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DECEMBER 2024

# Every Hour Can Make a Difference

*Denise Hayward, CEO, Volunteer Now*



Last week I was highlighting the need for more volunteers in the hope that the new year will inspire people to give their time for others. Whilst research published by NISRA in November shows that volunteer numbers in Northern Ireland are back to levels pre-pandemic (28% of the population volunteered within the last year), Volunteer Now would still like this number to increase and has noted a change in the amount of time that those

The drop in available volunteer hours is a knock-on effect from the pandemic and the general pressure put on everyday life through the cost of living. Whilst we have a fantastic, engaged network of volunteers and are thrilled to see numbers coming back up following the challenges we faced since 2020, we are now looking at a different challenge. People appear to have less time to give so in short, we simply need more people. More and more organisations need the support of volunteers, and we have an ageing population who rely on voluntary services. We want to stress that not everyone needs to give up a huge amount of time either, as every hour can make a difference to someone's life. We just need more individuals to give volunteering a go.

Research by Volunteer Now has also shown that many people have misconceptions about what volunteering may involve, a challenge we are directly tackling: There are so many volunteering roles available in Northern Ireland for people of all ages in every area – each of which play an important role and have a positive impact in our society.

We have been highlighting these through a series of awareness campaigns and will continue to do so. From assisting at a sports event to packing items at a food bank, from befriending an isolated older person to driving someone to hospital. These are all roles that we cannot fill without volunteers.

We are hopeful that with the new year approaching, people will consider adding volunteering to their list of resolutions. We tend to try new hobbies or introduce healthy habits in the new year so we're hoping that volunteering could be top of that list.

Importantly, if volunteering is new to you, you aren't alone. We support volunteers every single step of the way, and if it doesn't work out, that's absolutely fine. Our volunteers talk about how volunteering clearly benefits others but also how much it benefits them. The mental and physical benefits of volunteering are proven. It can help you feel more active, more connected and give you a sense of purpose. It can create an enormous sense of wellbeing for individuals or for employees whose employer gives them time to volunteer.

By trying volunteering, you might just find it becomes a part of life you didn't know you needed. Volunteering changes lives and we hope more people in Northern Ireland will make 2025 the start of their volunteering journey.

Volunteering opportunities throughout communities in all parts of Northern Ireland can be found on the banner on our homepage.



**ONLINE TRAINING**

Click the button below to find out more!

Volunteer Management | Safeguarding | Volunteering | Governance

## Online Training

- Keeping Adults Safe: Training for Staff & Volunteers
- Recruit, Retain, Reward Volunteers
- Volunteers & the Law
- Keeping Adults Safe: Adult Safeguarding Champion & Appointed Person Refresher Training



## VOLT Programme 2025

The team at Volunteer Now are working to develop a programme of VOLT sessions for 2025, aiming to have these arranged as early as possible.

We will be promoting upcoming sessions through our website on the training calendar, but we will also communicate via email.

In January and February we will be delivering the following:

- [Investing in Volunteers Information Session](#) | 28 Jan | 11am-12pm | Online
- [Involving Young People as Volunteers](#) | 13 Feb | 10am-12pm | Hybrid - Belfast & Online
- **A session hosted by our Safeguarding Team** | Date & Time TBC

If you have any queries, or feel that there are any topics we should address in a VOLT session, please let us know by contacting [Andrew.Hanna@volunteernow.co.uk](mailto:Andrew.Hanna@volunteernow.co.uk).



Melanie Fitzgerald, Volunteer Co-ordinator Team Lead from the Belfast Trust gave an excellent overview of the volunteering programme in the Trust. Volunteers are making a real difference and Melanie spent time looking at how they help to shape the Trust's volunteer programme. The Trust has a strong recruitment pathway and lots of attractive roles but there are challenges in involving volunteers in a tightly regulated environment. The volunteering team at Belfast Trust manage these challenges in a creative way and the session explored their approach.



### NI Human Rights Commission Draft Strategic Plan 2025-2028

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) is in the process of developing its Strategic Plan 2025-2028. The aim of this process is to shape their focus and direction for the next three years and to ensure the overall mission and values of the Human Rights Commission remain the right ones, which are then achieved in practice.

Chief Commissioner, Alyson Kilpatrick, has outlined the process further in her letter to stakeholders which you can access [here](#).

The consultation period will run for 12 weeks from 15 October 2024 to 14 January 2025. Therefore, the Commission would greatly appreciate your responses to the questions [at this link](#).

**Click to open NIHRC Draft Strategic Plan 2025-2028 using the button below.**

If you need these documents in another accessible format, please contact [publicconsultations@nihrc.org](mailto:publicconsultations@nihrc.org) or telephone **028 9024 3987** and ask for the Engagement and Communications team.

**NIHRC Draft Strategic Plan 2025-2028**





## Good Relations Awards 2025

The Good Relations Awards 2025 are now open for nominations. The annual Awards spotlight the essential role that members of the local community play in delivering peace and building united communities here.

This year there are six award categories:

1. The Community Relations Council Exceptional Achievement Award (Partner: Community Relations Council)
2. Good Relations Volunteer of the Year Award (Partner: Volunteer Now)
3. Good Relations Community Champion Award (Partner: NICVA)
4. Good Relations Youth Award (Under 25) (Partner: NI Youth Forum)
5. Good Relations Connecting Communities Project of the Year Award (Partner: Community Foundation for NI)
6. Good Relations 'Housing for All' Award (Partner: NI Housing Executive)

The Good Relations Awards are organised by the Community Relations Council in partnership with The Executive Office (TEO). Each Award category is supported by a partner organisation: Volunteer Now; NICVA; NI Youth Forum, and the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland. New for 2025 is The Housing for All award and Community Relations Council is delighted to have the support and engagement of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in this category.

The Awards recognise the exceptional commitment to Good Relations work undertaken by people and groups who go above and beyond, every single day, to make a better, more united community for everyone. The Awards celebrate those who unite and champion our local communities, while also showcasing the diverse range of projects that connect communities in peace, understanding and cultural respect.

**If you know a local group, individual or organisation in Northern Ireland that deserves recognition for their work, click the button below to nominate.**

The closing date for nominations is **19 December 2024**.



**Special Olympics**  
Ireland

## Special Olympics Ireland Volunteer Awards 2025

The 2024 Special Olympics Ireland Volunteer Awards was a celebration of the beating heart of Special Olympics. Without the contributions of volunteers in clubs and at events year-round, our mission to transform lives through sport wouldn't be possible.

The event, held at the Crowne Plaza Santry on 14 September, saw veteran sports broadcaster Gráinne McElwain reprising her role as MC from the 2023 Awards. The gathered guests were addressed by athlete and previous Youth Award winner Rebecca Nolan, Special Olympics Ireland Volunteer Manager Claire O'Connor, and Special Olympics Ireland CEO Matt English.

The Volunteer Awards underscore the impact and importance of volunteering in the work of Special Olympics Ireland, with the award winners illustrating how transformative and life-changing the experience has been.

Special Olympics Ireland extends an invitation to all those interested in helping transform the lives of people with intellectual disabilities through sport to get involved as volunteers.

**For more information on how to become a Special Olympics Ireland volunteer, please click the button below.**

Photos from the 2024 Awards can be viewed [here](#), and the video can be viewed [here](#).

**Become a Special Olympics Ireland Volunteer**

Belfast City Council give grants and funding to various types of organisations in Belfast:

**Funding for Belfast Festival of Learning 2025** – closing date 20 December 2024 at 12noon

**Small Grants** – closing date 10 January 2025 at 12noon:

- Community Festival Fund
- Arts & Heritage
- Good Relations
- Park Events
- Support for Sport
- Community Summer Scheme

**Vacant to Vibrant Scheme** – open until available funding is fully allocated.



[Find Out More](#)



## Investing in Volunteers Congratulations!

Congratulations to [Air Ambulance NI](#) and [Holywood Family Trust](#) who both renewed their Investing in Volunteers quality standard!

Investing in Volunteers (IiV) is the UK Quality Standard that helps you assess and improve the quality of your volunteer management and involvement, prove and improve the effectiveness of your work with volunteers and enhance your organisation's reputation.

Achieving the standard shows your current, and potential, volunteers how much they are valued and gives them confidence in your ability to provide an outstanding volunteer experience. It also reassures funders of the quality of your practices.

[Find Out More](#)



Hello, I'm Deborah, I work in the Belfast office as an Administrative Officer. I am part of the team who answer phone calls, post and emails. I also take bookings for courses and send out relevant material and Certificates of Achievement to those who have completed a course. We are happy to help with any enquiries about bookings or training you may be interested in.



### Contact Deborah



### Member Spotlight

#### **Advice NI**

Advice NI is a registered charity founded in 1995 and exists to provide leadership and services to their member organisations and to ensure accessible advice services across Northern Ireland.

They support their members by working with them to enhance standards and service delivery, act as a voice for the independent advice sector and work in partnership to develop and deliver advice services.

Advice NI also delivers a range of advice services to the public including benefits, debt, tax credits and other HMRC services.

### Advice NI

### Directory of Befriending Services

Volunteer Now coordinate the Befriending Network for Northern Ireland, and this directory of services acts as a tool for health professionals, organisations, families and individuals when looking for available support services in their area. At this time of year, it can be a challenging for people, and for this reason, we strongly advise everybody to research and become even more familiar of support networks and services available in their local area. This knowledge may go a long way to helping somebody who is isolated this Christmas time.

**NETWORK**  
Support | Strengthen | Build

Directory of  
Befriending  
Services

**VOLUNTEER NOW**  
connect · build · change

## Directory of Befriending Services



### New Members

Welcome to our newest organisational members: [Royal Voluntary Service](#), [Coleraine Cougar Special Olympics Basketball Club](#), [Mid Ulster District Council](#) and [My Big Career](#). This brings our organisational members total to 1155!

[Become A Member](#)



### Flexible, accessible training

Did you know you can learn all you need to know about volunteer management in just 8 hours with our on demand courses? You can complete these anytime, anywhere & on any device! Click below to find out more.

[Find Out More](#)



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