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OCTOBER 2025

Experience of Volunteering 2024/25



Denise Hayward, CEO, Volunteer Now

The new NISRA statistics on experience of volunteering: Findings from the 2024/25 Continuous Household Survey were published at the start of October. The overall level of volunteering is generally consistent with the previous year, which continues to underpin a recovery from the drop associated with the pandemic.

The statistics show 27% of the population have volunteered with an organisation. While 34% of the population has volunteered informally in the community, without an organisation. The figures still show an under-representation in volunteering in some groups and underline the importance of working to make volunteering more inclusive. You can access the full report [here](#).



Online Training

- Online Safety: Keeping Children & Adults Safe in a Digital World
- Keeping Adults Safe: Recognising, Responding & Reporting
- Diversity, Equality & Inclusion Workshop - Ask, Learn, Act
- Induction, Support & Supervision of Volunteers
- Succession Planning for Volunteering



Good Relations Week 2025

Oscar, BAFTA and IFTA award-winning actor James Martin MBE is calling on individuals, organisations and communities across the region to come together and 'Connect' for Good Relations Week, which takes place from Monday 13 to Sunday 19 October 2025.

The week will feature a dynamic programme of more than 200 cross-community and multicultural events across all 11 local council areas, embracing the 2025 theme of 'Connect - People, Planet, Prosperity' and working towards the overarching goal of shaping a more peaceful, inclusive and sustainable future for everyone.

[View the full programme](#)



NI Community Infrastructure Fund

Communities Minister Gordon Lyons launched the new £4m the NI Community Infrastructure Fund earlier in October.

The NI Community Infrastructure Fund is designed for the everyday facilities that sustain local life – the halls, centres, and buildings that rarely make headlines, but which make an enormous difference. However, in too many cases, they are no longer fit for purpose and that is not good enough.

The Fund is a small capital grant scheme to support the sector to improve the internal or external fabric of their existing community buildings so that they can meet the needs of their community and/or improve the quality and range of activities being delivered.

The scheme opened for Expressions of Interest on 1 October and closes on 29 October. For more information and to attend an information session please click the button below.

NI Community Infrastructure Fund



Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann Comes to Belfast!

We're thrilled to share that Belfast will host Fleadh Cheoil 2026 – it will be coming to Belfast from 2– 9 August 2026. Fleadh Cheoil is the world's biggest celebration of Irish music and culture and Volunteer Now are delighted to be responsible for the volunteer coordination at this event.

We are aiming to recruit around 1,500 passionate volunteers. This is a huge opportunity to showcase the warmth, talent, and community spirit in Belfast. There are so many wonderful ways to volunteer and become the heartbeat of the Fleadh.

If this sounds like something that would interest you (or your own networks), please do reach out to the team- Events@volunteernow.co.uk

We can't wait to make this an unforgettable celebration!

Ards and North Down 10 Year Community Development Strategy Survey Questionnaire



Community Strategy - Have Your Say

Ards and North Down Borough Council is seeking your help to develop a new community strategy.

They need your thoughts on how they should provide services such as play clubs and summer schemes, how they can support communities and how you would like community centres and halls to operate in your area.

To have your say please attend one of the workshops being held over the coming weeks or complete the online survey.

The new Community Strategy will help shape the future of community services in the Borough and provide a clear direction for the Council to improve this provision for the duration of the Strategy (2026-2035). The Strategy will cover Council's direct provision which includes play clubs, summer schemes, over 50+ club; their volunteer engagement activity; and community centre and hall provision/ operating arrangements.

Community workshops are being held across the Borough as detailed below. They are informal, drop-in, events offering opportunities for residents to find out more about how the Council is developing the strategy and to share their views on priorities.

Everyone is welcome to attend between **6pm - 8pm** at the following locations:

- Portaferry Market House: Thursday 16 October
- Ballygowan Village Hall: Tuesday 21 October
- Manor Court Community Centre, Newtownards: Wednesday 22 October
- Alderman George Green Community Centre, Bangor: Thursday 23 October
- Skipperstone Community Centre, Bangor: Monday 27 October

If you are unable to attend a meeting, you can complete the community survey online (click the button below) or scan the QR code above.

Community Strategy Survey



James
Lind
Alliance
In association with



Public Health
Agency

Research and Development

Involvement Matters

Health and Social Care, Research & Development division, in association with the James Lind Alliance, have recently launched **Involvement Matters**. A project aiming to identify the top priorities for improving Personal and Public Involvement (PPI) in health and social care research across Northern Ireland — and we need your input.

We are keen to hear from:

- People with experience of being involved in health and social care research
Representatives from the Community and Voluntary Sector
- Health and social care professionals who lead on or help deliver research
- Other members of the Northern Ireland research community (e.g. funders, representatives from the academic research community).
- People who are interested in PPI, but have no involvement experience

Your experiences and views will help us create real, lasting change in how PPI is carried out, making it more inclusive, relevant, and impactful for everyone in our communities.

Check out our PPI animation [here](#).

 The survey is still open and can be accessed by clicking the button below — please take a few minutes to share your views and help shape the future of health and social care research in Northern Ireland.

You are invited to attend Volunteer Now's

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

November

Thursday **13** at 2:00 PM

2025

PwC Belfast Office, Merchant Square,
20-22 Wellington Place, Belfast BT1 6GE



Volunteer Now's AGM 2025

You are warmly invited to Volunteer Now's AGM on Thursday 13 November 2025 at 2.00pm in PwC Belfast Office, Merchant Square, 20-22 Wellington Place, Belfast, BT1 6GE

We are thrilled to welcome Stephen Gray, Digital Transformation Manager at MindWise NI, as our AGM Guest Speaker!

Stephen will introduce **AI for Volunteer-Involving Organisations**, sharing practical examples and leading an interactive discussion on how technology can enhance volunteer engagement.

Don't miss this exciting opportunity to explore the future of volunteering!

Please RSVP by Thursday 6 November 2026 to nicole.fitzsimons@volunteernow.co.uk

Grants are available to rural community-led, voluntary organisations in Northern Ireland to support projects that address issues of local poverty and social isolation and to implement energy efficiency measures or environmental improvements.

The Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme is open for the 2025/25 round. Applicants can apply for a minimum grant of £500 up to a maximum grant of £2,000 with a minimum of 15% match funding required.



Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme



Be Collective

Are you looking to recruit new volunteers?

Or are you looking for a volunteering opportunity?

Then have a look at our volunteering management and recruitment platform - Be Collective - it's free to use!

Be Collective



Investing in Community Volunteers Programme

As part of the PEACEPLUS Investing in Community Volunteers Programme, individuals, community groups and volunteers from across Fermanagh & Omagh District Council are invited to have their say and shape a programme that reflects your needs and the needs of your community.

A draft programme of activities has been developed, and we would like to hear your thoughts. Whether you're already active in your community or simply curious about getting involved, this is your opportunity to share your local knowledge and insights and find out more about what's on offer. The Investing in Community Volunteers Programme is one of 13 programmes as detailed in the Fermanagh and Omagh PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan, a project supported by PEACEPLUS and managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

To ensure everyone has an opportunity to take part, focus groups will take place in every DEA, across Fermanagh & Omagh. Focus Groups will take place both in-person and online (Zoom). 'In person' sessions are 'drop-in'. Zoom sessions will have a start time detailed below. To access the Zoom sessions simply click on the link below at the session start time.

Investing in Community Volunteers Programme



MEA Loneliness Network Celebrate Positive Ageing Month

Mid and East Antrim (MEA) Loneliness Network held their October meeting in conjunction with Volunteer Now and their Link, Lunch & Learn VOLT Session. The event was held on Tuesday 7 October in Larne Bowling Club to highlight Positive Ageing Month.

Positive Ageing Month is an annual October initiative that celebrates older people's contributions to their communities by organizing a variety of events and activities to promote their well-being and inclusion.

As part of the VOLT event, MEA Loneliness Network members met and networked with other volunteer organisations in the Mid and East Antrim area. Those present were able to share research, advice and information for attracting new older volunteers during October and beyond, while also celebrating the contributions of those who already volunteer.

Sabrina Lynn from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust says

“As a Loneliness Network we wanted to recognise how volunteers play a crucial role in strengthening communities by enhancing social connections, building a sense of belonging, and improving overall well-being. Volunteering allows local people to gain valuable skills, experience, and confidence, while also making a positive impact on their community. This event gave us a chance to highlight how volunteering can help reduce feelings of loneliness and low moods and can increase confidence and general wellbeing”

Mid and East Antrim Loneliness Network Chairperson Marjorie Hawkins said

“In recent years more local people are experiencing of loneliness and isolation. Volunteering is a great way to reduce feelings of isolation, loneliness and risk of depression. Volunteering improves mental health by reducing stress, lowering anxiety, increasing feelings of purpose, accomplishment, and happiness.”

Wenda Gray from Volunteer Now added

“Volunteer Now are delighted to be involved with Positive Ageing Month which is about celebrating and promoting the positive aspects of growing old and recognising the valuable contribution community and voluntary organisations make to improve the health and wellbeing of older people. If you are over the age of 50 and live in the Mid and East Antrim area please get in contact with us to get involved in some of our opportunities by contacting wenda.gray@volunteernow.co.uk”



Autumn 2025 Training

Elevate is a **FREE** interactive workshop which is suitable for anyone with an interest in community development and health inequalities including staff and volunteers in voluntary organisations, community groups, councils, health and social care and government agencies.

What will be covered?

Health Inequalities - local and regional examples
The Social Determinants of Health
The role of Community Development in reducing Health Inequalities

**Sketrick House,
Newtownards**

**21
OCT**

10AM-3:30PM

**28 & 29
OCT**

6-9PM

Online Evening

**Cathedral Road Rec
Centre, Armagh**

**7
NOV**

10AM-3:30PM

**17
NOV**

10AM-3:30PM

**St Columbs Park
House, Derry**

**Black Mountain
Centre, Belfast**

**25
NOV**

10AM-3:30PM

**4
DEC**

10AM-3:30PM

NICVA, Belfast

Find out more and register at www.elevateni.org/training

KAVS is the highest award for local volunteer groups - it is the MBE for organisations and it is awarded for life! The Award is for groups of volunteers whose level of initiative and impact are truly exceptional. The applicant must

- be volunteer led;
- have an outstanding reputation locally;
- be exceptional compared to other similar groups
- make a considerable difference locally
- be well run

Click below to find out more!



The King's Award for Voluntary Service

The MBE for volunteer groups

The King's Award for Voluntary Service



NEA NI Training Services

National Energy Action (NEA) is one of the leading providers of domestic energy and fuel poverty training services for over 30 years. We are delighted to offer both face-to-face and online tuition across the UK. Our aim is to enhance the quality of energy advice services provided by local, regional and national organisations across various sectors. As well as our existing suite of training NEA can create bespoke courses to respond to specific needs.

We look forward to welcoming you on one of our courses soon.

NEA NI Training



GoVo - New Volunteering Platform for England, Scotland and Wales

GoVo is being developed to grow volunteering across Britain and mobilise the next generation of volunteers. Its development is being led by RVS (Royal Voluntary Society) however it is **not available for use in Northern Ireland** as it is funded by the People's Postcode Lottery. We believe however that the press around its launch (17 October) will seep into our press so we are sharing this for your information.

GoVo will not look to replace existing platforms or current infrastructure networks. Rather, the platform will provide national additionality to local centres and platforms. It will give people a wider choice of routes into volunteering; some will prefer the flexibility a digital route will provide while we know others will benefit from greater support and face to face guidance from local infrastructure organisations and Volunteer Centres.

As it may have an impact on larger national organisations, Volunteer Now will work with RVS with regards to integration with Be Collective as appropriate.



Hi, I'm Suzanne and I'm the Volunteering Support Officer in Fermanagh. Originally from the South I spent many years travelling with my work combined with studying Business & Marketing before I ended up settling in Enniskillen. Up to that point I knew little about volunteering, in fact I wondered why anyone would volunteer their time for free and didn't think there was much benefit in doing it if it didn't result in a paycheck or bonus. But it soon became apparent how important volunteering was to community life in Fermanagh, communities were coming together in ways I'd never witnessed making changes that made a real difference and far exceeded my expectations.

But it wasn't until I was asked to volunteer with the local St. Vincent de Paul in Enniskillen that I finally understood the attraction. The dedicated volunteers who worked in the St Vincent de Paul were a lifeline to the needs of the community; I found myself looking forward to spending time in their company, enjoying the craic that went down in the process of organising stock and working on shop displays blended with authentic hospitality and enthusiasm. I wondered if this could be part of the reason Fermanagh was reported to be one of the happiest places to live in the UK, could there be more to it than lakes and a castle.

I began to move from a mindset of profit to a mindset of people. I began to realise that everyone has something of value to bring to the table, and the sharing of skills, experience and kindness cannot be underestimated, especially in a world that is coming up against the real challenges of isolation and exclusion. Volunteering in its essence is a tangible expression of the heart of the people. An activity that has existed long before the invention of money. It is inclusive, it infuses those who do it with a personal sense of value and you don't need statistics to prove it.

Based in Fermanagh House, Volunteer Now are a leading support service in the volunteering community, so if you're thinking about volunteering or need volunteers for your organisation, please contact me.

Give Volunteering a Go and dare to be part of the magic!

Contact Suzanne

Member Spotlight

Diverse Youth Northern Ireland

Welcome to Diverse Youth Northern Ireland, a collective initiative developed to bring our youths together and promote inclusion, leadership, self-awareness, and diversification tolerance. Our youths are our leaders of tomorrow, we strongly believe, and in fact, very confident that being aware of diversity and the need for cultural tolerance



Diverse Youth
Northern Ireland

shaping the future for better...

Diverse Youth NI



Publication of the Month:

Involving Pre-Retirees in Volunteering

This October represents Positive Ageing month, a time to pause and celebrate the contributions of older people and to promote active participation in community life. Volunteering is an integral part of any community and can be a great way to remain connected and engaged with society.

The document this month focuses on involving pre-retirees in volunteering, prompting ideas that both employers and volunteer-involving organisations can consider to make volunteering a more appealing option for this age group. As an organisation, you must consider whether your roles are appealing *and* accessible for older people, and if so, how can you continue to strengthen this. A more diverse volunteer pool can bring many different perspectives, skills and qualities to your organisation.

Involving Pre-Retirees in Volunteering

**New Members**

Welcome to our newest organisational members: [Leeds Heritage Theatres](#) and [The Hygiene Bank](#). This brings our organisational members total to 1228!

**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.



Volunteers in Focus: Episode 8 - Nephrite, USPCA

Meet James, a volunteer driver with Armagh Rural Transport 🚐 ❤️

For over 12 years, he's been giving back to his community by volunteering in the driving scheme. His motivation is the desire to make a difference in people's lives and to offer support to those who may be isolated as they age.

James says that the early quiet moments during a pick-up always change once the conversation starts. The simple act of taking time to listen, connect, and offer companionship makes all the difference. By the time he takes them home, he notices the positive impact on all service users.

Believing that volunteering is all about offering your time and space, James is proud to help people feel more connected in his community. This experience highlights an important message: age doesn't matter when it comes to volunteering. In his retirement, James continues to give back in a way that fits his stage of life, showing that there's always a role to play, no matter your age.

Volunteers in Focus celebrates the power of volunteering and how it helps build stronger communities. Stay tuned for more inspiring stories and see how you can make a difference ✨

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