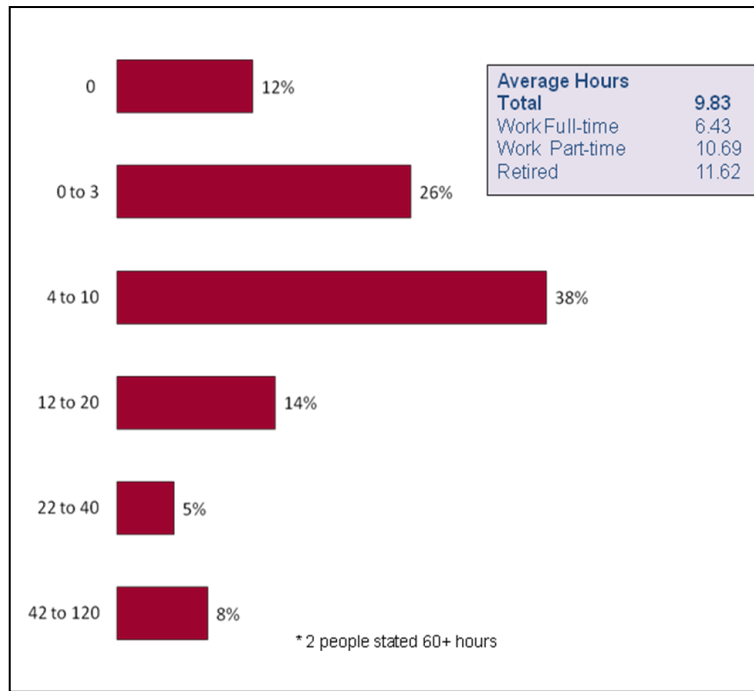
Across all age groups in Northern Ireland more people volunteer informally than they do formally (35% and 21% respectively) (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007). This survey has highlighted the fact that the majority of 50+ year olds are involved in some form of volunteering (66%), and that respondents were more likely to be involved in informal volunteering (59%) than formal volunteering (36%).

Have you, in the last year, done any of these things voluntarily, in your neighbourhood? [Base: All Respondents n=350]



Respondents were given a list of activities which volunteers do at neighbourhood level and asked to state if they had been involved in any form of informal volunteering in the last 12 months. Overall, a greater percentage of respondents had been involved in some form of informal volunteering than not; 59% had volunteered informally and 41% had not. There was a wide range of activities that respondents said they got involved in. The key activity for most informal volunteers was keeping in touch with someone less able to get out themselves (38%) followed by giving advice (21%). This concurs with the previous research carried out in NI (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007) Respondents were also helping out informally, in other ways, but to a lesser extent, by helping to do decorating, writing letters, looking after property and pets or doing some routine household work.

About how many hours do you normally spend on informal volunteering activities each month? [Base: All who volunteer informally n=118]

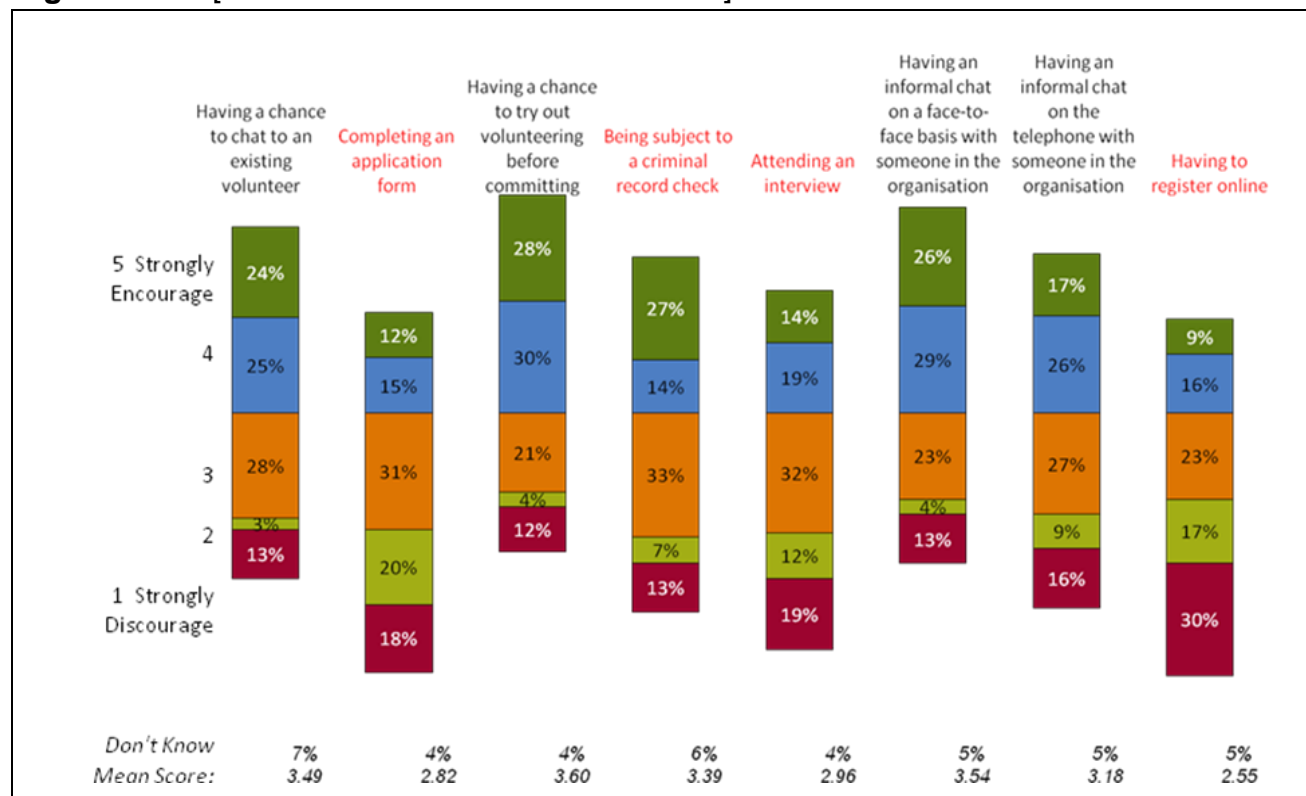


Respondents who stated that they volunteered informally, were asked to indicate how many hours they spent volunteering each month.

On average, informal volunteers committed nearly 10 hours per month. Unlike the pattern for formal volunteering, retirees gave more time to informal activities (11.62 hours per month) than those who were in employment (*full time*- 6.43 hours per month; *part-time*- 10.69 hours per month).

This differs with the pattern of volunteering generally, where people in employment are more likely to volunteer both formally and informally than those who were not working (Volunteer Development Agency, 2007). This research would indicate that when age is factored in people who are in full time retirement are more likely to informally volunteer.

What things would encourage or discourage you to volunteer formally within an organisation [Base: Non formal volunteers n=224]



Volunteer management practice is a term which is usually associated with formal volunteering activities and includes the introduction, support and management a volunteer receives within a volunteer involving organisation. The way in which volunteering is organised within an organisation or group is a vital determinant in whether someone volunteers and will ultimately shape the type of experience they have. Unfortunately some aspects of volunteer management can also act as a barrier to volunteering. Two questions were asked on this topic in order to help understand where on the continuum of encouraging or discouraging some of the most common volunteer management practices lay.

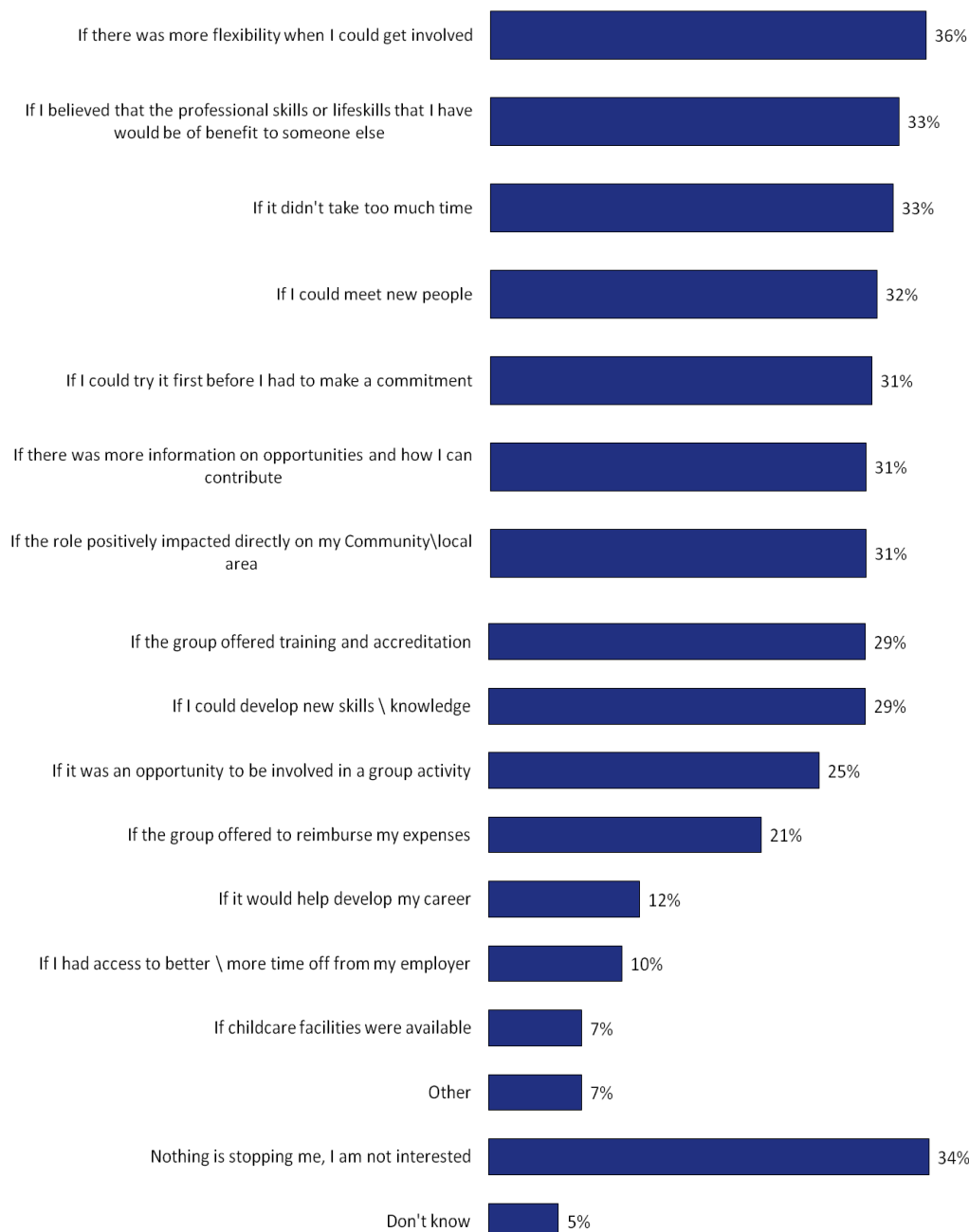
Firstly respondents were given a list of practices commonly included as part of the recruitment and selection of volunteers. These practices are listed in the graph above. Respondents were asked to answer these questions by using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicated that they would find a practice strongly discouraging and 5 indicated that a practice would be strongly encouraging. The most encouraging thing that an organisation could do was to give people an opportunity to try out volunteering before they committed (58%, scored 4 or 5) or being given the opportunity to have a face-to-face chat with someone in the organisation (55%, scored 4 or 5). A telephone chat with

someone in the organisation was also perceived as encouraging by the majority of respondents (scored 3 and 4). Being the subject of a criminal check was not the greatest barrier to volunteering; 20% said that it would be a discouragement (the average score being 1 or 2). Overall, having to register online was the most off putting recruitment practice that a respondent considering formal volunteering could be asked to do (47% stating that it was discouraging). Being asked to attend an interview or complete an application form was also one of the more discouraging practices. The terms 'interview' and 'application form' may be more off-putting than the actual practice itself, in the sense that they may suggest a formal process which is more akin to an employment situation. More informal or softer language such as '1 to 1 chat' or 'registration of interest form' may make the practices seem less daunting. As respondent age increased so too did the general level of discouragement felt towards the practices. This was most noticeable for online registration, 40% of the 70-79 age group stated that this would strongly discourage them from considering volunteering compared to 22% of those in the 50-59 age group.

Which, if any, of the following would make you consider volunteering formally with an organisation? [Base: Non formal volunteers n=224]

Respondents who were not currently involved in formal volunteering (either volunteering informally or not volunteering) were given a list of the most common motivations and benefits from volunteering and asked if there were any which would encourage them to consider formally volunteering. Well over half (56%) of respondents found at least one statement which they thought was encouraging; 34% said that there was nothing stopping them volunteering, they were just not interested in it. Respondents in their 70's (52%) were much more likely to give this as answer compared to those in their 50's (22%) and 60's (35%).

A wide range of options were chosen by those people who would consider formal volunteering, with no overriding statement standing out. This outcome is in line with other research in the field which argues that different people are motivated to volunteer for different reasons and that individuals can have multiple motivations and barriers to volunteer. By a small majority, the most common motivation to volunteer was if there was more flexibility in when you could get involved (36%); however, if they thought their skills would be of benefit of others (33%), if it didn't take up too much time (33%) and if there was an opportunity to meet new people (32%) had a similar percentage response.



**David & Maureen's one good reason:
they love the outdoors**

VOLUNTEER!



Health, Well Being and Volunteering

7.0 Health, Well Being and Volunteering

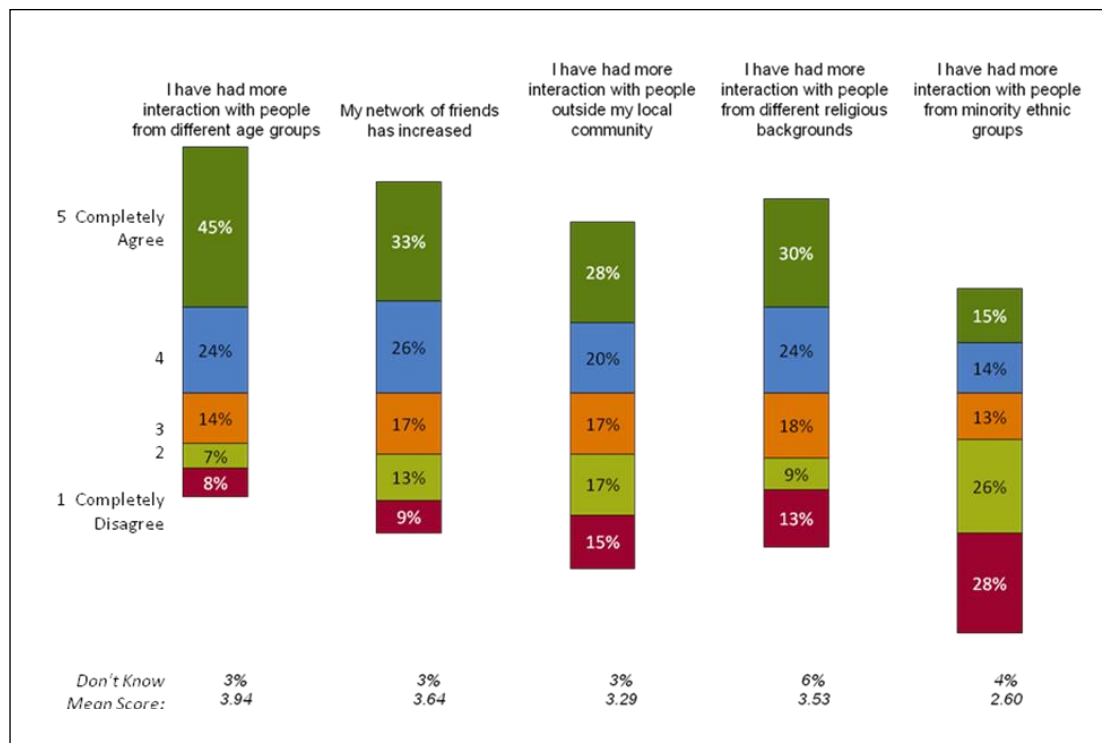
The relationship between volunteering, health and well being is an interesting one. There is a considerable body of international research which has focused on the impact of volunteering on the health of the older age group. To date, the majority of work in this area has come from America. However, there is a collection of papers emerging from Northern Ireland, which has focused on this area, largely supported by the 'Unlocking Potential Project' within Volunteer Now. There is currently a NI longitudinal study underway which is investigating the relationship between volunteering and a range of health well being scales. The first report, based on the first 6 months of data, is due to be launched in the autumn of 2011⁸. Some of the existing positive health benefits directly linked to volunteering include lower blood pressure, stronger immune systems, improved ability to cope with issues related to ones own health, improved self rated health, improved self-esteem, reduced social isolation, increased social support and interaction, improved life satisfaction and greater healthy behaviours i.e. exercise (Graff, 1991; Musick & Herzog, 1999; Volunteering England, 2008; Volunteer Development Agency, 2007b; Herbert, 2008; Rochester and Thomas, 2006; Price, 2007; and Hill, 2006 referenced in Volunteer Development Agency, 2009:1).

In particular social isolation and loneliness is one of the biggest worries for older people along with having enough money for food and heat (Gray, 2009). Unfortunately social isolation is a daily reality for many older people in Northern Ireland (AgeNI, 2010; Engage with Age, 2010). Research has shown that 16% of people aged 65+, do not get out of the house more than once per week and 21% feel lonely 'always' or 'often' (Help the Aged, 2008). TV viewing is also the most regular hobby for 81% of the 50+ year olds in Northern Ireland (Volunteer Development Agency, 2009:2). Organisations and groups which work for the rights and welfare of older people have been calling for a greater focus to be given to all forms of preventative measures to encourage older people to remain socially active, healthy and independent. Obviously, public policy measures in social care and health have a huge part to play in making this happen and there are existing policy strategies with healthy ageing as a priority. Volunteering, as a type of social activity can also be a useful preventative measure. The impact and outcomes from volunteering have clear strategic links with many public policy priorities set by the Northern Ireland Government Departments, in policy papers, including the Life Time Opportunities: Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy (2005) and Ageing in an Inclusive Society (2005) (Volunteer Development Agency, 2009:3). In order to have up to date, local information on the actual impact that volunteering can have on health and well

⁸ Interim reports and updates on the research are available from www.volunteernow.co.uk

being is vital, to informing and influencing policy and practice. This survey asked a number of key questions on respondent’s social interaction, life satisfaction, self reported health and physical activity levels. The question was analysed in a way which allowed for any comparisons between volunteer and non-volunteers to be made.

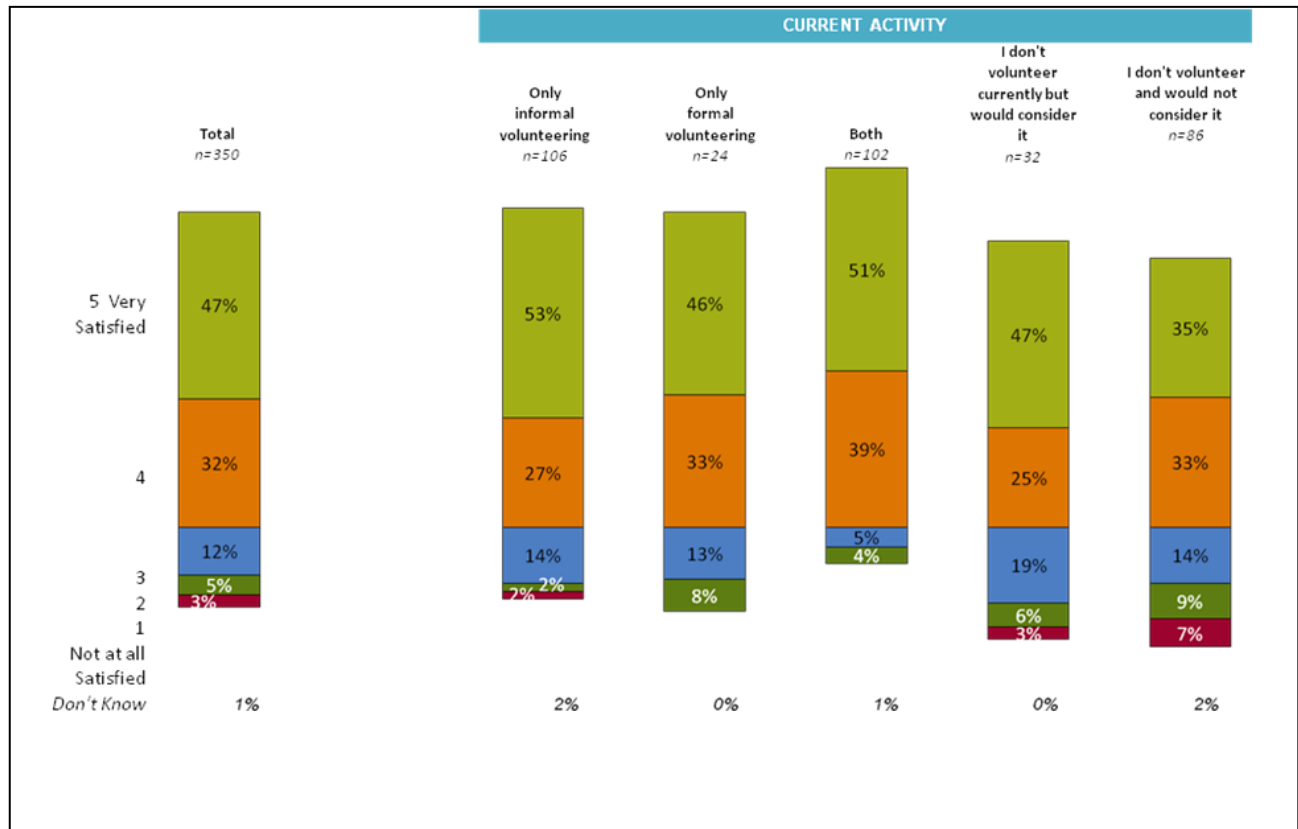
Agreement regarding social interaction since starting volunteering [Base: All who volunteer n=232]



Respondents who stated that they volunteered were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a list of statements related to changes in social networking since they started volunteering. They were asked to choose a number between 1 and 5, where 1 was complete disagreement and 5 was complete agreement. Respondents were most likely to agree that they had more interaction with people from different age groups since they started volunteering (69%) and to see an increase in their network of friends (59%). Approximately half of respondents also agreed that they had more interaction with people from a different community (48%) as well as those from a different religious background (54%) since volunteering. Although relatively lower in terms of agreement, a substantial percentage agreed that they had more interaction with people from minority ethnic groups since they started volunteering (29%). When responses of formal volunteers and informal volunteers were compared, the results showed that respondents involved in formal volunteering were more likely to ‘completely agree’ that

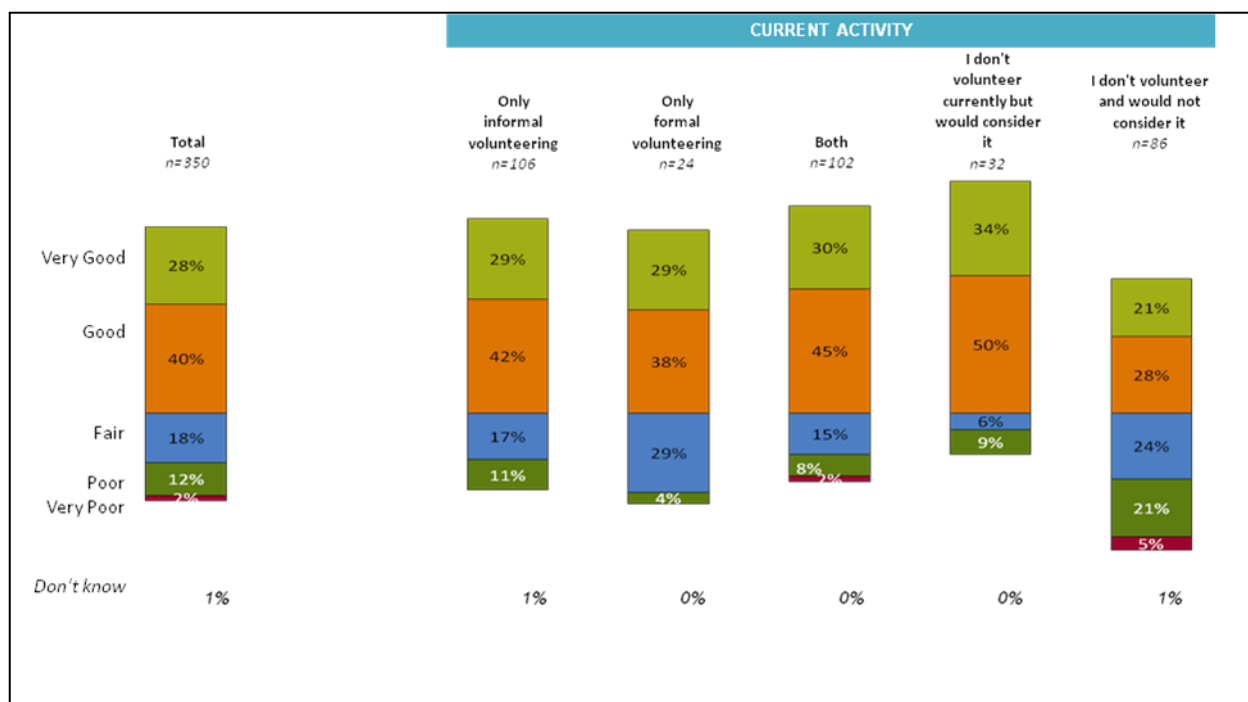
their social interaction had increased compared to those who were informal volunteers only.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your life at present with 1 being not at all satisfied and 5 being very satisfied? [Base: All Respondents n=350]



Overall, irrespective of current activity, the majority of respondents were satisfied with their life at present (79%). There was some variation in response to this question when volunteers were compared to non-volunteers. Volunteers were more likely to say that they were satisfied with their life compared to non-volunteers, especially non-volunteers who would not consider volunteering. Almost all respondents who volunteered both formally and informally were satisfied with their life (90%). Those respondents who did not volunteer and would not consider it were least satisfied (68%). In particular, previous research conducted in Northern Ireland has highlighted differences between the 50+ age group in relation to attitudes to growing older and moving into retirement. It found that volunteers, irrespective of age, were more likely to feel fulfilled (Volunteer Development Agency, 2009:2).

How is your health in general? [Base: All Respondents n=350]



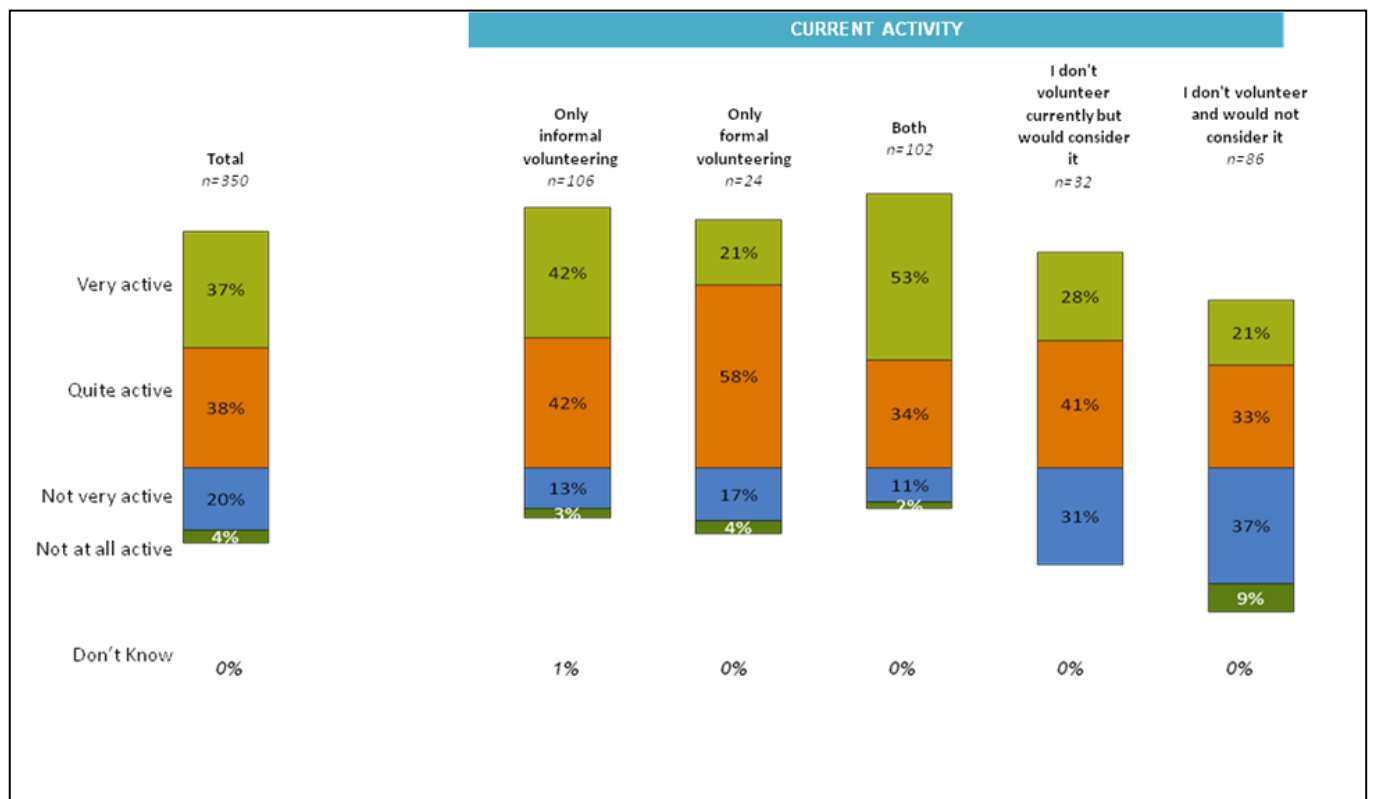
Overall, 68% of respondents reported that their general health was good or very good. The average self reported health of all volunteers was 77% which was well above the average reported health of non-volunteers (67%). Interestingly, those who didn't currently volunteer but would consider it were most likely to state that their health was good (84%). Self reported health ratings declined with age, those respondents aged 70-79 (16%) were much less likely to rate their health as very good compared to those in their 50's (33%) and 60's (30%).⁹

As previously reported, people with poor health are less likely to volunteer. In this survey, 26% of those who did not volunteer and would not consider it described their health as 'poor' or 'very poor'. This was substantially more than some of the other groups. The lower reported health within this group may also explain the lower satisfaction levels with life amongst the cohort of people who don't volunteer and would not consider it, as demonstrated in the previous chart *'how satisfied are you with your*

⁹ 77% of the 50+ year old respondents to the Continuous Household Survey (CHS, 2009-10) reported their health to be 'good' or 'fairly good'. The CHS is based on a systematic random sample of 4,500 addresses drawn each year from the Land and Property Services Agency's (LPSA) list of domestic addresses.

health, at present? Interestingly, previous research conducted with a similar group of 50+ year olds in NI found that illness or disability was the second most common reason why people did not formally volunteer (Volunteer Development Agency, 2009:2). However, there is also a body of international research which argues that people who volunteer are less likely to suffer ill health in later life. There are a range of different theories about why this is the case; they include the fact that people who are healthy are more likely to volunteer. There is also an argument that volunteering helps people to cope better with illness or poor health, because volunteering helps them to be more satisfied with life (see Volunteer Development Agency, 2009:1 pg 19, for a list of references).

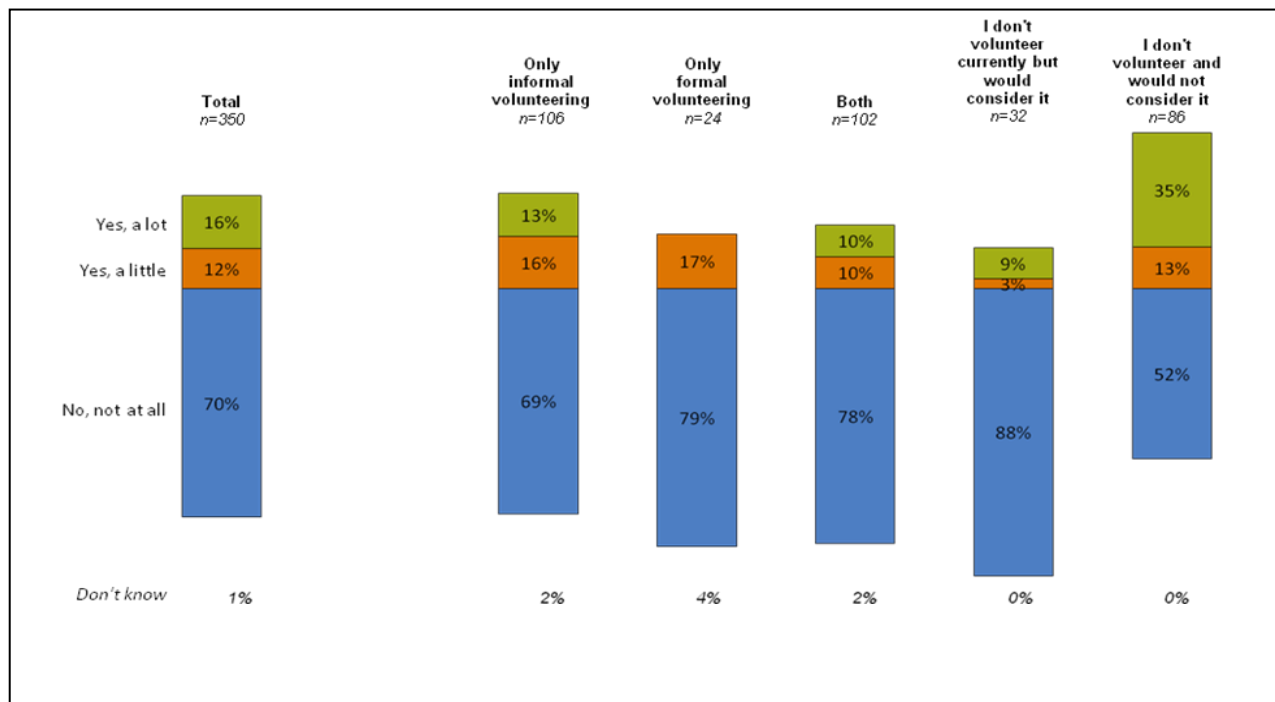
How active or otherwise would you describe your life at present? [Base: All Respondents n=350]



Overall, 75% of respondents described their life as either very active or quite active. Volunteers were more likely to say that they were active than non-volunteers. Volunteers who were involved in both formal and informal were the most active group (87%). Those who were not volunteering and would not consider it were least active (54%).

Would your current state of health prevent you from considering volunteering?

[Base: All Respondents n=350]



Overall, 28% of respondents suggested that their health could be a barrier to them volunteering. In previous research the second most common barrier to formally volunteering after having too many other commitments was having an illness or disability (Volunteer Development Agency, 2009:2). In this survey, almost half (48%) of those who were not volunteering and would not consider it cited that health issues were a barrier. Only 12% of those who stated that they did not volunteer but would consider it stated that health issues were a reason why they did not volunteer- for 88% health was not a main reason. This would suggest that there are other barriers apart from health which are preventing both of these non-volunteering groups from doing so. This is particularly so for those who are still remain open to it as an option i.e. 'I don't volunteer but would consider it'. Often reasons for and against volunteering are multiple and varied, and can alter over time as lifestyle and personal circumstances change. However, this report along with previous reports go some way in being able to list some of the most likely barriers. The most pertinent findings along with the issues / questions they raise have been considered further in the discussion section of the report which follows.

8.0 Discussion

This section of the report will focus on some of the most pertinent findings and highlight the issues which they raise.

8.1 Substantial Volunteering Activity of the 50+ Age Group

This survey showed that the 50+ age group is a very active group in terms of both formal and informal volunteering. Volunteering activity rates did fall slightly for those in their 70's (61%) compared to those in their 50's (67%) and 60's (69%), however volunteering rates for all age categories remained within the 60- 69 percent bracket. These statistics offer strong evidence to suggest that older people are contributing a great deal to the social economy of NI and that a disproportionate amount of discourse is spent talking about the needs of older people and their dependency on the state. Of course, there are clearly issues with how the ageing demographic will be managed at a government level; however, as this survey has shown, older people continue to contribute to society when they are of pensionable age and are a valuable resource to it. The contribution that people of pensionable age make to society, through volunteering, deserves more recognition from the public and the government. Furthermore, a range of local research would suggest that elected representatives have some way to go in gaining the confidence of older people.

8.2 Health as a barrier to volunteering

Volunteers were more likely to say that they had an active lifestyle and that their health was good or very good. However, health problems act as a significant barrier which prevent people of all ages from starting to volunteer or continuing with it. Over half of the respondents in this study who stated that they would not consider volunteering, gave health as a reason. This is an area which needs further research to help understand the extent to which health is a barrier to volunteering and to see if there are specific types of health issues which stop people from considering or staying with volunteering. In terms of organisations, it would be important to find out how they respond to new and existing volunteers who have health problems and to understand how these situations are addressed i.e. are reasonable adjustments available in terms of roles and working environment.

8.3 Volunteers likely to vote but are dissatisfied with political representation

Older people are becoming an increasing proportion of the population and therefore also representing a greater proportion of the electorate of NI. One in five people who will cast their vote in the next Assembly Election on May 5th will be aged over 65. There is an established body of research which supports the fact that people who volunteer are

more likely to be interested and engaged in a wide range of other civic activities. This survey adds further support to this work by also finding that respondents that were involved in volunteering had an above average likelihood of voting. There was also a greater chance of them taking part in Age Awareness Week and therefore being aware of the breadth and depth of issues and debates on ageing. Opinion polls are also showing that older people are dissatisfied with political representation as they do not feel that their issues are understood or appropriately addressed.

8.4 Understanding the volunteering patterns of people in their 70's

This survey found that older people are much more likely to be informal volunteers compared to young people. In this survey, 59% of respondents were informally volunteering within their neighbourhood, this is compared to 24% of a sample of 16 year olds in NI in another recent survey (Irvine & Schubotz, 2010). In particular, respondents in their 70's were more likely to informally volunteer than formally volunteer. Formal volunteering rates were 11% lower for those in their 70's compared to those in their 60's, although informal volunteering rates only fell by 5% across the same age range. Firstly these figures highlight the fact that people of pensionable age remain active volunteers within their communities but are more likely to do this informally than through an organisation.

There are a wide range of reasons why people as they move into their 70's may reduce the amount of formal volunteering they do. An obvious factor may be health problems for themselves or family. Individuals may decide that they no longer want to volunteer or may feel pressure to stop because they feel 'too old'. Organisational policy and practice may also be a factor. Some organisations have a policy that they do not involve volunteers, once they reach 70. This may be a decision that organisations are forced to make due to lack of available insurance cover or ability to pay higher premium rates for older volunteers. In the current climate of funding cuts, paying for staff to manage the involvement of volunteers and to make adaptations to roles depending on volunteer interests, motivations and needs may be increasingly challenging. There is already evidence emerging to suggest that organisations are cutting back on volunteer management practices due to the current downturn (Volunteer Now, 2010:2). However the results of this survey would suggest that formal volunteering is more likely to lead to greater increases in social interaction, a benefit which older people, more than any other age group can benefit from. However, it also supports previous work, which has shown that engagement of non-volunteers becomes increasingly difficult as people become settled into their retirement (Volunteer Now, 2009). Addressing the barriers and enablers to volunteering for the 70+ age group is an area which would benefit from future research and discussion.

8.5 People who don't volunteer but would consider it

A small group of respondents (34 people) stated that they didn't currently volunteer but would consider it. This group was most likely to state that their health was good and did not see health as a reason for not volunteering. They were also the most likely group to use the internet and social networking websites. Although, generally awareness of volunteer related advertising was only 28%, respondents in this group were as likely to have seen advertising as any of the other groups. And although they were the most likely to be internet users, very few had heard of the Volunteer Now website. This may be due to the fact that this generation are more likely to use the internet to keep in contact with family and friends; however, it also highlights the value of exploring the potential for engagement of this group through the new forms of communication such as the internet, social networking, alongside other more traditional means.

8.6 Barriers and enablers to considering volunteering

Research has shown that often people decide not to consider volunteering based on preconceptions, without sourcing relevant information or knowing where to find it. Concern for over-commitment, inflexibility in roles, and the belief that they would not have the necessary skills are some of the most common barriers raised by the 50+ age group to volunteering (Volunteer Now, 2010:1). In this survey, respondents were asked what things organisations could do to encourage them to consider volunteering more fully. The most significant enablers to volunteering related to being given the opportunity to find out about the role before committing. Over half of the people in this survey said that being given the chance to try out volunteering, to have a chat with a representative of the organisation or an existing volunteer would encourage them to consider it. There are many volunteer involving organisations in NI who are offering these types of opportunities. For example organisations which provide open days, taster sessions or information meetings for prospective volunteers. However, especially within organisations who are finding it difficult to recruit volunteers, there is potential to increase interest by implementing these types of practices and to promote them widely.

Apart from being asked to register online, being asked to complete an application form or attend an interview were the most common barriers to considering volunteering. Volunteer management practices such as these are an important way for organisations to effectively select volunteers and are increasingly common. A recent NI based survey reported that 58% of organisations ask for application forms and 86% carry out informal chats / interviews (Volunteer Now, 2010). The barrier to these practices may not be the actual process but what their name implies. The terms 'interview' and 'application form' as a way to describe volunteer management practices may be off-putting for some people as they may suggest a formal process which is more akin to an employment

situation. More informal or softer language to describe these practices such as an 'informal chat' or 'registration of interest form' may have had a different response and should be considered by organisations. It is important that organisations are aware of how language and description influence their market. The recruitment process for volunteers benefits from being organised and structured whilst still being a relaxed and informal experience for volunteers. Further research to explore the use of language in volunteering and its impact on volunteering rates is to be encouraged.

8.7 The Internet is one of many tools for communicating with older people.

There is certainly a place for the internet as a way of communicating with and making volunteering accessible to the older age group, as much as any other age group. Over half of respondents in this survey stated that they used the internet, albeit in most cases keeping in touch with friends and family was the main or sole reason for using it. The limited usage of the internet by many older people may explain why almost half said that being asked to register for a volunteering opportunity online would put them off. It may also explain why less than half of those who recognised seeing volunteer advertising (28%) were aware of the Volunteer Now website (12%).

The range of ways in which older people use the internet will undoubtedly change with time, as future generations who habitually use multimedia technology move into the older age group. However, there are still a significant percentage of the 50+ age group who are not using the internet at all. There are many reasons for this, not being exposed to it in school or the workplace is one reason. However, income, educational attainment and social-economic grouping will also be factors which can create barriers for people of all ages using computers and the internet. For this reason there is a need to use multi-communication approaches when promoting volunteering. There is a market for newer methods such as websites, facebook, twitter and texting. However, traditional methods like flyers, posters, tv / paper / radio ads, attending road-shows / community events are still very important ways of sending messages to consumers. Also word of mouth, through existing satisfied volunteers has historically been one of the most powerful promotional tools.

9. Conclusion

This report is a valuable addition to the existing research that is available in Northern Ireland with regards to understanding the attitudes, lifestyle and volunteering activity rates of the 50+ age group in Northern Ireland. The report has highlighted the substantial contribution which older people are making to their communities through volunteering. It is hoped that this information will be used to balance out the discourse used when discussing ageing, to include the older people as a resource as well as having needs. The report has offered some information which can stimulate and inform future discussions of practitioners and policy makers with regards to creating the environment for older people to be fully utilised, through making fair and inclusive policy decisions. Ensuring the full participation of older people in society is an integral and important theme within the 'Ageing in an Inclusive Society'. Having this value set out in the NI Government Ageing Strategy sets an important example for all Sectors and life domains. Volunteer Involving organisations may find it useful to review the enablers and barriers raised by older people in this report and review their volunteer management practices. For researchers who have an interest in this field, there are also a range of other areas which would benefit from future exploration.

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