Volunteering, self-help and citizenship in later life

A collaborative research project by Age Concern Newcastle and the University of Newcastle upon Tyne

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................................................. 2
Chapter 1 Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 6
  About the study.............................................................................................................................................. 6
  Background: volunteering in the 21st century .......................................................................................... 7
  Report structure............................................................................................................................................... 9
Chapter 2 Policy context: promoting and supporting volunteering for older people ........................................... 10
  Older people’s lives and volunteering .................................................................................................. 10
  Demographic ageing.............................................................................................................................. 10
  Employment trends and older people ................................................................................................. 11
  The social participation agenda ......................................................................................................... 12
  Broadening the base of the volunteer workforce ............................................................................... 14
  Summary..................................................................................................................................................... 14
Chapter 3 Older people as volunteers ............................................................................................................ 15
  Introduction................................................................................................................................................ 15
  Formal and informal volunteering ........................................................................................................ 15
  National statistics: the extent and types of formal volunteering.................................................. 16
  The contexts and drivers of volunteering for older people............................................................. 17
  Summary..................................................................................................................................................... 19
Chapter 4 How the study was undertaken ..................................................................................................... 20
  Designing the research and choosing the participants ....................................................................... 20
    Focus groups - involvement and consultation strategies ............................................................. 20
    Collecting baseline information on older volunteers ................................................................. 21
    In-depth interviews with current and former volunteers, and leisure and learning users .... 21
  Analysis of fieldwork data.................................................................................................................. 23
  Ethical policy.............................................................................................................................................. 23
  Characteristics of the research participants....................................................................................... 24
    Research participants in the survey................................................................................................. 24
    Research participants in the in-depth interviews........................................................................... 25
Chapter 5 The volunteer workforce at Age Concern Newcastle .................................................................... 27
  Introduction................................................................................................................................................ 27
  Socio-economic characteristics of current volunteers ....................................................................... 27
    Labour market participation.......................................................................................................... 27
    Household income............................................................................................................................ 28
    Home ownership, residence and deprivation................................................................................. 29
    Household composition..................................................................................................................... 30
    Education.............................................................................................................................................. 30
    Health and disability.......................................................................................................................... 30
  Social and civic participation by current volunteers ......................................................................... 30
  Volunteering in Age Concern Newcastle ............................................................................................. 32
    Types of volunteering activity.......................................................................................................... 32
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 6 Becoming a volunteer: pathways and experiences</th>
<th>39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becoming a volunteer</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns of volunteering</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanations for starting to volunteer</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7 Being a volunteer: meanings and roles</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering as giving a place in society</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering as enjoying yourself</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering as choice or commitment?</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8 What affects the capacity to volunteer? Time and other constraints</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering and time use</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarcity and abundance of time</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constraining and enabling factors</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What it means to be an ‘older volunteer’</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving volunteering</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9 Supporting volunteers</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service provision and volunteering within Age Concern Newcastle</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer perspectives</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understandings of the aims of the organisation</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing an ethos of volunteering</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting volunteer relationships within the organisation</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues of the practical management of volunteering</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority ethnic services and volunteers</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 10 Conclusions</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building a volunteer workforce</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional and organisational factors</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The timing and placing of volunteer opportunities</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building on intrinsic and instrumental rewards</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a socially inclusive and safe environment</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering and citizenship in later life</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of tables and figures

Table 3.1   Citizenship Survey 2005: formal volunteering 17
Table 4.1   Survey respondents’ characteristics 24
Table 4.2   Interviewees’ characteristics 25
Table 5.1a  Work situations by gender (all age groups) 28
Table 5.1b  Work situations by gender (aged 55 and over) 28
Table 5.2a  Annual household income and gender (all) 29
Table 5.2b  Annual household income (aged 55 and over) 29
Table 5.3   Participation in civic activities 31
Table 5.4   Social participation in organisations 32
Table 5.5   Social and civic participation by age 32
Table 5.6a  ACN volunteering activities (all) 33
Table 5.6b  ACN volunteering activities (by age group) 33
Table 5.7   Reasons for volunteering 34
Table 5.8   Length of volunteering 35
Table 5.9   Volunteer profiles by volunteer role 37
Table 5.10  Volunteers interviewed by role 38
Table 6.1   Volunteer ‘pathways’ by gender 41
Table 6.2   Explanations for starting to volunteer 42
Table 8.1   Formal volunteering by age and gender 68
Figure 8.1  Average time spent on formal volunteering 69
Table 8.2   Combined formal and informal volunteering 70
Table 9.1   Summary of main ACN services 82
1. **Introduction**

**Chapter 1 Introduction**

The voluntary sector is increasingly incorporated into the mainstream of public policy with consequences that include more reliance upon the time, commitment and skills of volunteers. The sector and the government have worked together to demonstrate the benefits of volunteering and to attract new volunteers. 2005 was named the Year of the Volunteer in order to promote a stronger culture of volunteering. In March 2006 a new cross government programme Volunteering For All was announced to identify and remove barriers to volunteering (Home Office 2006). One government sponsored initiative called Experience Corps targeted people over the age of 50 but in general older people have not been as prominent as their younger counterparts in debates on volunteering or in campaigns to promote it. This report is about volunteering in later life. It offers new insight into the variety of older people’s volunteering and suggests practical ways in which it can be supported and encouraged.

The population is growing older in the UK, as in most developed countries, because people are living longer. Accounts of demographic trends leading to an ageing population tend to concentrate on decline and dependency. Stereotypes of older people as ‘takers’ rather than ‘givers’ can contribute to discrimination, social exclusion, and isolation. Most older adults are not dependent on others. Indeed, caring and neighbouring by older people make a vital contribution to families and communities. The idea of a greater role for volunteering in individuals’ lives after retirement has many attractions. It could benefit organisations that need volunteers, and help to meet government targets to raise overall levels of volunteering. The more visible presence of older volunteers could challenge negative stereotypes by demonstrating that older citizens can provide, as well as receive, voluntary services and care. Moreover, volunteering can potentially help to sustain individuals’ self-esteem and well being. Historically people over retirement age have participated less than younger adults in volunteering. There is some evidence that the age profile of volunteers is changing but relatively little is known about the contribution older citizens make as volunteers.

The Big Lottery funded Age Concern Newcastle - in partnership with Newcastle University - to undertake research designed to increase understanding of volunteering amongst older people. The research team used a range of social science techniques (surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups) to assess the conditions under which older people become volunteers, their capacity to remain volunteers, and constraints that impact on volunteering for them. The study concentrated on volunteering within Age Concern Newcastle but the findings have relevance beyond that context. This report is addressed to volunteer-using organisations, to policy makers concerned with the voluntary and public sectors, and to anyone interested in the well-being of older people.

**About the study**

The research reported here was commissioned by the Community Fund (now the Big Lottery Fund) under the research grants programme. The aim of the programme was to
1. Introduction

promote social inclusion and older people (over the age of 75) were among the priority groups intended to benefit. Age Concern Newcastle is an independent local charity that aims to improve the quality of life of retired people living in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne. It is a member of the Age Concern ‘Volunteering Partnership’, which comprises members of the Age Concern Federation.

The mission of Age Concern Newcastle is ‘to promote the status and well-being of all older people in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and to make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience’. It has four distinct but interlinked functions:
1. Services and Support: to provide direct help for frail older people, to encourage self-care, and engage in preventative work
2. Education and Social Advocacy: To listen to the needs and views of older people and represent them to policy makers and to the wider public. This can involve campaigning, advertising and publicity
3. Innovation and Research: To identify new needs and look for ways to meet them and to open up opportunities for older people to undertake new and interesting activities.
4. Partnership and Cooperation: To work with other organisations, voluntary and statutory to meet the needs of older people as effectively as possible

In order to fulfil these functions, Age Concern Newcastle relies heavily on volunteers who are over retirement age. The organisation is committed to ensuring that all volunteers have an active, enjoyable and rewarding role to play in helping improve the quality of life for older people in Newcastle. Voluntary roles complement those of paid staff, enhancing the functions and activities of Age Concern Newcastle, and therefore are not meant to displace or supplant paid staff. Volunteers at Age Concern Newcastle perform various roles including work in the community (for example lunch clubs throughout the city), one-to-one support for others in their own homes, and administration and management in the organisation’s city centre head office.

Age Concern Newcastle applied for funding for this study because better information was needed to recruit and retain volunteers and thus enhance the organisation’s ability to respond to the needs of older people. The study was designed to draw upon experiences at Age Concern Newcastle to inform other organisations working with volunteers and to help them to understand and access the contribution of older people. The research process built upon an already innovative record in establishing mechanisms for including older people in policy implementation within the organisation.

Background: volunteering in the 21st century

Changes in social policy, in the labour market, and in volunteering itself all made this study particularly timely. The voluntary and community sector (VCS) includes registered charities, as well as non-charitable non-profit organisations, associations, self-help groups and community groups. Most involve aspects of voluntary activity although many are also professional organisations with paid staff (National Audit Office 2005). Some estimates value the contribution of volunteers to the UK economy in tens of billions of
1. Introduction

pounds (ibid, p12). The sector is growing in size partly because of its increased role in service delivery, as well as in the new localism agenda through partnership working with local authorities.

Volunteering is seen by policy makers as an indicator of social capital and an important expression of citizenship against a background of the decline in the propensity to vote. Voluntary organisations now play a significant role in the delivery of public services (Lewis 2005). That role moreover is likely to grow since the February 2006 Public Accounts Committee report Working with the voluntary sector (House of Commons 2006) criticized the Government’s modest targets for increasing the involvement of voluntary organisations in public services. The 2006 Public Accounts Committee report recommended more ‘meaningful and stretching targets’ to encourage the use of the voluntary sector. Funding by statutory agencies has many implications for voluntary organisations, including new demands on paid workers and on the workloads, responsibility, and skills of volunteers (Blackmore 2005).

The labour market is changing in ways that are likely to affect the supply of volunteers and attitudes and expectations with regard to voluntary work. Working hours and work intensity are increasing and working lives are squeezed more and more between the ages of 25 – 50 (Mutari and Figart 2001). Women now account for about half the UK working population and most of the recent increase in women’s economic activity has been among women with children (Dench and Ogg 2002). Some commentators observe an erosion of social capital as a result of women taking on more paid work (Franks 1999). Higher participation of women in the labour market, together with the population decline in younger age groups, are set to intensify pressures on the voluntary sector (Scottish Executive 2004). One in three organisations experiences difficulty recruiting volunteers (NCVO 2004). The answer to the questions ‘who does the caring’ and ‘who can work without payment’ is often older people (Reday-Mulvy 1998). Older people’s volunteering, however, is under researched despite its potential policy significance.

There is evidence that in many contexts volunteering is becoming more work-like with increasingly formalised structures involving, for example, selection, appraisal and training (Davis Smith 1995). There is also a widely observed trend towards the promotion of volunteering from the volunteer’s perspective in terms of what he or she can gain from the experience. Some commentators argue that management practices imported from the workplace, and the possibility of rewards, can damage the generous, giving spirit of volunteering; others contend that such developments help volunteers to feel valued (Davis Smith 1995). Little has been written about how these tensions are likely to be perceived by people over the age of retirement.

Overall, national statistics indicate that volunteering tends to be associated with people in employment, living in affluent areas, with relatively high levels of education. In the recent past a trend for volunteering to fall off after retirement age was reported. The latest national data from the Home Office indicate that volunteering is practiced at least occasionally by a large and growing minority of people of all ages in England including the over 60s and that volunteering declines only above the age of 75. This study sought to
1. Introduction

supplement such statistical sources and uncover new information about what volunteering means for older people, including those in the 75 plus age group. Age Concern Newcastle was an excellent site for this study because of its active involvement in improving the status and well-being of older people and providing them with a forum for consultation.

The research began with focus groups to help plan the fieldwork and ensure that it was informed by the views of as wide a range of volunteers as possible. There followed a questionnaire survey of Age Concern Newcastle’s current and former volunteers. This yielded 220 responses from volunteers of all ages. The most substantial part of the research consisted of 76 in-depth interviews with people aged 55 and over. Most (four fifths) of these interviewees had responded to the volunteering questionnaire and the rest were users of Age Concern Newcastle’s leisure and learning services. Two more focus groups followed to discuss issues arising from the interviews.

Report structure

In the next Chapter (2) we elaborate on the policy context for promoting and supporting volunteering against the background of demographic ageing and trends in the workplace including work intensification and low participation of older people. In chapter 3 ‘Older people as volunteers’, we examine the existing evidence base on the volunteer workforce and the participation of older people. Chapter 4 is about how the study was conducted and the data are reported and discussed in chapters 5 – 9. In Chapter 5 we draw upon the survey to describe the characteristics of volunteers at Age Concern Newcastle and the roles they play in the organisation. Chapter 6 ‘Becoming a volunteer’ examines how, when and why people came to participate in volunteering at Age Concern Newcastle and other organisations. Chapter 7 is about the meanings of volunteering to current and former volunteers, and to users of Age Concern Newcastle’s leisure and learning services. Factors affecting the capacity of older people to volunteer, and likely to constrain it, are the subject of Chapter 8. Chapter 9 is about the organisational context and how a diverse volunteer workforce of older volunteers can be supported in the face of sometimes unwelcome changes in roles and expectations. In the final chapter all this material is drawn together to highlight implications for volunteer-using organisations, for policy makers, and for older people as citizens.
Chapter 2 Policy context: promoting and supporting volunteering for older people

Older people’s lives and volunteering

Older people are a diverse population with many different lifestyles, beliefs, and attitudes to ageing. The idea of more older people becoming volunteers is appealing to some volunteer-using organisations and representatives of older people. A report for Age Concern England tentatively welcomed the promotion of volunteering more widely to older people but warned against seeing volunteering as a panacea (Worsley 1999). Voluntary work is ‘a fragile concept, carefully nurtured over the years and in danger of being misunderstood, misused and over-loaded’ (ibid. p75). In this chapter we look at demographic ageing and roles of older people in paid and unpaid work. Then we turn to volunteering, its growing prominence in policy, and agenda to broaden the base of the volunteer workforce. We note that what this means for older people has been little examined to date.

Demographic ageing

Recent decades have seen a fundamental change in the age structure of many Western societies. In the UK, people aged 60 and over made up more than a fifth (20.9 per cent) of the population in 2001, for the first time outnumbering children aged under 16 (Census 2001). There were 1.1 million people aged 85 and over in the UK in 2001, more than three times as many as in 1961. The number in this age group is predicted to rise to four million by 2051. Demographic ageing has been described as one of the major challenges for governments because of crises in national pensions schemes and new demands on services (OECD 2001).

Much debate on the demographic trends leading to an ageing population concentrates on processes of decline and older people as dependent on others (Meadows and Volterra Consulting 2004). In policy and practice, there is a long tradition of viewing older people as a ‘burdensome and problematic’ (Older People's Steering Group 2004). Later life, then, becomes defined by ‘physical decline, dependency, marginality and passivity’ (Hockey and James 1993:23). Such negative images can contribute to discrimination, social exclusion, and isolation. One key message from major studies of ageing in the UK by the Economic and Social Research Council and Joseph Rowntree Foundation is that older people are a large and diverse population and individuals resent being characterised in terms of neediness and incapacity. Most older adults are active, mobile, healthy and productive, even if they are not gainfully employed.

Households consisting of adults above retirement age are disproportionately likely to be on low incomes and reliant on benefits. They are overrepresented in the lowest 20 per cent of overall net income distribution. Sixty percent of pensioner households, on the other hand, receive income from occupational pensions (Davis et al. 2002). For better off
2. Policy context

Retired people there are opportunities to consume new leisure and tourism services provided by businesses increasingly alert to the ‘grey advantage’ market (Tempest et al. 2002). The ways in which people retire have changed, as have the ways in which they live in retirement (Marmot et al. 2003). Rates of participation in economic activity shortly below retirement age are low for men and women. Older people as paid workers, however, have recently become the subject of policy interventions. Theories of successful ageing stress the importance of being and staying active for the individual’s perceptions of well-being: ‘Active Ageing’ is a major policy priority within the EU, also OECD and G8 (Walker 2002).

Employment trends and older people

Employment rates in the UK overall are high with almost three quarters (74.6%) of the working age population in paid work. Nevertheless, the Government is pursuing policies to combat worklessness with initiatives that focus upon making work pay and upon individuals’ skills and attitudes to work. The national programme New Deal is the flagship of the government's Welfare to Work strategy. It has been argued that welfare to work policies send a signal that only paid work is important and tend to devalue non-marketised activity (Lister 2002). Indeed, it is something of a paradox (to which we return below) that the welfare to work agenda co-exists awkwardly with the large and growing expectations now invested in volunteering across policy domains (Hardill and Baines 2003).

Older people are less likely to participate in paid work today than they were in the past. Worldwide, between 1950 and 2000, labour market participation among people over 65 has declined from a ratio of 1:3 to 1:5 (European Policies Research Centre 2005). In the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, policy-making in much of the European Union emphasised the virtues of early retirement, partly as a response to high levels of unemployment (Platman and Taylor 2004). For younger adults in employment, however, there is evidence that working hours and work intensity are increasing (Hogarth 2001; Mutari and Figart 2001). This is the subject of a large and growing ‘work-life balance’ literature in which time and daily life – especially for employed parents - are exhaustively examined in terms of scarcity, pressure and difficult choices (Hogarth 2001; Franks 1999). There are accounts of speeded up life, working and consuming 24/7 (Work Life Balance Centre 2001; Equal Opportunities Commission 2000). Metaphors abound of scarcity (‘famine’, ‘deficit’) and of difficult feats of coping (‘balance’, ‘juggling’) (Perrons 2003). Older people are noticed in such debates as dependents (making demands on the time of paid workers) and to a lesser extent as providers of unpaid childcare to working parents. The productive unpaid activity of older people outside caring roles within the family does not fit easily into these discourses. Citizenship is both a status and an active practice. As an active practice it needs time inputs in order to make a contribution to the ‘common good’. Yet time is relatively little discussed in the context of citizenship; citizenship, moreover, is all but invisible in ‘work life balance’ debates and agenda.
In the 21st century, however, older workers have moved up the policy agenda. Governments are keen to increase the supply of older workers and to stimulate demand by lowering the costs of employing them. The European Commission’s ‘Lisbon report’ of 2000 pointed to an ‘employment deficit’ in the age cohort 55-65, which contributed to weaknesses in the EU economy. The European Union’s approach clearly links active ageing policy with economic growth. In 2004 the Kok Report stressed population ageing as one of the main challenges facing the EU economy. It recommended that the Member States develop a comprehensive active ageing policy to include: incentives for workers to work longer and for increasing participation in lifelong learning for all ages, especially for low-skilled and older workers. In the UK the Cabinet Committee on Older People coordinates policies on issues related to older people. There are Public Service Agreement targets for the employment of older people. The Performance and Innovation Unit’s *Winning the Generation Game* set out ways of ending discrimination in paid work. It also called for involving more older people in voluntary and community activities. ‘Active ageing’ from this perspective is not only about paid work. It fits the wider agenda about citizenship and reversing the decline in civic society.

**The social participation agenda**

The voluntary sector has been recognised by the Government as making an important contribution to civic society and social cohesion. In recent years a particular emphasis has been placed by policy makers on the role volunteering can play in transforming the economic and social wellbeing of individuals, households and communities. For example, in the words of the then Home Secretary Charles Clarke (2005):

> The voluntary and community sector is the invisible glue that holds society together, builds social capital and empowers individuals to make a difference in people’s lives...the passion of people who give their time and talents is a great strength of today’s Britain.

The importance of volunteering and its diversity have been captured in debates on social capital. ‘Social capital’ refers to the value of social networks. It consists of the networks, norms and trust that enable individuals and groups to engage in co-operative activity. As a concept social capital has been around in sociology since the 1920s but there has been an explosion of interest in the last decade and a half. Social capital has been described as sociology’s most successful export to other academic disciplines, to practitioners, and - perhaps most of all – to governments. The political scientist Robert Putnam’s (2000) interpretation has been particularly influential. Taking part in collective activity, according to Putnam’s analysis of data from the USA, has a significant impact on individual health and well-being. More controversially he contends that social capital yields benefits not only to individuals and families but also to neighbourhoods, cities and nations. Volunteering is regarded as one measure of social capital and thus an indicator of a healthy civil society. In addition to contributing to civic renewal through developing social capital, volunteering has two distinctive dimensions in present day policy in the UK:
2. Policy context

- An increased role in the delivery of public services (Blackmore 2005; Lewis 2005);
- Helping to connect (or reconnect) individuals to the labour market by offering opportunities to develop skills and credentials (Russell 2005)

In the UK - in common with other welfare states - care is distributed between the family, the state, and the for-profit and voluntary sectors. The roles and responsibilities of all these sectors are under pressure to change. There are moves towards a more mixed economy of care with a declining role for state provision and more reliance on both the market and the voluntary sector, as well as family care (Daly and Lewis 2000). In the UK a key role was identified for voluntary organisations in the delivery of public services - especially caring services - under the Health and Community Care Act of 1990 (Wardell et al. 2000; Billis and Harris 1996). For volunteers, there is evidence that the development of service contracts in the early 1990s led to more explicit job specification and increased supervision and training (Russell et al. 1997).

Some voluntary organisations claim to be closer to service users than statutory providers and in an ideal position to find ways to improve public services (RNID 2004). The New Labour government has endorsed this view as part of its modernisation agenda for public services and put mechanisms and funding in place to enhance the contribution of the voluntary sector to service delivery (Compass Partnership 2004; HM Treasury 2002). For some voluntary groups the opportunity to enter into partnership with government is a welcome chance to build up fee income and influence. For others there are less positive implications, including tensions between the idea of voluntary organisations as agents of ‘civil renewal’ and as service providers (Lewis 2005). The tighter service specifications and increased accountability that goes with funding by statutory agencies make new demands on paid workers and on the workloads, responsibility, and skills of volunteers (Jochum et al. 2005; Blackmore 2005). The need for yet more reform in how social care and health services are provided for adults in England was the subject of a recent Green Paper entitled Independence, Wellbeing and Choice. One of that document’s recommendations for a more flexible approach to putting together care packages is promoting a mixture of ‘traditional’ services with an increased contribution from the voluntary and community sector.

Volunteering is increasingly harnessed towards combating the social exclusion associated with worklessness (Parsons and Broadbridge 2004; Wardell et al. 2000). Under New Deal, young people are offered voluntary work as a route into full-time training or employment. National targets for Sure Start include reducing the proportion of children in households where no one has a job. Sure Start projects offer training for volunteering and parents are encouraged to use this as a route into employment. A recent government report on youth volunteering in the UK recommended stronger links to accreditation and vocational qualifications (Russell 2005). Against this background voluntary activity can become seen as little more than a stepping stone to employment or a second best alternative for those outside the world of ‘real’ work (Bruegel 2000). Government’s assertion of the central role of paid work in defining the status of citizen is a stance which has been criticised for devaluing unpaid work such as caring or volunteering (Lister
2. Policy context

Moreover, when volunteering is aligned closely with policies to enhance readiness for paid work, it is likely to have ambiguous relevance to older people (Craig 2004).

Broadening the base of the volunteer workforce

The aim of the Year of the Volunteer in 2005 was to open up more volunteering opportunities and increase participation especially on the part of marginalised groups. With a growing dependency on volunteering to deliver public and personal services, there are concerns that the population decline in the younger age groups will compromise many areas of social life (Evans and Saxton 2005; Scottish Executive 2004). Therefore, it has been argued that there is a progressive need to involve more people in volunteering including those over retirement age (Volunteer Development Scotland 2003). Health and welfare agencies are seeking to recruit volunteers from the growing numbers of retirees. Volunteer Development Scotland for example, in a review of the literature and evidence, recommended that more people should be encouraged to volunteer on retirement and that at the same time better acceptance of older volunteers should be encouraged (Volunteer Development Scotland 1995). According to Experience Corps¹ there is an urgent question, ‘How do we persuade people whose skills and experience would be of great value to the volunteering sector, to volunteer in the first place?’ Answers suggested by a government report include: design of specific opportunities for older people, incentives, and accessible information about volunteer opportunities (Performance and Innovation Unit 2000). It has been argued, on the other hand, that policies designed to encourage older people to ‘be active’ and contribute may make some older people - those in poor health, for example - feel more of a ‘burden’ and further excluded from society (Boaz et al. 2000). There must, according to (Fischer and Schaffer 1993), be no implication that older people have any special obligation to volunteer.

Summary

Volunteering is changing and new expectations surround it. The delivery of services in particular demands a formality that tends to blur the roles of volunteer and paid worker (Alcock et al. 2004). This can potentially run counter to broadening the base of the volunteer workforce to maximise participation and extend social capital (Russell et al. 1997). When volunteering is parcellled into initiatives to combat worklessness, it becomes aligned with welfare to work policies. These policies - it has been argued - amount to a ‘fetishism’ of paid work (Lister 2002). How older people approach volunteering in these contexts is not well understood. In the next chapter we overview evidence for older people’s volunteering.

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¹ A project launched by the Home Office in 2002 to increase the participation of over-50s in volunteering.
3. Older people as volunteers

Chapter 3 Older people as volunteers

Introduction

This chapter is about the evidence base for assessing the time, skills and commitment that older people devote to volunteering. Quantitative data on national patterns and trends in volunteering in the UK are increasingly collected on behalf of government in the light of intensified policy interest in social capital. Aspects of volunteering are covered from different perspectives in various national surveys. These include: the General Household Survey (GHS) and the National Statistics Omnibus Survey; the British Crime Survey and the National Survey of Volunteering. Although age is not the main focus of any of these data sets, there are indications of responses by age alongside other socio-demographic variables. There is also some relevant information in national data sets on aspects of ageing. Moreover there exists a small but growing number of policy-oriented and academic studies that have been designed to collect original data on various aspects of volunteering, especially motivation to volunteer. A few of these have taken age as a main or a substantial theme. Such studies include surveys usually of specific groups of volunteers and / or volunteer-using organisations as well as more qualitative studies that have used personal interviews or ethnographic methodologies. We highlight some key findings from this body of literature, drawing largely but not exclusively on material from the UK. We discuss and evaluate the evidence base from statistical sources as well as those studies that have taken a qualitative approach. All this is contextualised within a wider literature on older people’s social and economic contribution. Finally we point to the knowledge gap with respect to understandings of volunteering in later life.

Formal and informal volunteering

Volunteering is usually associated with activities undertaken through an organisation or group. This formal, ‘third sector’ activity is distinguished by its context from one-to-one acts of good neighbourliness sometimes referred to as ‘fourth sector’ (Williams 2003b). In practice the boundaries between the formal and informal can be difficult to draw and may be different for different groups (Beneria 1999). For example, the contribution of some minority ethnic groups may be undervalued because its lack of formality does not conform to narrow definitions of volunteering (Lukka and Ellis 2001). Some argue that formal giving and volunteering are subsets of a more comprehensive array of relations of care, and that empirically people do not segment the formal from the informal (Schervish and Havens 2002). Data sources on volunteering, and most commentary, however, make a distinction between the ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ and we follow that approach in this report.

Older people make a vital contribution to families and communities. They provide support to enable parents to participate in the labour market (Wheelock et al. 2003; Dench and Ogg 2002). Older people - mainly but not exclusively grandmothers - are seen as the next best source of childcare when mothers cannot look after children due to work
commitments (Wheelock and Jones 2002). The most usual carers for dependent older people are other older people, some of whom are themselves in later old age. The 2001 census revealed that nearly 4,000 people aged 90 and over provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care per week to another family member or friend.

Studies of ageing stress the contribution older people make to the places in which they live, together with the importance of local communities to older people’s well-being (Scharf et al. 2004). For example, according to a study that revisited the communities researched in the classic work of Young and Willmott half a century ago, older people are still vigilant about the changing fortunes of the places in which they have invested much of their lives; older women, in particular, act as ‘neighbourhood keepers’ (Phillipson et al. 1999:741). We now turn to look in more detail at formal volunteering and the participation of older people.

National statistics: the extent and types of formal volunteering

As volunteering has risen up the policy agenda in recent years, the quantity of data collected by the government on this subject has grown. Government data demonstrate that formal volunteering is practiced at least occasionally by a large and growing minority of people in England. Participation is not, however, evenly distributed among socio-economic groups. The most likely people to volunteer are those in employment, with the highest levels of education and the highest incomes (Attwood et al. 2003). There are geographical variations, with formal volunteering more characteristic of affluent areas and informal volunteering of less affluent ones (Williams 2003a). Here we concentrate on age and volunteering and draw mainly upon the Citizenship Survey - a biennial survey of 10,000 individuals.

The Citizenship Survey is designed to contribute to the evidence base for the Home Office’s community policy agenda and was run in 2001, 2003 and 2005. Under the heading ‘Active Communities’ the Citizenship Survey collects information on the extent of informal and formal volunteering and the demographic characteristics of people who participate. More than two fifths (44 per cent) of people in England and Wales participated in ‘formal’ volunteering (i.e. giving unpaid help to others through clubs, groups or organisations) at least once in a 12 month period (2005 survey early findings). This represents a rise from 39 per cent since the first survey in 2001. The proportion who reported volunteering at least once a month was much lower in both years with a less pronounced upward trend (27 per cent in 2001 and 29 per cent in 2005).

The 2005 Citizenship Survey indicated that people aged 50 – 74 were more likely to volunteer than were most younger adults. The figures from that survey by age group are summarised in Table 3.1. The peak ages for volunteering, according to these data are 16 – 19 and 35 – 49. (The high participation of young people in 2005 is likely to be associated

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2 The data from both the 2001 and 2003 surveys are available from the UK Data Archive. At the time of writing (February 2006) only early findings are available from 2005

3 http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/citizensurvey.html
3. Older people as volunteers

with citizenship on the national curriculum). The least likely age group to volunteer formally is the over 75s, of whom only 21 per cent did so at least once in a 12 month period against 29 per cent for all age groups. The high participation of the 35 – 49 age group reported in the Citizenship Survey concurs with statistics from earlier UK surveys of volunteering indicating that volunteering reaches a peak in middle age (Knapp et al. 1995).

The Citizenship Survey data indicate that high participation levels continue after retirement age. This is in contrast to earlier findings from the UK and other developed economies that forms of civic participation including formal volunteering tend to fall off among older persons (Burr et al. 2002). A sharp decline in volunteering after late middle age was reported in the National Survey of Volunteering conducted in 1981, 1991 and 1997 by the National Centre for Volunteering (Davis Smith 1998). This series of surveys collected information about volunteering activity and reasons for volunteering from 1486 randomly sampled UK addresses. It can not of course be compared directly with the more recent Citizenship Survey series (2001 – 2005) which used a different sampling base and asked different questions. The National Survey of Volunteering series, however, are consistent with Citizenship Survey data in that they reported a trend towards more volunteering on the part of older people in the last two decades of the 20th Century (Davis Smith 1998). Some popularity for volunteering among the recently retired is also reported in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA), which collects data on the health, economic situation and quality of life from a sample of 14,000 people aged 50 and over. According to the ELSA survey of 2002, a fifth of men and a quarter of women aged 55 to 59 who were self classified as retired did some form of voluntary work (Marmot et al. 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Volunteered formally at least once in the past month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 - 19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 34</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 - 49</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 64</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 - 75</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75+</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The contexts and drivers of volunteering for older people

Policy statements on volunteering, as indicated in Chapter 2, emphasise numbers of volunteers and the need to increase participation. They tend to highlight the rewards that
3. Older people as volunteers

can be enjoyed by volunteers themselves as much as or more than the contribution that they can make to the wellbeing of others. Sometimes there is an assumption (implicit or explicit) that personal rewards must be emphasised in order to recruit volunteers. This is particularly, but not exclusively, the case when young people are the target. For example, a commission set up by the Home Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to enquire into youth action and engagement recommends that it is necessary to amplify the importance of volunteering for personal skills development (Russell 2005). The usual rewards associated with volunteering are experience and credentials marketable in the workplace (Parsons and Broadbridge 2004). The National Survey of Volunteering reported that during the 1990s, respondents’ emphasis on skill development increased (Davis Smith 1998). Other rewards for volunteering are also sometimes proposed. At a national conference organised by Experience Corps it was claimed that we are no longer a society where the numbers of people needed as volunteers can be recruited on a purely altruistic basis and some contributors called for tax incentives to volunteer. A discussion paper from the Performance and Innovation Unit cited new proposals in the United States that would enable older volunteers to earn scholarships transferable to grandchildren or others (Performance and Innovation Unit 2000).

The data sources cited in the last section focus on volunteer numbers and characteristics. The subject of motivation for volunteering has attracted much interest and been addressed in detail in more in-depth studies. These tend to report that people of all ages volunteer for a mix of altruistic and self-interested reasons and that volunteers are not just ‘givers’ but ‘takers’ as well (Merrell 2000). This has been expressed as a ‘duality of volunteering’ incorporating altruism and egoism (Wardell et al. 2000). An American review claimed that older volunteers were much less likely than younger ones to be motivated by material rewards or status (Fischer and Schaffer 1993). In general the evidence suggests older people volunteer for similar reasons to their younger counterparts. They want to feel that they are useful members of society, to help others, to put something back into the community, to meet new people, and to pursue learning and personal growth (Narushima 2005; Rochester et al. 2002; Barlow and Hainsworth 2001). The most usually reported age related incentive to volunteering is to fill the vocational void left by retirement and to manage increased free time (Davis Smith and Gay 2005). There is also evidence that organisations whose mission or purpose is to promote the well-being of older people have a considerable advantage in involving older people as volunteers (Rochester et al. 2002).

Barriers to volunteering in later life include failure by older workers to plan the transition from full time employment and their lack of awareness about volunteering and how to access it (Volunteer Development Scotland 1995). Lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities parallels issues discussed in employability and inactivity literature (McQuaid and Lindsay 2005). Increasing pressures towards formalisation in volunteering deters some older people who would prefer to volunteer in a more informal, less workplace-like setting (Davis Smith and Gay 2005). An image of volunteering as middle aged and middle class can be a significant deterrent for older people from less privileged social backgrounds (Volunteer Development Scotland 2003).

4Modernising Volunteering
http://www.experiencecorps.co.uk/xq/ASP/id_Content.332/id_Page_Parent.2/qx/article.htm
3. Older people as volunteers

More emphasis in the literature has been placed upon motivation and deterrents than upon the experience of volunteering and its outcomes. Some studies however have looked at the impact of volunteering on subjective and objective well-being and a few have done this from the perspective of older people. There is evidence, for example, from case study work in Canada that volunteering improves the lives of older adults because through it they gain a sense of autonomy, self worth, continual learning and development, an active and positive lifestyle, and support networks (Narushima 2005). In the UK the most substantial source of evidence is the recent study led by Fiona Devine (2003) which used qualitative methods to examine the context, experience and consequences of volunteering as well as reasons for entering it. It was not specifically about older people but a third of the 100 participants were over retirement age. Devine’s study - part of the Economic and Social Research Council Participation and Democracy Programme - makes an important contribution to understanding volunteering by unravelling its interactions with political activity and attitudes. One conclusion was that volunteering must be situated within networks of informal support, especially family, neighbours and friends (Roberts and Devine 2004). The centrality of enjoyment and pleasure in volunteering was emphasised across age ranges (ibid.). Devine identified a need for further research to explore the issue of time and voluntary action, specifically how volunteers juggle voluntary action along with other commitments (Devine 2003).

Summary
The study sought to add to the existing literature by identifying the factors that influence older people to give of their time in formal volunteering amidst their other activities such as paid work, caring and neighbouring. Much empirical research on volunteering, as discussed above has focussed on motivation and debates between altruism and self-interest. Framing volunteering in such terms, in our view, tends to assume an individualistic set of explanations and offer a thin concept to capture the social and economic complexity of volunteering. The study with Age Concern Newcastle was not designed to add to debates around motivation but to understand more about how older people construct and negotiate constraints and opportunities in their daily lives. We posited that the practice, construction and interpretation of public and private roles, responsibilities and needs would determine patterns of volunteering. In the next chapter we explain how we undertook the research and then, in Chapter 5, describe the characteristics of people who participated in it. In Chapter 6 we return to the themes discussed above with an examination of ‘pathways’ into volunteering.
Chapter 4 How the study was undertaken

This chapter describes how we undertook the study of volunteering at Age Concern Newcastle. In order to interrogate the complex social meanings and practices associated with volunteering, we placed in-depth qualitative interviews at the heart of the project. The research began with focus groups to help plan the fieldwork and ensure that it was informed by as wide a range of volunteers as possible. There followed a questionnaire survey of Age Concern’s current and former volunteers and ‘nearly’ volunteers.\(^5\) The most substantial part of the research consisted of 76 in-depth interviews with people aged 55 and over. Most (four fifths) had responded to the volunteering questionnaire and the rest were users of Age Concern Newcastle’s leisure and learning services. Two more focus groups followed to discuss issues arising from the interviews. All this fieldwork was contextualised with the collation of relevant data and commentary from diverse sources.

Designing the research and choosing the participants

Focus groups - involvement and consultation strategies

Early on in the project, an advisory focus group was set up in order to draw upon the knowledge and expertise of Age Concern Newcastle staff and volunteers. It included the Volunteer Development Manager, the Ethnic Minority Development Worker and five participants active as Age Concern Newcastle volunteers selected in consultation with key members of staff. The group met four times with the aim of enabling the researchers to plan and implement the fieldwork and dissemination and to involve the organisation and its volunteers in the planning of the research by drawing upon their experience and knowledge. Regular items in the Volunteer’s Newsletter and the distribution of the project leaflet (see Appendix A) at a Volunteers’ Forum helped raise awareness of the research and to encourage participation.

Following the design and piloting of the questionnaire, the focus group members together with those who were involved in the pilot survey came together for a consultation in which valuable comments were provided to further hone the questionnaire. When the survey was completed, the team reported on the findings and consulted with the focus group regarding the carrying out of in-depth interviews. In addition to the input from the focus groups, informal discussions were conducted with the Involving Older People Strategy Manager and the Ethnic Minority Development Worker. These individual and group discussions were tape recorded, written up and fed into subsequent stages of the research.

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\(^5\) The idea of surveying ‘nearly volunteers’ came from Age Concern Newcastle. They hold a database not only of current and former volunteers but also those who had come asking about opportunities for volunteering, but not taking up volunteering in the organisation.
4. How the study was undertaken

**Collecting baseline information on older volunteers**

The questionnaire survey of Age Concern Newcastle active volunteers, former volunteers, and a small sample of ‘nearly volunteers’ was designed to uncover, alongside demographic data about volunteers, how the time and effort they give to voluntary activity for Age Concern Newcastle fits into other aspects of their daily lives (caring, paid work, learning, leisure and other volunteering). It included questions about why they volunteered; the kinds of voluntary activities they undertook for Age Concern Newcastle and the difficulties they faced as volunteers.

The Volunteer Development Manager holds a comprehensive database of volunteers that includes exit questionnaires, through which former volunteers were located. Drawing on the data collected from the last three years, questionnaires were posted to 290 current volunteers and 322 former volunteers by Age Concern Newcastle in summer 2004. This survey of current and former volunteers collected a total of 134 responses (or 46 per cent response rate) from current volunteers and 87 (27 per cent) from former volunteers.7

Among these survey respondents were ethnic minority volunteers to whom the questionnaire was specifically distributed at their volunteering sites. They were assisted in completing the questionnaires by a key bilingual volunteer or the Ethnic Minority Development Worker. Altogether seven Chinese and four South Asian volunteers were helped to complete their questionnaires. Minority ethnic volunteers made up 8 per cent of the total sample.

**In-depth interviews with current and former volunteers, and leisure and learning users**

This major phase of the research consisted of in-depth interviews with current volunteers, former volunteers and a sample of leisure and learning users. These three groups of older people enabled comparisons to be made between those who are presently active in the organisation, those who had left volunteering for the organisation, and those involved in the organisation as service-recipients. While there are possible overlaps between the three groups (e.g. a volunteer who is also a leisure and learning user), the interviews were designed to draw out comparisons between the experiences and perspectives of volunteers, former volunteers and people who have not volunteered.

The selection of the current and former volunteers who were involved in the in-depth interviews was based on the characteristics of survey respondents. Interviewees overall were purposively sampled according to their gender, age, work situations, whether they were sharing their residence, had any caring commitments or lived in one of the 10 per cent most deprived wards (respondents’ postcodes were matched with the Index of

6 There were twelve respondents from the survey of ‘nearly volunteers’ and a separate report was written up for the organisation summarising their key characteristics.

7 These are considered respectable response rates for a survey.
4. How the study was undertaken

Multiple Deprivation of English wards as a proxy for disadvantage). As the study was focused on older people, only those aged 55 and above were selected. The principle of selection was not to ensure that interviewees were typical of the whole volunteer workforce but to cover the spectrum of characteristics. Care was taken to include the most elderly volunteers as well as volunteers from Chinese and South Asian communities. Interpretation and translation services were employed in two cases with Chinese respondents.8 Altogether 40 current volunteers, 21 former volunteers and 15 leisure and learning users participated in the in-depth interviews.

The in-depth interviews were carried out in the first half of 2005. A topic guide was used to follow up on issues that emerged from the questionnaire and focus groups, designed to elicit the range of pathways into and out of volunteering in the midst of employment, retirement, and giving care. The interviews explored the ways in which volunteering, self help and old age were constructed and interviewees were encouraged to give their perspectives with regard to volunteering in Age Concern Newcastle and more generally. These were contextualised within accounts of their daily life, work and social histories.

Access to the leisure and learning users was gained after consulting with the Leisure and Learning Project Managers. The researchers carried out a simple survey (one A4 side) by visiting a range of classes and activities at the organisation’s city centre premises over a period of two weeks. The survey asked for basic socio-demographic information such as age, living arrangements, work situations, and postcode. The fifteen leisure and learning users were selected purposively and reflected as closely as possible, the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the volunteers who were interviewed. The in-depth exploration of the experience, commitments and attitudes of this group of leisure and learning users helped the researchers to understand potential engagement in volunteering and mechanisms that may encourage or inhibit it. Apart from the common themes of daily activities and work and social histories, the topic guide for the interviews also explored the knowledge of and attitudes towards volunteering and the services provided by Age Concern Newcastle.

In consultation with the Project Steering Group, the research team decided to reduce the number of interviews with leisure and learning users and instead conduct two focus groups of a range of volunteers, service-users and members of the Elders Council.9 Each focus group was presented with some of the key findings from the research, and discussed issues arising such as volunteering by particular groups of older people, multiple volunteering (i.e. volunteering for more than one organisation), the boundaries between paid work and volunteering and the government’s stance towards volunteering.

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8 Two minority ethnic interviewees who had not been involved in the survey were recruited on an individual basis for the interviews because very few minority ethnic survey respondents were willing to be interviewed.

9 The research team found that little was being added to the emerging patterns by the leisure and learning interviews. The Elders Council was chosen to participate because it had recently entered into a formal arrangement with Age Concern in the Quality of Life Partnership.
4. How the study was undertaken

Analysis of fieldwork data

The quantitative data was coded onto SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for Windows and analysed in order to identify key characteristics of volunteers, former volunteers and nearly volunteers (e.g. age, gender, living arrangements, caring activities, other volunteering) and to provide an overview of reasons for volunteering, not volunteering or ceasing to do so. The information which was compared and contrasted with what is known from the literature review was tabulated and written up as a series of reports to Age Concern Newcastle.

The qualitative interviews and focus groups were transcribed and summarised\(^\text{10}\), and key themes such as ‘meanings and attitudes to volunteering’, ‘time constraints’ and ‘organisational issues’ were identified. The interview transcripts were then analysed with the help of QSR NVivo, a software package widely used for indexing and managing complex qualitative data.

Ethical policy

At the start of the research, a statement on research ethics was written up for agreement by the project Steering Group. The statement particularly highlighted the nature of the project as a piece of funded collaborative research and what it meant for leadership and cooperation. It discussed the importance of considering research participants who are particularly vulnerable because of their age or frailty (particularly former volunteers), issues of a sensitive nature that may or may not be reported to the organisation and proper protocols such as recording procedures when sensitive disclosures arose.\(^\text{11}\) It also discussed the fact that people who are vulnerable as a result of frailty and dependency may require a carer acting as a gatekeeper. It was agreed that the researchers would adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent directly from the research participants to whom access is required, while at the same time taking account of the gatekeeper’s interest. Fortunately, no such cases of sensitive disclosures or the need for carers as gatekeepers were encountered in the course of the research.

As the researchers were working under the auspices of Age Concern Newcastle, enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks were carried out on behalf of the researchers who were issued with Age Concern identity tags for use on home visits in order to reassure interviewees. The confidentiality of those who were involved in the in-depth interviews was also carefully maintained. The researchers took particular care to explain what the research was about; who was undertaking and financing it; why it was being undertaken; and how it was to be disseminated and used. All research participants were

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\(^{10}\) Only two of the interviewees refused to have the interview recorded and detailed notes were made, which were later checked by the interviewees for accuracy.

\(^{11}\) At the advisory focus group, it was agreed that if something of a sensitive nature requiring disclosure arose in the course of the interview, the interview would be halted and the interviewee would be alerted to the fact that information might have to be passed on, and was there anyone whom they would prefer that information be passed to.
4. How the study was undertaken

provided with the leaflet outlining the project and an ethical statement (see Appendix B) ensuring confidentiality and their rights in the interview setting, such as the freedom to refuse participation at any stage or to refuse any specific request such as tape recording. All the participants were also given the opportunity to ask for clarification before the start of the interview.

Characteristics of the research participants

Research participants in the survey

The questionnaire survey consisted of 134 responses from current volunteers and 87 from former volunteers. Their socio-demographic characteristics are summarised in following table 12:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1: Survey respondents’ characteristics (N=221)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age groups</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living arrangements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work situation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area of residence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% deprived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not 10% deprived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of gender and age, the sample of current volunteers in the survey reflected the main characteristics of Age Concern Newcastle’s database of volunteers as 81 per cent

12 The inconsistent totals reflect respondents who did not answer all the questions in the questionnaire.
were female and just over two thirds were aged 60 and over.\textsuperscript{13} However, the proportion of retired people in the survey was higher at 64 per cent.

**Research participants in the in-depth interviews**

The following table describes the composition of the three sets of interviewees involved in the in-depth interviews according to the characteristics given in Table 4.1. In selecting interviewees, as the tables show, we over represented those who had caring commitments and those who were aged 75 and above.

**Table 4.2: Interviewees’ characteristics (N=76)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environ</th>
<th>Current volunteers</th>
<th>Former volunteers</th>
<th>L&amp;L users</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>57 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age groups*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75+</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living arrangements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With others</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>35 (46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living alone</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>67 (88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% deprived</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not 10% deprived</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*One current volunteer is aged 45-54 and one former volunteer did not provide his age

**This includes all those who are unemployed but seeking work, or not working due to sickness or disability, or looking after home and family.\textsuperscript{14}**

The characteristics of the interviewees reflected quite closely those in the survey as one quarter were male and over a third were living in one of the 10 per cent most deprived wards. Because those over the age of 55 were selected, more were retired, and living alone. While attempts were made to sample the former volunteers and leisure and learning users in such a way as to reflect the characteristics of the current volunteers

\textsuperscript{13} According to Age Concern’s database of 289 current volunteers in 2004, four fifths were female volunteers, just under two thirds were aged sixty and over and 57 per cent were retired.

\textsuperscript{14} Many do not acknowledge that they are ‘looking after home and family’ in a formal survey. For our purposes, only those who are solely looking after home and family are included together with these other groups in the category ‘other’.
4. How the study was undertaken

who were interviewed, there were some variations as a result of the composition of the survey sample and difficulties in seeking consent for the interviews e.g. the onset of illnesses and people going away for holidays. Some differences between the three groups include the greater incidence (one third) of former volunteers who were male, and of leisure and learning users (two thirds) who were living on their own.

Most of the participants were interviewed in their own homes where they made the researchers feel very welcome. A number of the former volunteers were of the older age range and more frail in health and living in sheltered accommodation, whereas the leisure and learning users were more active and likely to prefer their interviews to be carried out in the organisation’s city centre premises before or after one of their activity sessions. The fieldwork was made much easier by the general willingness among all the interviewees to assist in the research, which stemmed from their association with the organisation and work done to publicise the research.

A summary of the characteristics (age, area, work situations, living arrangements and years volunteered for Age Concern Newcastle) of each interviewee is provided in Appendix C. Each participant was given a pseudonym and mnemonic to aid the analysis but to preserve anonymity, only pseudonyms are used in the rest of the report. In the Appendix, these are listed alphabetically by interview groupings for easy reference.
Chapter 5 The volunteer workforce at Age Concern Newcastle

Introduction

This chapter draws upon the survey to present an overview of the people who volunteer for Age Concern Newcastle, or have done so in the recent past. The typical Age Concern Newcastle volunteer is female, white, and retired. She is very likely to be on a low income, and quite likely to live in a deprived neighbourhood. The volunteer workforce at Age Concern Newcastle is diverse and includes many individuals from groups whose participation in volunteering more generally tends to be low. Just over a fifth of the survey respondents had a disability and almost ten per cent were minority ethnic. In this chapter we examine volunteers’ socio-economic characteristics (employment, education, income, and health), their levels of civic and social participation, and the volunteer tasks they undertake. Although the main focus of this report is on older volunteers, some young adults also give their time to Age Concern Newcastle. This chapter includes summary information about volunteers of all ages. As indicated in Chapter 4, the survey included individuals who had ceased to volunteer for Age Concern Newcastle within the last three years as well as currently active volunteers. We draw comparisons between these groups. The last part of the chapter shows how different volunteer roles are characteristic of different social groups.

Socio-economic characteristics of current volunteers

Labour market participation

There is, as indicated in Chapter 2, a strong emphasis in the policy literature on volunteering as a form of preparation for paid work by individuals who are excluded from it. For most volunteers at Age Concern Newcastle this agenda is irrelevant. The most typical employment status of Age Concern Newcastle volunteers, by a long way, is retired. More than three fifths (62 per cent) of all the current volunteers who responded to the survey question about employment status described themselves as retired. This applied to 60 per cent of the women and 68 per cent of the men. Less than a fifth (19 per cent) of the volunteers across all the age ranges were in paid work (see Table 5.1a for a summary of work situations by gender for all volunteers who supplied this information and Table 5.1b for those aged 55 and over). These figures, as indicated in Chapter 4, closely reflect the information in Age Concern Newcastle’s records about the volunteers although there is a small over representation of retired people in the survey.

Twenty current volunteers (15 per cent) were neither retired nor in employment. This group is summarised as ‘other’ in Tables 5.1a and 5.1b. Just over half (11) of them described themselves as ‘looking after home and family’. This latter group included six women and one man over the age of 65. The next most common in the ‘other’ category were eight who indicated that they were ‘not working’ (of whom all but one had a disability). Volunteers aged between 55 and 64 were prominent among those ‘not
working’ with a disability (five women and one man). The remainder of the ‘other’ category consisted of two unemployed and three in full-time education. The students were all under the age of 34 and the unemployed under 54.

Table 5.1a: Work situations by gender (all age groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>work situations</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retired</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Column per cents

Table 5.1b: Work situations by gender (aged 55 and over)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>work situations</th>
<th>gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retired</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Column per cents

**Household income**

National trends indicate that those with the highest levels of household income are more likely than others to be involved in voluntary and community activities (Attwood *et al.* 2003). As Age Concern Newcastle volunteers are typically retired people, it is not surprising that there are few high income earners among them. A large proportion of Age Concern Newcastle volunteers are on low incomes. Household income includes the total earnings and income of household members, and thus has to be considered in relation to the composition of members in the household. As to be expected, more than a quarter failed to respond to this question.
5. The volunteer workforce

aged 55 and over. Sixty one per cent of all the respondents who answered the question said they had incomes amounting to less than £15,000 per annum. This was true of a slightly higher proportion (64 per cent) of those aged 55 and over. Only 18 per cent of all age groups and 14 percent of those aged 55 and over reported incomes above £25,000.

Table 5.2a: Annual household income and gender (all age groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range (£)</th>
<th>Male (N)</th>
<th>Female (N)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
<th>Percentage (row)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 4000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4000-5999</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6000-9999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10000-14999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15000-24999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25000-29999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30000+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2b: Annual household income and gender (aged 55 and over)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range (£)</th>
<th>Male (N)</th>
<th>Female (N)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
<th>Percentage (row)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 4000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4000-5999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6000-9999</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10000-14999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15000-24999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25000-29999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30000+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Home ownership, residence and deprivation

Two thirds of the volunteers reported that they owned their own home. The average length of residence was 19 years. Twenty seven per cent had lived in their present home for more than thirty years. Most volunteers for Age Concern Newcastle, unsurprisingly, live in Newcastle. Of those volunteers (111) who supplied their postcode, 87 (78 per cent) were resident within the boundaries of the Newcastle local authority area. Others live in the neighbouring authorities of Gateshead, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Northumberland. More than a third (37 per cent) of volunteers who supplied their

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16 In 2002, the percentage of households in Newcastle receiving less than £15000 was 44.8 per cent (see Community Data Services [http://www.comdata.co.uk/cgi-bin/iddisplay.pl](http://www.comdata.co.uk/cgi-bin/iddisplay.pl))
5. The volunteer workforce

postcode lived in wards ranked in the most deprived 10 per cent in England.\textsuperscript{17} Forty five per cent of volunteers who supplied their postcode lived in wards ranked as in the most deprived 20 per cent in England.

\textit{Household composition}

Three fifths of the current volunteers reported sharing their residence, in most cases with a spouse or partner. A quarter of the shared households included an adult child. Thirty-six per cent of the men and 40 per cent of the women lived alone.\textsuperscript{18} The likelihood of living alone increases steeply with age. Of the volunteers aged under 55 only 20 per cent lived alone while 37 per cent of the 54 – 74 age group did so. Two thirds of the oldest volunteers (aged 75 and over) lived alone.

\textit{Education}

Nearly two fifths (39 per cent) of the volunteers completed their schooling at age 15 and below, all of whom were over the age of 55 at the time of the survey.\textsuperscript{19} One quarter of the volunteers completed their schooling at age 16 and more than a third after age 16. Twenty-three per cent completed their schooling at age 21 and above. Just over a fifth (five male and 19 female) had returned to education after some years.

\textit{Health and disability}

The majority of volunteers reported good health. More than four fifths (82 per cent) described their health as ‘good’, ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’. Sixteen per cent said their health was as ‘fair’ and only 4.5 per cent ‘poor’. Just over a fifth (22 per cent) stated that they had a disability. The most commonly reported disability by a long way was arthritis which was reported by 10 volunteers. Only a third of volunteers who said they had a disability were registered disabled.

\textit{Social and civic participation by current volunteers}

Volunteering is linked in government policy documents to social and political participation (Murphy \textit{et al.} 2005; Home Office 2003; Attwood \textit{et al.} 2003; Prime \textit{et al.} \textsuperscript{17} The Index of Multiple Deprivation (2000) ranked all 8414 wards in England according to indicators of deprivation in the domains of employment, health, education, housing and access to services. Half of the wards in Newcastle are among the most deprived 10 per cent in the country. \textsuperscript{18} In the ELSA study, 18.2 per cent of men and 31.4 per cent of women live alone (Marmot \textit{et al.} 2003). The relationship between living alone and volunteering is one feature that could be further investigated. \textsuperscript{19} The 1947 Education Act raised the school leaving age to 15 and in 1972 education was made compulsory up to age 16. This means that for those younger than 72, the school leaving age was 15, and for those under 48, the school leaving age was 16)
5. The volunteer workforce

2002). This series of Home Office reports on citizenship highlights levels of volunteering in the population, together with civic participation (e.g. voting or writing to councillors), social participation (e.g. membership of groups), and informal ‘volunteering’ (helping others on a one to one basis). The Home Office has targets that include increasing all these ‘key activities’ as aspects of good citizenship. In this section we examine the civic and social activities of Age Concern Newcastle volunteers.

Volunteers at Age Concern Newcastle were asked to indicate from a list of seven social groups and four civic activities which ones they were engaged in. Altogether, 68 per cent were involved in at least one social group, and 43 per cent were engaged in at least one form of civic participation. According to the Home Office Citizenship Survey (Prime et al. 2002), 65 per cent were involved in social participation, 38 per cent in civic participation and 67 per cent in informal volunteering. The figures for those aged 65 and above were lower than for the general population. In comparison, Age Concern Newcastle volunteers are more active in social and civic activities than the general population.

Table 5.3: Participation in civic activities by gender (all age groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civic activity</th>
<th>Male (N)</th>
<th>Female (N)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voting</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted local councillor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended meeting of any neighbourhood group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigned/complained/helped on local issues</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a public meeting or rally</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The large majority (79 per cent) of the volunteers voted in the last local elections, with a greater proportion of women voting than men (see Table 5.3).20 Age Concern Newcastle volunteers are likely to be members of churches (37 per cent), followed by being members of an education, art or music group or evening class (21 per cent) (see Table 5.4). It is likely that membership in these classes may be through their involvement in Age Concern Newcastle’s activities as service-users.

20 The ELSA research reported greater rates of voting among the older age groups, and men reporting slightly greater rates of voting than women, especially among the oldest age groups (Marmot et al. 2003).
5. The volunteer workforce

Table 5.4: Social participation in organisations by gender (all age groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Male (N)</th>
<th>Female (N)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church or other religious group</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, art or music group</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports club etc</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants’ or residents’ group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political party etc</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social club</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual aid or self-help group</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With respect to age, those aged 55 and over were more likely to report participating in social and civic activities than their younger counterparts (see Table 5.5).

Table 5.5: Social and civic participation by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>18 - 54 (N)</th>
<th>55 and over (N)</th>
<th>All (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social participation</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic participation</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Volunteering in Age Concern Newcastle

Types of volunteering activity

The activities in which the volunteers were involved at Age Concern Newcastle are summarised in Table 5.6a. Over half of all the respondents indicated that they did ‘hospitality’ work including cooking and serving meals. Some in this group would also handle money, explaining the 28 per cent involved in this activity. Hospitality activities are much more characteristic of the older age group. They were reported by 58 per cent of respondents aged 55 and over and by only 36 per cent of those aged under 55. Handling money was similarly more likely to be reported by respondents aged 55 and over (30 per cent as opposed to only 16 per cent of the younger group). There are many activities organised for older people by Age Concern Newcastle volunteers and this is reflected in the next most frequent response, ‘helping in activity’. The participation of older and younger volunteers is similar although helping in activities is slightly more characteristic of those under 55.
5. The volunteer workforce

Table 5.6a: Age Concern Newcastle volunteering activities (all age groups)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Male (N)</th>
<th>Female (N)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling money</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping in activity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving advice, information</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting people</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other work or help</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretarial. Admin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising. Leading</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising money</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee member</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transporting, escorting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Giving advice and information, and visiting people, were more typical of the younger volunteers. Table 5.6b gives a breakdown by age for the five most frequently reported activities.

Table 5.6b: Age Concern Newcastle volunteering activities by age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Aged 18 - 54</th>
<th>Aged 55 and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling money</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping in activity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving advice, information</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting people</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons for volunteering

Survey respondents were asked to indicate their reasons for volunteering from a series of options. The three most prominent reasons for volunteering (see Table 5.7) were ‘to put my spare time to good use’ (53 per cent), ‘to improve the lives of older people’ (42 per cent) and because ‘someone asked me’ (40 per cent). To put my time to good use was more often reported by volunteers aged over 55 (56 per cent as opposed to 40 per cent of the younger groups). ‘Someone asked me to help’ was also much more characteristic of older volunteers (reported by 45 per cent aged 55 and over and by only 20 per cent of their younger counterparts). To improve the lives of older people, on the other hand, was...
5. The volunteer workforce

reported by 50 percent of the volunteers aged under 55 and only 42 per cent of those over that age. A few of the less popular reasons were most typical of younger volunteers. Of the nine who volunteered to improve their job prospects, eight were under 44 and one between 65-74 years of age. Two young volunteers described their reasons for volunteering as being a requirement for the further studies that they intended to pursue.

Table 5.7: Reasons for volunteering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Male (N)</th>
<th>Female (N)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To put my spare time to good use</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve the lives of older people</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone asked me to help</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet people, make friends</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To put my existing skills to good use</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To play a part in community activities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because of ACN's good reputation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn new skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve my job prospects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the National Survey of Volunteering, older people were more likely to stress free time as a reason for volunteering (Davis Smith 1998). In the Scottish survey of older volunteers on the other hand, ‘service to the community’ and wanting to ‘make good use of spare time’ were the most important reasons (Volunteer Development Scotland 1995).

Length of time in volunteering

More than a quarter (29 per cent) of the volunteers had volunteered for nine or more years and most of these longstanding volunteers were women. A fifth (21 one per cent), on the other hand, had started volunteering at Age Concern Newcastle within the last 12 months. These figures are comparable to the Scottish survey of older volunteers, where one third volunteered for more than eight years (Volunteer Development Scotland 1995).
5. The volunteer workforce

Table 5.8: Length of volunteering and gender of current volunteers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of volunteering</th>
<th>Male (N)</th>
<th>Female (N)</th>
<th>Total (N)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 mths</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12 mths</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 yrs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 yrs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-8 yrs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 or more yrs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the volunteers in the 65-74 age range started volunteering at Age Concern Newcastle in their 50s and 60s. As we go on to discuss in Chapter 6, people who were attracted to Age Concern Newcastle as volunteers in later life often had long histories of volunteering for various other organisations over many years.

**Obstacles to volunteering**

Just over half the volunteers reported difficulties with trying to juggle volunteering with the rest of their lives. Eighteen volunteers (13.5 per cent) indicated that family commitments make it difficult for them to volunteer, 17 blamed health problems and 15 (11 per cent) blamed work commitments. Seven attributed their problems to old age while another seven have study commitments. Five said transport is a problem and three are hindered by getting paid work. Altogether, 64 (48.5 per cent) do not encounter any difficulties with volunteering. The overwhelming majority did not have concerns about volunteering for Age Concern Newcastle as an organisation. Sixteen (13 per cent) did express some unhappiness.\(^{21}\)

In the National Survey of Volunteering, volunteers had grown more critical of the time volunteering takes up and less critical of being out-of-pocket (Davis Smith 1998). The vast majority of Scottish volunteers also had few serious concerns or worries. About a fifth however worried about ‘the physical demands of the job and my ability to cope with them’, and ‘providing a service that the government should provide’.\(^{22}\) Among those issues they were least concerned about were ‘doing someone out of a job’ (Volunteer Development Scotland 1995). Being out-of-pocket and taking someone’s paid job were not expressed as concerns by Age Concern Newcastle volunteers in this survey.

\(^{21}\) A separate report on their written concerns was made available to Age Concern Newcastle

\(^{22}\) This issue has probably arisen as a result of the restructuring of health and social care to community groups in the nineties. It was perhaps not brought up by Age Concern Newcastle current volunteers because in 2004, it had become a norm.
5. The volunteer workforce

Comparisons between current and former volunteers

The survey of former volunteers followed almost the same structure as that of the current volunteers. A much higher proportion of former volunteers reported participation in hospitality. This was true of 70 per cent of the former volunteers aged 55 or over and by 52 per cent of their younger counterparts. The large number of former volunteers who reported hospitality activities is almost certainly associated with a change in funding by Social Services in Newcastle, which resulted in the closure of lunch clubs in which many Age Concern Newcastle volunteers had participated. Otherwise, the two groups were similar on most demographic and volunteering characteristics. Where differences were observed, very few were statistically significant.

The age and gender patterns of former compared to current volunteers are similar apart from a greater percentage of those who are in the 75 plus age range among former volunteers. There was also a higher percentage of those in the age range 35-54 (18.4 per cent) among the former volunteers compared to the current volunteers (10.4 per cent), which could be an indication of recruitment trends. Around the same percentages of volunteers in both groups are retired, but former volunteers were more likely to be in paid work. However, current volunteers are more likely to be receiving higher incomes than former volunteers. On the whole however, both groups had significant numbers (42 per cent former and 47 per cent current) with household incomes below £10,000 per annum. While current volunteers were more likely to live outside the city of Newcastle, they were also more likely to live in the deprived wards. A greater percentage of former volunteers (47 per cent) live alone compared to current volunteers (39 per cent). This is to be expected with the greater proportions of former volunteers aged above 75, most of whom are women living on their own. Current volunteers were more likely to report good health and former volunteers were more likely to state that they have a disability.

Former volunteers were more likely to be members of a social club whereas current volunteers were more likely to participate in an education, art or music group or evening class. This could be explained by the fact that there are more men among the former volunteers, and social club membership is common among working class men (Perren et al. 2003). Current volunteers would be more aware of the new leisure and learning facilities in Age Concern Newcastle and more likely to take of advantage of them. Female rather than male former volunteers were more likely to be involved in civic participation, informal and caring activities, but gender differences are not as pronounced among the current volunteers. For both groups, those over 55 were more likely to be participating in social and civic participation than those under 55.

Putting one’s spare time to good use and improving the lives of older people were the most common reasons why both groups volunteered. However, former volunteers were more likely to want to ‘play a part in community activities’ than current volunteers, who were more interested in meeting people and making friends. Former volunteers were more likely than current volunteers to name health reasons as being an obstacle, although the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant.
5. The volunteer workforce

Conclusions from the survey findings have to be tempered with caution as the samples may not be fully representative. There was a much lower response rate to the survey from former volunteers (see Chapter 4). In the case of the sample of former volunteers, one problem lies in the fact that the information given about their activities is retrospective, and we may not always be comparing like with like.

Volunteer profiles by current volunteer roles

The list of volunteering activities reported in Tables 5.6a and 5.6b was based on the categorisation used in the National Survey of Volunteering. These categories are inevitably highly generic. Volunteer roles at Age Concern Newcastle are varied but for the purposes of analysis we divided them into four main role types. The roles are labelled ‘Lunch club’, ‘Centre’, ‘Befriending’ and ‘Management’. Table 5.9 draws upon the survey data to show comparisons between these roles according to volunteers’ socio-economic characteristics.

Table 5.9: Volunteer profiles by volunteer role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteer role</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Male:Female ratio</th>
<th>Over 65%</th>
<th>Not in paid work %</th>
<th>Income &lt; £15000 pa %</th>
<th>Resident deprived ward %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lunch Club</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1:9</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1:3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriending</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1:5</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1:0.67</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to explain the four roles types more fully we now consider the kinds of volunteer activity they include and the different ways in which the people who undertake them tend to interact with Age Concern Newcastle. This discussion goes beyond the survey data and draws from the interviews and from our knowledge gained from working with Age Concern Newcastle staff and volunteers.

The largest volunteer role group is those who are involved in the lunch and leisure club service. They are dispersed throughout the city and are based in community centres, churches and sheltered housing schemes. Individuals can volunteer a few times every week or once every three to four weeks on a rotation basis. A number of lunch clubs were started as a church activity that later drew support and funding from Age Concern Newcastle. For such volunteers, their allegiance tends to be to the church or neighbourhood rather than to Age Concern Newcastle as an organisation. Those who provide ‘Befriending’ visit, sit and give bereavement support services. Their role is particularly ‘individualised’ on a one-to-one basis, specifically catering to housebound and frail older service-users, sometimes over a long period of time. The next largest group of volunteers consists of those based in the city centre premises. They may be working in the café, or providing assistance at the computer helpdesk, or assisting or leading leisure and learning activities. Other volunteers in the Centre are involved in
5. The volunteer workforce

work such as office, reception, transport, advice and financial services. Volunteers in a management capacity are the trustees and others who are involved in ad hoc committee or project work, who meet at various times through the year.

The gender composition of volunteers in lunch clubs can perhaps be explained by the nature of the clubs, which is such that the large majority of service-users are women. Lunch club volunteers are also most likely among the other categories of volunteers to live in a deprived neighbourhood. The Befriending and Centre volunteers are quite similar but Centre volunteers are more likely to be over 65 and to be retired than the Befriending volunteers, and the proportion of men in this group is higher. The Management volunteers stand out as being distinct from the other volunteers on a number of counts: they have a more equal ratio of male to female volunteers; they also have a younger age profile and are more likely to be in paid employment. None of them earn below £15,000 per annum and only a quarter live in neighbourhoods classed as 10 per cent deprived.

We now turn from the survey to the forty current volunteers who took part in the in-depth interviews. Their volunteer roles and their characteristics are summarised in Table 5.10. The most diverse group of volunteers are those who work at the city centre premises and they have been sub-divided into two groups in Table 5.10, Leisure and Learning (L&L) and ‘other’.

Table 5.10: Volunteers interviewed by role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of volunteer</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Employed and retired; only one living in a deprived ward. Male and female, most under age 65.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch club</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Retired and ‘other’; 6 living in deprived wards; 6 living alone, and all but one female.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriending</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Retired; none living in deprived wards; all but one living alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre: L&amp;L</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Retired and ‘other’. The most varied group on all characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre: Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Retired; less likely to live in deprived wards than L&amp;L volunteers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We refer to these different volunteer roles within Age Concern Newcastle at various points in the report. Many of the personal factors we discuss in Chapters 6 - 8 cut across them. They become significant, however, in Chapter 9 when we turn to organisational contexts within which volunteers fulfil their roles.
Chapter 6 Becoming a volunteer: pathways and experiences

This chapter is about patterns of entry into volunteering: when people started to volunteer in their life and how this varies with their history of employment and family caring responsibilities. It also considers the explanations that people give to the question of how they got involved in volunteering, many of which are linked in with their life course and history of paid work. The explanations that people give for starting to volunteer are categorised according to life events, networks, personal needs and attitudes and contexts. The chapter ends with a discussion and assessment of volunteer recruitment patterns.

Becoming a volunteer

Patterns of volunteering

In this chapter we draw upon the narratives of the 74 interviewees (out of 76) who have volunteered at one time or another during their lives. Experiences of active volunteering were extensive, even among leisure and learning users. Among the 21 individuals we interviewed as ‘former volunteers’, ten were still volunteering for organisations other than Age Concern Newcastle. Among the 13 leisure and learning users who had experience of volunteering, eight were still active volunteers. Only two of them had never volunteered formally in any capacity. This section is concerned with overall patterns of entry into volunteering for the older people we interviewed. The study was designed to improve understanding of volunteering in later life. While some individuals first become volunteers after the age of retirement, many already had long histories of volunteering as younger adults. The first distinction we make is between ‘later stage’ and ‘early stage’ volunteers. Then we look at lifetime experiences of paid work and unpaid care. People’s first experiences shed light on the volunteering pathways they take. Pathways varied according to whether volunteers were men or women, and whether they had a history of continuous employment or mainly of caring for family.

Two fifths of the interviewees with volunteering experience started volunteering when they retired or some time after retirement. We refer to this group by the shorthand label ‘later stage’ volunteers. All the others already had volunteering experience when they reached retirement. We use the term ‘early stage’ volunteers for all those who started volunteering at any point before retirement. The points in their lives at which the ‘early stage’ volunteers entered volunteering may be summarised as:

- when they were caring for children
- when they were in paid work
- in their youth: teenage to early twenties and before starting a family

23 It is interesting to note that for a third of the 37 who started volunteering in the early stages of their life course, the setting for their first experience of volunteering was working as adults with children or young people.
6. Becoming a volunteer

Over a quarter of all volunteers had caring responsibilities, particularly looking after young children, at home, at the time they started. This group consisted entirely of women and it included a few who had left work early to care for grandchildren at the same time as starting to volunteer. This group generally started volunteering by helping out in a playgroup or school setting. Twelve began volunteering when they were in full-time paid work, usually volunteering in the evenings or at weekends. Eleven out of the 74 volunteered when they were in their youth, of whom four were in their teens when they started. They might volunteer in uniformed groups, youth groups or at university. There was just one individual (a former volunteer) who started volunteering when looking for paid work, and whose entry into volunteering does not fit into any of these patterns.

While volunteers’ work history varied widely, we can simplify such histories into two main groupings, as shown in the vertical columns of Table 6.1. One group of volunteers had a ‘lifetime of employment’. The other had a ‘lifetime of caring’ for family, but which was sometimes combined with a certain amount of employment. The lifetime of employment group consists of volunteers who retired at the standard retirement age, as well as those who retired early on medical grounds or who were made redundant. Altogether, more than two thirds of volunteers had a lifetime of employment, and this included all the men interviewed (34) and more than half the women. The second group – all women – includes those who left paid work early on to care for children, but who may have returned to some intermittent or part-time employment, as well as those who have been homemakers most of their lives.

Apart from differences in their employment history, people also showed different patterns of volunteering through their lifetimes. Table 6.1 simplifies complex volunteer histories by using the event of ‘retirement’ to distinguish between ‘early stage’ and ‘later stage’ volunteers (shown in the horizontal rows of Table 6.1). As it happens, the sample proved to be equally divided between ‘early stage’ and ‘later stage’ volunteers according to this definition (37 of each).

We can now look at how work histories intersect with volunteering histories. This allows us to identify three distinct types of volunteering pathways, in which gender proves an important determining element. The volunteering pathways of the early stage volunteers can be divided into ‘volunteering-employment’ and ‘volunteering-caring’. ‘Later stage’ volunteers, in contrast, typically become volunteers only in retirement and do not have histories of combining volunteering with paid work or care.

Table 6.1 shows that the 37 ‘early stage’ volunteers were almost evenly divided between those with a lifetime of employment (18) and those with a lifetime of care (19). This suggests two distinct patterns: one in which volunteering and employment have gone along side by side in a person’s life and one in which volunteering and caring have been

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24 Among the ‘early stage volunteers’, there are people who can be described as ‘volunteer returners’ i.e. those with a clear gap between two periods of volunteering. For example, Mrs Armstrong volunteered when she was a teenager at a school for disabled children and only returned to volunteering after early retirement. Compared to ‘lifetime’ volunteers, some of these ‘volunteer-returners’ took some time to recall that they had done some volunteering in the past.
6. Becoming a volunteer

combined. Only a small proportion of the female volunteers (9 out of 56) took a ‘volunteering-employment’ pathway. However, as might be expected, all those with a ‘volunteering-caring’ pathway were women.

‘Later stage’ (post-retirement) volunteers were likely to have had a lifetime of employment. Such volunteers only volunteered once their employment activity had terminated. This is a significant group, as just under half of the interviewees (34) fell into this category. Only three interviewees (all women) had followed a lifetime of care with later stage volunteering. These patterns suggest that those with a lifetime of care are likely to have started volunteering earlier on in their lives.

Table 6.1: Volunteer ‘pathways’ by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteering ‘pathway’</th>
<th>Lifetime employment</th>
<th>Lifetime care</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early stage volunteers</td>
<td>18 (9 men; 9 women)*</td>
<td>19 (All women)</td>
<td>37 (9 men; 28 women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later stage volunteers</td>
<td>34 (9 men; 25 women)</td>
<td>3 (All women)</td>
<td>37 (9 men; 28 women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>52 (70%)</td>
<td>22 (30%)</td>
<td>74 (18 men; 56 women)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Of the 74 interviewees, 18 were men and 56 were women.

Let us now examine these three types of volunteer pathways in more detail by analysing the interviews themselves. Mrs Mitchell is typical of the ‘volunteering-caring’ path, and this is how she describes combining volunteering with her caring role over many years:

I did a couple of weeks in [a charity shop]… yes, then I moved back to [town]…. and for a number of years I was under extremely severe pressures of every sort, ……...and I had children at school, so I, I was, and I had a part time job to keep things going but eventually things eased off and then I was able to look around for something more interesting than the paid job I was doing ….. so as I say, I asked around people who were in education and that’s when I did the, it was a project for young ex-offenders, …… that was great fun, I liked that a lot and I also did a bit of voluntary work in the schools with children (Mrs Mitchell)

For Mrs Atkinson too, a ‘volunteering-caring’ path was important as it made her life more fulfilling:

Mrs Atkinson: One tends to get sick and tired of housework all the time.
Interviewer: Yes.
Mrs Atkinson: And the only time you went out was when you went down to the school to pick the bairn up. How boring!
Interviewer: Yes.
Mrs Atkinson: You know and God I thought I’m going batty.
6. Becoming a volunteer

Relatively few women followed a ‘volunteering-employment’ pathway. This is explained by the caring responsibilities that women in employment had which impinged on their capacity to volunteer at an earlier stage in their lives. Mrs Black for example spoke at length about managing childcare when she was a young teacher and Mrs Baxter explained that she didn’t volunteer when she was younger because she was busy bringing up four sons. Single women without children like Ms Graham and Ms Clark also spoke of their very demanding jobs as health care professionals.

Later stage volunteering is usual for either men or women who follow a lifetime of employment with volunteering after retirement.

Interviewer: Had you ever done volunteering before?

Mr Dawson: No I haven’t no, no, no. I worked up till I was seventy so I didn’t have a great deal of time to do anything like that but since then I’ve been tied up with this [volunteering]

However, there is a very small group of women (three) for whom later stage volunteering comes after a lifetime of care. Mrs Bartley is an example of someone who started volunteering later in life because she was occupied with looking after her elderly parents followed by nursing her husband who was many years her senior for much of her life.

Well I’ve always looked after me mother, she was ill. And then after me mother, me father, you know ‘cause they’ve always lived… this is their house, you know. But then I met my husband and we were together 30 years and I looked after him, he was in a wheelchair, you know. I used to push him around everyday, you know. Wind, rain or snow he wanted to be out. (Mrs Bartley)

It should be noted that for many who follow a ‘volunteering-employment’ path, their first experience of volunteering was not with Age Concern, but with another voluntary or self-help organisation. For such volunteers, this seems to mean that there is a level of preparedness in continuing to volunteer, and joining Age Concern later on was often a case of existing networks or being at a stage or situation in their life to volunteer in that capacity. Mr Evans had volunteered most of his life, so that voluntary work after retirement was a matter of course:

Interviewer: Was there a difference when you retired?

Mr Evans: No, it just continued actually……because people started to ask me to do other things.

Explanations for starting to volunteer

The ways in which volunteers explained how they started to volunteer varied widely. Explanations were linked to the patterning of volunteering and employment histories described in the previous section, and covered four main categories, which were not
mutually exclusive. Table 6.2 describes these in terms of events, networks, personal needs or attitudes and contexts. ‘Events’ refer to cases where it is significant events in the life course that mark the start of a volunteering experience. The most common such event is retirement, but illness may also be important. Second, volunteering is often a result of the connections that people have with each other; their ‘networks’. Third, interviewees explain that they are volunteers because of the kind of people they are; their knowledge and skills and their needs and attitudes in relation to these. Finally, ‘context’ refers to the social and cultural environment with its moral and ethical values that interviewees say exerted an influence on them to volunteer.

Table 6.2: Explanations for starting to volunteer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Factors for starting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>Retirement; Family transitions; Relocation; Illness Bereavement</td>
<td>Need to fill a gap; Need for social contact and interaction; Link with past employment; New opportunities; Children’s development; Disability</td>
<td>○ Life transitions; ○ Social needs; ○ Family needs; ○ Self-help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks</td>
<td>Friendship; Family; Social groups</td>
<td>Encouraged by friends; Overcoming initial fears of; engaged in a new activity; Membership of Church; adult class; another voluntary group; Being asked to ‘cover’ whilst people are away; Past workplace networks</td>
<td>○ Companionship; ○ Social ties; ○ Familiarity; ○ Obligations to the group/organisation; ○ Extension of formal workplace relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal needs /</td>
<td>Personality and understanding of self</td>
<td>Oriented towards people, sociable; a work ‘persona’ that carried into retirement</td>
<td>○ Personal identity; ○ Self-realisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitudes</td>
<td>Personal capabilities</td>
<td>Desire to use previous skills and experience</td>
<td>○ Confidence; ○ Self-respect; ○ Contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual motivation</td>
<td>Needing a structure; Needing a change; Needing to keep active</td>
<td>○ Control; ○ Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Social and cultural: norms and values</td>
<td>work ethic in the cultural ‘air’ value transmission giving back to society Social obligations</td>
<td>○ Citizenship; ○ Social participation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Becoming a volunteer

Events

But when my wife died of course I needed something to occupy me because we used to go out every, we’d go out together all the time, all the time so I had to find something to do. (Mr Dawson)

Interviewees\textsuperscript{25} often described trigger factors for volunteering, such as life events; bereavement, illness, or change in work status that results in a vacuum that needs to be filled with something useful. Retirement was a significant event for many volunteers that contributed to their interest in volunteering. The impact of family transitions - children starting playgroup, getting married, moving away, or divorce - figured more prominently among the female than the male volunteers. Men mainly talked in terms of bereavement and retirement.

When retirement was the trigger for volunteering, a number maintained some link between their previous occupation and their role as volunteers. For example those who had served in the army or air force could be involved either in uniformed groups training young people or in helping ex-servicemen; a former social worker volunteers in the befriending service and a former secretary volunteered as an Oxfam office secretary because of the skills she could bring to the job.

A number described their active search for a volunteering role in terms of the need to give structure to their life after retirement. Others viewed retirement as a complete change. For example, Mr Metcalfe described the stressful conditions of his previous employment and the relief of retirement as \textit{jubilación}.

\begin{quote}
I never had much time because I used to work a minimum of ten hours a day and many times seven days a week, and up to eighteen hours a day so I never had time for anything……Or anyone quite honestly because I was so stressed out but now since, since I finished work and time on my hands I’ve had time to calm down, I can speak to people……The Spanish have a word for retirement it’s called \textit{jubilación} and it’s like I’m very happy. (Mr Metcalfe)
\end{quote}

Retirement gave him the opportunity to relax and enjoy the company of the people around him, and so to Mr Metcalfe, volunteering was a form of leisure.\textsuperscript{26}

For women who have been family carers for all or most of their lives with little labour market experience the term ‘retirement’ makes little sense, although in some instances a husband’s retirement or redundancy is a significant event. Indeed, a few women did not feel able to volunteer formally at an earlier stage.

\textsuperscript{25} Leisure and learning users who had experience of volunteering were not included in this part of the analysis because the topic guide used in their interviews had a different focus compared to that used for Age Concern volunteers. The section is thus based on the analysis of 61 interviews.

\textsuperscript{26} Volunteering as a form of leisure will be taken up in Chapter 7.
6. Becoming a volunteer

My husband died, yes, aha because it is, you don’t think about doing all these things when they’re alive because your life’s too full, you know, you’ve got your family and your husband and all that and when they go you’ve got to fill your days in, which can be sometimes difficult. (Mrs Granger)

For those who volunteered at a later stage after a lifetime of caring, it could be said that they ‘retired’ from a life of caring before starting to volunteer formally. Some of these women considered volunteering a different and more interesting stage in their lives rather than a continuation of their previous caring role.

Single women without family around them felt the need for social contact having lost most of this after an intense lifetime of work. Most of the single women started to volunteer at a later stage in their lives.

After retirement because otherwise your social contacts really, you make your friends through your work don’t you, on the whole, you’ve got to do, make some sort of effort to get social contacts, to keep some sort of social contact with people or else you just become a recluse. But the, particularly, you know, if you haven’t got a family….I haven’t got any family up here at all so you’ve got to make your own. (Ms Graham)

For later stage volunteers, retirement as an event is often not the sole trigger for entering into volunteering. In a number of cases, retirement after lifetime employment coincided with bereavement, increasing the need for social interaction. For a number of volunteers, their main reason for volunteering was because the loss of a loved one led to a need for something to occupy themselves with. Occasionally, bereavement was combined with severe depression, and volunteering was reported as having therapeutic value.

And when I came back here [Newcastle] about 6 months after I wasn’t really very well, I took it very badly when my husband died and a Social Worker took me to Age Concern for a coffee so I’ve got a lot to thank them for…..[describes volunteering soon after]. (Mrs Cooper)

As mothers, a number of early stage volunteers were also more likely to invest in their children’s development by giving time to volunteer in children’s activities such as playgroups or uniformed groups, which led to the return to other volunteering later in their lives. For example, Mrs Mackenzie volunteered to help in a Barnados play-bus which her child attended and then went on to read with children in her children’s primary school. Mrs Fletcher on the other hand volunteered because she wanted to accompany her grown-up daughter who was volunteering in order to explore a career in nursing.

Family transitions, such as children leaving home or the loss or estrangement of family members can also provide another trigger factor for volunteering. For example, Mrs Tandon who was widowed, felt the marriages and moving away of her daughters left a vacuum after her retirement. Being alone at home without the family responsibilities she used to have, she chose to volunteer instead of seeking paid employment so as to still be
available to her family. After caring for her mother-in-law, Mrs Davidson moved to join her daughter and her family in the northeast and felt the need to build relationships. She, like others among the interviewees, is also an example of how relocation from another town or city due to family transitions, can be an incentive to participate in voluntary activities.

The onset of an illness or disability can also trigger volunteering, whether for early stage or later stage volunteers. Mrs Benn returned to volunteering after becoming disabled with arthritis when she was working. Mr Lamb began to volunteer following a period of caring for his wife during his retirement, once she passed away. The need to build up self-confidence after a period of hospitalisation, recuperation or rehabilitation can also trigger an interest in voluntary activity, though it may rather lead to involvement in a self-help group.

**Networks**

Friendship is an important element in people’s decisions to volunteer. Many were encouraged by friends to join a group, or decided to volunteer only because of joint participation with one or more friends. There is a sense of companionship that springs from volunteering ‘together’. Mrs Campbell described all her various volunteering experiences as volunteering with a friend, not on her own. Mrs Cooper volunteered with her friend for fifteen years until the latter died.

Volunteering with a friend helps the potential volunteer to overcome the initial fears associated with engaging in a new activity or social group. The importance of getting to know people and feeling comfortable also contributes to volunteers staying on. Some volunteers were asked by the organisations they volunteer for to give suggestions of people they knew of who may like to help, so recommended their friends. Other volunteers went into volunteering through a family member, a mother or daughter who had been involved in the past, or because a sister was interested in starting to volunteer, or because their wife or children participated in the activities of the organisation.

Many volunteer because of their involvement in a church, or other social group or activity such as an IT class, or other voluntary or community groups. Participation in a community organisation such as the regional Chinese association or the local Elders Forum led some older people to volunteer for Age Concern Newcastle. In those institutional contexts, they encountered an appeal for help or recognised a need. Some were asked to cover whilst people were on holiday or were ill and then continued to volunteer afterwards.

Mr Dawson: I said well I’ll do it. I said I was just going to do it for the one week [laughs]. So I said to her [project manager] I’ll do it. She said oh lovely she said that’s right she said oh I know you [name] so she wrote it down, she said [name] can do it.
6. Becoming a volunteer

Interviewer: And that was nine years ago?

Mr Dawson: So and that was it and I got lumbered then. I did it for a couple of weeks then there was two other men said to me well [name] it seems to be a lot. I said well it is really I said I could do with some help. So they said well we’ll volunteer and we got four volunteers….

A number of volunteers, particularly those with a lifetime of employment, explained that they came into volunteering because of past connections with work and the personal relationships arising from that area of their lives. Some were recruited through these networks because of the skills that they had, or they were ‘head-hunted’ to volunteer. 27 This was particularly the case among the trustees, but the domestic and interpersonal skills of other volunteers were also appreciated. There is further discussion of skills in the next section.

Personal attitudes and needs

People often explained why they became volunteers in terms of their personalities. A number described themselves as being people-orientated, ‘gregarious’, the sociable type, not the sort to sit around but needing to keep busy, or it being just in their nature to help out.

I just love people. I’m a people person. (Mrs Campbell)

The earlier description of volunteering patterns shows that some have been in caring and volunteering roles from a young age, and this history frames their personality and understanding of themselves.

And I’ve always been a sort of caring person you know? I can’t help it; it’s just in me. I was 38 years as a warden so I think it’s in-built in me regarding people, you know? (Mrs Willis)

Some volunteers who have held responsible positions in their employment life appreciate the opportunities to resume such roles in their volunteering life. 28 In some cases, a previous social role translates into a work ‘persona’ that people carry into their retirement.

Some that’s why I wanted to do it, and they said they had one day a week and I thought that’s brilliant, that was on a Wednesday, so I thought I’ve got Monday and Tuesday to do things at home, Wednesday I’m out and it gives me a raison d’être to get dressed and you know and sort of resume your old persona in other words…. And as

27 Other research has found that effective recruitment of older volunteers depends heavily on personal contact and the use of social networks (Rochester et al. 2002).

28 McDowell (1997) describes how identities at work carry over into other non-work forms of social engagement.
6. Becoming a volunteer

I say, it still enables you to keep contact with who you were in the past. (Mrs Hetherington)

Skills and knowledge from past work experience can be determining factors in people’s desire and confidence to volunteer, and contribute to their self-respect. A number explained that they volunteer because they are able to perform what is required of them. As retired people, they want to feel happy and at ease with the tasks, which has to be within their comfort zone. Mr Milburn who volunteered outside Age Concern Newcastle recollected:

It was the tills I didn’t like, they were these, you know, these things that you press it in and now it’s all right, I was fine until I made a mistake and I was only there, I wasn’t there regularly so I didn’t know how to put it right and if I made a mistake I had to wait and shout help and there might be a queue about six or eight people there and thinking oh dear like, so I wasn’t very happy there. (Mr Milburn)

Those who are highly skilled explained their volunteering as a desire to put the skills that they have developed to good use. There is less recognition by those without highly rated skills of their abilities to contribute, but they may recognise that they contribute personal qualities such as a helpful attitude, sociability and an orientation towards people.

I did this voluntary work I was used to older people and lots of people have got no time, no patience, no compassion for older people and you need that. (Mrs Armstrong)

While some are encouraged to volunteer, others are more likely to be driven by needs. These include needing a structure to their lives, needing to build up their confidence, wanting to pursue a different interest or activity or to have a different experience or fulfil a lifelong interest. Some pursue volunteering independently in a proactive way for such reasons.

I wanted a change and it was, it was just half a day a week, Thursday mornings, that was my morning. It gave me a change and it also meant I had a break from caring for me mum which sounds a bit selfish really…. But it just gave me something to do where I wasn’t a carer, you know. (Mrs Fletcher)

For others, loneliness and boredom led to a need to meet others and participate in activities, while some felt still ‘too young’ to retire and sit back, and needed to do something. A number talked of the need to be mentally and physically active.

Context

I think this goes back to when I was a child really, your streets were like little families, little communities…. And everyone used to help one another…. When I
was working we had a family helping my parents so really I’m, I’m just carrying on. (Mr Metcalfe)

Finally, volunteers often place their explanation for volunteering within their life context. They talk of the underlying norms and values that make up their mindset and lifetime practices of volunteering, whether it be the work ethic, something that is in the ‘cultural air’, or recollections of what things were like in the past and the importance of continuing such traditions. Volunteers spoke of the importance of giving back to society, putting something back in. Some pointed to specific instances where they have received from society, which has motivated them to give back.29

Well I had elderly parents and my mother had Parkinson’s disease which is very sort of like dementia and then towards the end of her life dementia did come in and it was just, of all of the people that helped me was the social worker put me onto the Alzheimer’s [Society] and they gave me so I could get out, you know, somebody used to come and sit for an hour and let me out of the house. So that was how, and I thought well I’ll just pay them back for what they did for me, you know, so that’s how it evolved. (Mrs Lewis)

Many older volunteers belonged to the cohort that understands the ‘citizen-soldier’ as a social role.30 They saw volunteering as a ‘British tradition’, while referring specifically to uniformed groups. This was especially the case for men who had served in the forces and now volunteer in ex-servicemen organisations: 31

I joined SSAFA to continue with the service tradition because SSAFA is a voluntary organisation, Soldiers’, Sailors’ and Airmen’s Families Association that look after the welfare needs of former members of those organisations. (Mr Evans)

There was evidence that values such as respect for a ‘social code’ and ‘discipline’ - which could be described as an ethic of volunteering - were passed from one generation to the next. Indeed, some volunteers gave their reasons for volunteering as the influence the older generation had on them. This often took the form of the charitable work that their mothers carried out influencing them as children. Older volunteers perceive values in society to be changing, with individual and material needs increasingly taking over from societal ones. Chapter 7 will discuss these individual and collective perspectives of volunteering in more detail.

Being neighbourly, or holding specifically Christian values - such as ‘to whom much is given, much is required’ (Mrs Thompson) - underlie much of people’s thinking. But values from other cultural traditions expand the socio-cultural context for volunteering in

29 Volunteers’ reflections of the meaning of volunteering as reciprocity will be further explored in Chapter 7.
30 Such roles are presently overtaken by professional roles (Turner 2001).
31 Cooper and Thomas (2002) refer to ‘communitas’ as that idea of a collective or community. Some of their respondents who lived through the Second World War talked about the continuation of the ‘Dunkirk spirit’.
a multicultural Britain. The Sikh volunteer explained how she was influenced by her Sikh beliefs, and that it was through God’s blessing that she was able to volunteer, while the Chinese volunteer explained Chinese values of giving.

Especially in the Chinese saying, the one who can give, is luckier than the one who just take it. If you can give that means you are lucky, you are able to give. (Mrs Lee)

Among those who are more educated and receiving comfortable pensions, volunteering is sometimes expressed in terms of a social obligation arising from early retirement or part-time working.

At that point I felt well, you know, other people of my age are still working and here am I, I’ve got my pension and I really should be doing something to earn that and to put something back into society. (Ms Charlton)

I went part time job share five years ago this year and [laughs] it sounds silly but this is the truth, I just felt so guilty about the self-indulgence of having all this free time that I felt I should do something that was useful and worthwhile and of benefit to other people and that’s it, that’s why I became a volunteer, yes that’s it, aha. (Ms Dodds)

**Recruitment**

The explanations that people give for volunteering help us to understand recruitment. In this section, we will look at the practical ways in which people were recruited into voluntary organisations. We show that the ways in which volunteers describe their recruitment routes form a continuum. At one end of this continuum, volunteers refer to what can best be called happenstance. For others, volunteering was certainly unplanned, but fits in with their (recognised) value system. Most volunteers, as we have already seen, are recruited by word of mouth and the encouragement of people in their networks. Some volunteers make their own individual plans to volunteer. Finally, volunteers may be brought in by specific planned recruitment efforts by a volunteer-using organisation.

A number of volunteers said it was just a case of being at the right place at the right time. They might give the example of a chance meeting with an old colleague on the street who volunteered for Age Concern. Others ‘happened’ to be in Age Concern making enquiries about insurance cover when they spotted a poster asking for volunteers. Volunteering can also follow on from other forms of voluntary action, such as donations to a charitable cause. Subsequent information about the charity can then pave the way for volunteering.

Word of mouth is the most typical means of recruitment. A response to a specific request for help from a friend or former colleague is often the start of a volunteering career. This method is very effective. However, it is very ad hoc and results in new recruits who

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32 As Crow (2004) points out, such a relationship is often based on trust rather than hierarchical relations.
6. Becoming a volunteer

are like existing volunteers, and have the same social characteristics. There is therefore an argument for diversity in recruitment practices that are linked in with equal opportunities.

Some people had clear plans to volunteer after retirement, though the kinds of volunteer posts they were looking for were not always available. It can help if volunteer-using organisations have a visible presence in the city, and some thought of MEA House as a place to go to volunteer. Mrs Mitchell was aware that many voluntary organisations had their offices there, so she simply started from the top floor knocking on doors to look for a volunteering opportunity.

Mrs Jackson, a leisure and learning user, wanted to volunteer as a helper in neighbouring schools, but when she inquired, all such posts were taken up by parents of children attending the schools. Mrs Jackson was clear what she did and did not want to do:

    well I rang them [hospital] up and asked, cos they’ve got the voluntary services, you know, and the lady kept saying you can work in the shop if you want to. I says I don’t want to work in the shop. I like to talk to people. Well you can go round with the book trolley. I says I don’t want to go round with the book trolley. So I knew exactly what I wanted to do. (Mrs Jackson)

The recent setting up of a volunteer bureau in MEA House (Autumn 2005) might lead to a change in recruitment patterns to better match vacancies with individual preferences.

Other ways in which volunteers are recruited include seeing an advertisement, poster, or notice somewhere with a call for volunteers, and these are not ineffective means of recruitment. Men were often recruited in this way, whereas women were recruited more through their friendship networks.

Some mentioned the active recruitment of volunteers by Age Concern Newcastle staff giving talks in community settings. Frequent references to two staff members in particular indicated the important role they played in recruitment.

As several volunteers were recruited from churches, and some recruitment of Chinese volunteers for the Chinese lunch club takes place at their popular meeting place in the casino, perhaps publicity work could be carried out in more varied settings where older people meet.

Some volunteers specifically mentioned how they were encouraged to volunteer by the positive aspects of Age Concern Newcastle as an organisation, which included the location being convenient, the venue appealing e.g. ‘calm and adult’ (Mrs Mitchell), that it was well managed and professional, as well as its status as a national organisation.

33 MEA House is the building where the head office and related premises of Age Concern Newcastle is located. Situated in the city centre, its offices are let out to various charities. Its hall and meeting rooms are well-used by its tenants, and its coffee shop and computer help desk run by Age Concern Newcastle is popular with the public.
6. Becoming a volunteer

Although leisure and learning users are located at Age Concern Newcastle’s premises, it seems few are recruited as volunteers. One suggestion was that membership of the organisation should be more actively promoted among such service-users (of all ethnicities) that come through its doors.

Pre-retirement courses run by large employers could also play a role in recruiting volunteers. However, only two of the 74 interviewees in this study talked about a pre-retirement course as having any influence on their desire to volunteer. Nevertheless, from the few examples given by other interviewees, corporate human resources sections have a role in publicising volunteering opportunities to employees who are about to retire and who would like to continue to use their skills, knowledge and experience.

The data suggest that current patterns of recruitment target certain types of person. Many of the professionals amongst the volunteers had previously worked in public service jobs as teachers, nurses and social workers rather than in the business or commercial sector. Recruitment practices could perhaps be more open and inclusive to target retirees in general rather than particular occupational groups. Recruitment practices also need to cater to minority ethnic communities, with their own specific cultural practices and constraints (see Chapter 9).

Few agreed with the idea that financial incentives for volunteers would improve recruitment: there was a strong sense that volunteering is ‘not for reward’, otherwise people would start to volunteer for the wrong reasons. A number of volunteers recognised recruitment as a problem, but felt that they were not in a position to suggest how it might be improved and that this is the responsibility of the organisation. Others believed it was the responsibility of volunteers to draw people in, and tried to do their bit by encouraging friends and offering to mentor new volunteers.

Recruitment takes place across a continuum from unplanned to strategically planned, so that those involved in recruitment need to understand the social contexts and individual situations of the existing and potential volunteer workforce. When planning or thinking about volunteering, volunteers make decisions around fitting in volunteering with spending time with their spouse, looking after grandchildren and involvement in other voluntary organisations. The way they manage these various activities and commitments will be taken up in Chapter 8, which deals with the constraints on volunteering.

Summary

This chapter has identified complex patterns of volunteering over the life course. These can be simplified into those who volunteer before and after retirement (early and later stage volunteers). There are also – gendered – patterns of labour market participation. Those with a lifetime of caring for family are all women, as might be expected. Those with a lifetime of employment may be men or women. These patterns dovetail to form three types of volunteering pathway. Those in a ‘volunteering-employment’ pathway combine both activities over the life course. Only a small proportion of women are likely
6. Becoming a volunteer

to follow this pattern. It is exclusively women who follow the ‘volunteering-caring’ combination over their life course. Later stage volunteering predominantly occurs when employment is followed sequentially by volunteering after retirement. Both men and women may follow this pattern. There is only a tiny group of women for whom later stage volunteering takes the form of caring for the family sequentially followed by volunteering.

Four factors were significant as explanations that people gave for volunteering; life events, networks, personal needs and attitudes, and context. Retirement and bereavement were particularly significant life events. The need for a structure in one’s life after retirement was an important reason for volunteering. Women were affected more by family transitions such as children attending school, getting married and moving away etc than were men. For women with a lifetime of care, volunteering was more of a continuation of what they were used to doing, but for a small minority, retirement from a life of care enabled them to volunteer.

Decisions on whether to volunteer are also influenced by networks of family and friends. Involvement in other social groups and previous employment provide networks that can draw an individual into volunteering. Volunteering was sometimes explained by an understanding of individuals’ own personalities and needs, with some people actively seeking volunteer opportunities on their own accord and others having to be asked. For many people, volunteering provides a role and identity and opportunities to learn new skills. Finally, the context of values and norms for volunteering was also significant.

Recruitment practices need to bear in mind these explanations. Voluntary organisations have to be strategic, practical and imaginative to tap into the rich resource of older people. This is a challenge because at this stage in their lives, older people are faced with a variety of choices and constraints. These in turn are influenced by the various meanings they attach to volunteering as an activity as well as the outcomes of their volunteering experience, the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 7 Being a volunteer: meanings and roles

Introduction

This chapter looks at the meanings volunteers give to their volunteering experience; how they understand their volunteering in the pattern of their day to day life. Some commentators emphasise the contrasts between volunteering and paid work, which is characterised by economic necessity, extrinsic rewards, dutiful commitment and compliance (Noon and Blyton 2002). Personal commitment arises from the meanings and values that volunteers attach to what they do. It is such individual understandings that underlie the degree of commitment people have to their volunteering role. In an employment role, work and commitment is ultimately sanctioned by monetary rewards. But, as Noon and Blyton suggest, social expectations and individual conscience are also important. Commitment to unpaid work of any kind – whether informally within the family or community or formally within organisations – is sanctioned by conceptions of citizenship and personal obligation. We can only identify what sustains volunteering by ascertaining the meanings and understandings that volunteers themselves draw from their volunteering activity. This also allows us to see how volunteers conceptualise themselves as citizens. The chapter draws upon the rich data provided in the interviews to analyse the words that volunteers themselves use as they give meaning to their daily life, as they provide a narrative through which they understand their volunteering. In doing this, interviewees talk of their volunteering in terms that recall working for employment, working as they care for family or friends, and non-work activities in their leisure time.

The chapter starts from the ways in which interviewees see volunteering as giving them a place in society and the community. Volunteers are here explicitly constructing themselves as citizens (though they never use that word). The following section looks at the range of ways in which volunteers gain enjoyment and personal satisfaction from volunteering. Part of this satisfaction is based on personal development. Participating in collective activities is an important aspect of volunteering for many individuals. Their accounts show that volunteer opportunities at Age Concern Newcastle enable older people to be ‘active citizens’ in ways that policy makers promote as contributing to social capital. The third substantive section asks just how the role of volunteer is actually being seen by interviewees. On the one hand, people volunteer precisely because the work is undertaken on a voluntary basis. So volunteering is constructed in terms of leisure, but it is also compared with caring for family or friends. The freedom and flexibility of volunteering is highly valued. Yet volunteers also make formal commitments to volunteering and draw comparisons with paid employment.

It is only once we understand the complex nature of the meanings that people draw from volunteering that we can gain more practical insight into the limitations on the nature and

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34 Paid work is also based on the principle of ‘exchange’ which involves instrumental calculations, whereas volunteering is more likely to be based on the idea of the ‘gift-giving’ that possesses moral rather than market value (Bauman and May 2001).
35 Interviewees volunteered for other organisations as well as Age Concern Newcastle, and this chapter analyses conceptions of volunteering within all organisations.
7. Being a volunteer

amount of volunteering work that people are prepared to do. These constraints are the subject of the next chapter, in which the allocation of time in the day to day life of volunteers is analysed.

Volunteering as giving a place in society

I think you know, people should, it’s nice to put something back. That’s a horrible, sanctimonious cliché you know, I like to give something back, but I can’t think of any other way I can describe it you know. (Ms Dodds)

Interviewees did not always find it easy to express their personal understandings of volunteering, and might struggle to find words for what volunteering meant to them. For many, however, it was clear that volunteering gave them an accepted place in society and in their community. Volunteering in other words, was closely tied to how they understood their role as citizens, though that label was never used in the interviews.

This is how Mr Moore sees belonging to society:

I’m always, I try to get involved with things where one of two things happen, either you directly or indirectly are contributing to the improvement of people’s quality of life and if you’ve got a conscience and if you’ve got some sense of, you know, we’re all in this life together rather than just take what you can, then you know, there’s more than a place for altruism, you know. I mean it’s absolutely part of the glue of society (Mr Moore)

Mrs Davidson contrasts volunteering with selfishness, and sees belonging to society a matter of being needed:

I mean, what else would one do? Anything else that you’d do would probably be a selfish thing I mean a self-centred thing. I suppose one might join some sort of club or something but you certainly wouldn’t feel it’s the being wanted I suppose, being needed is a very, very big part of it. (Mrs Davidson)

There are a number of ways in which interviewees express how they see their volunteering as a matter of giving to society. Here are Mr Wheeler’s words:

But that, there might be a sense of duty you know, do you know what I mean, a feeling that it’s, I owe it to something or another, I don’t know how to describe that. It’s probably a thing that I think well things have been pretty good for me and I ought to do a little bit towards sharing that around a bit. (Mr Wheeler)

In her interview, Mrs Lee explains how she values the way minority ethnic people are looked after in British society. To her, volunteering is all about contributing to society
7. Being a volunteer

and sharing in this society because this is better than just thinking about ‘taking’ from society.\(^3^6\)

If everyone tries to take something out of the society, the society is very empty. If someone can put something into the society, the society is very warm. (Mrs Lee)

Some volunteers, like Mrs Willis, draw attention to the failures of other groups in society to illustrate their own attitudes.

And I think these people should be encouraged to volunteer and to do something for what they’re getting. I don’t think you should be getting for nothing in this world. I think you have to give as well as get. To give as well as to take. To give and take is very important. And I do think in a voluntary sense they should be made to do it. I’m sorry I’ve not worded it very cleverly. (Mrs Willis)

The understandings expressed so far resonate with meanings of volunteering as altruistic: where regard for others is the principle for a course of action. Using an anthropological perspective, Eckstein (2001:830) describes volunteering as ‘gift-giving’ where ‘the gift is its own reward in that it induces social obligations, including repayment with a counter gift’. Eckstein identifies this gift-giving as part of a system of reciprocity that is significant at the level of the collective. This coincides with the way some volunteers construct their sense of reciprocity around giving in return for receiving from society.

Other volunteers are less general in their references, placing themselves as contributing to a specific community rather than to society as a whole. A number of volunteers identified themselves with older people as a particular group in society, warranting more help than others:

I wanted to work with older people, well I wanted to sort of do some voluntary work with older people, give some of my time to older people because I think they’re a much maligned group, social group in the community and I think they’re patronised and I think that they’re ignored whereas children are right at the top. (Ms Dodds)

Many volunteers express more loyalty to the group of people they help than to the organisation with which they volunteer:

The work I do is for the people, not particularly for Age Concern. It’s for the folks that come along to have their lunch, that’s how I see it. (Mrs Dickinson)

Indeed, volunteering with a particular community in mind was often described in terms of ‘helping’. For example, Mrs Willis sees herself as ‘a little cog in the wheel of helping’. Others describe volunteering as ‘helping people less fortunate than yourself’ (Mrs Atkinson) and performed ‘out of the goodness of your heart’ (Mrs Dutton). This language of ‘giving’ and ‘helping’ was not as common among the male current volunteers, and

\(^{3^6}\) Stereotypes of minority ethnic people as being dependent on the state need challenging as much as those that exist for older people.
7. Being a volunteer

men spoke more about the enjoyment they got out of volunteering. Formal volunteers were frequently involved with informal volunteering activities in their neighbourhood, and they speak of this too, in terms of ‘helping the frail and elderly’. This ‘help’ is part of being a good neighbour, and was not perceived as informal volunteering.

Volunteering for work with a specific group often gave people a sense of belonging to the group that at times was described as a ‘family’. Mrs Hetherington is typical of those who see volunteering in Age Concern Newcastle as joining a family set up.

And that’s all I expected and actually it exceeded my expectations because you’re really valued by them and I didn’t really expect that. I expected to sort of go in, do me stuff, come away but you’re one of them, that you become kind of one of the, one of the family. It’s quite a sort of familial set up and you become one of the family and everybody gets to know everybody and you are valued as, you’re not just a volunteer. (Mrs Hetherington)

There are also volunteers who express their volunteering in terms of repaying the organisation for all that it has done for them. Mrs Cooper thoroughly enjoys her volunteering and sees her commitment in this light:

So I feel I don’t mind what I do for Age Concern because they did a lot for me in those years. Yes, they did really. (Mrs Cooper)

In other cases, being a member of a national organisation that provides a voice for older people made them feel they belonged to a wider cause. This contributes to the sense of mutual aid that is ‘characterised by individuals with a shared experience or situation working together to bring about change’ (Baines and Hardill 2005:6) but goes beyond it. Whether it was to contribute to society as a whole, or to a specific group in society, the vast majority of interviewees looked upon volunteering in terms of reciprocity and gift-giving. This interpretation made volunteering a very positive experience, as it contributed to a sense of belonging. The high value placed on reciprocity among older people may be explained by the sense of individuality and self-respect that it engenders (Wilson 1993).

Volunteering as enjoying yourself

I enjoy it like, it’s good, I enjoy it. We have some good laughs with the old people. Well some of them are not much older than me [laughs] they aren’t but there’s some hardships amongst them, I enjoy it, we have a good laugh with them……. But no, I just enjoy going, you get a good laugh and a good mix you know. You make a jibe and get a bit carry on with them. (Mr Lamb)

37 In one study of the experience of ageing, a rich pattern of reciprocity was identified, with older people actively ‘giving’ help and not just receiving it (Godfrey et al. 2004). Such one-to-one helping on an informal basis is what is called the ‘fourth sector’ occupying the gaps not filled by private, public sectors and third sector or formal volunteering (Williams 2003a).
7. Being a volunteer

Many volunteers describe what they do as fun and a source of happiness or great joy that gives them a ‘feel good’ factor. This fun-loving aspect of volunteering links with the personalities of individual volunteers. Mrs Dutton in particular likes to ‘play the fool’, while humour is important to Mr Martin:

But having said that my approach to people is, have more humour than anything else, or rather have a carry on. I can’t be serious unfortunately and people say you shouldn’t say things like that, you shouldn’t do this, you shouldn’t do that. My wife used to say look you shouldn’t say things like that to them but again she was right in a way because some people couldn’t take my sense of humour. But never mind [laughs]. (Mr Martin)

The enthusiastic enjoyment that people derive from volunteering suggests it fits into the pattern of their day to day life in a way that bears similarities to leisure. Mr Cameron is explicit about the leisure and relaxation needs of men who have had a lifetime of manual labour. These must be recognised if they are to be recruited as volunteers:

They are less - I’m trying to get the right word - they’re less aware of need……. I mean the people who’ve been in heavy manual work are so tired - I mean, they just enjoy switching-off.39

Volunteering also provides the chance for people to take their minds off their own problems by concentrating on something else. Mrs Mitchell valued the opportunity to volunteer because it took her away from the anxieties surrounding her family. Asked to describe what she would miss if she stopped volunteering, she responded:

I would miss, I’d miss the routine, the camaraderie, the feeling of belonging to something other than one’s private family concerns and worries. (Mrs Mitchell)

Many explicitly see volunteering as benefiting themselves more than others:

It’s never been a problem this activity. It’s not a chore. It’s not something for any financial or gains in any way. The benefits that I’ve mentioned before have come about as a consequence of my being aware of the fact that I’m getting more out of it. (Mr Adamson)

The enjoyment of volunteering can also derive from the intrinsic satisfaction of a job well done. Here is a volunteer at a lunch club:

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38 Although none of the interviewees has described volunteering specifically as ‘leisure’, the ways in which they describe it corresponds with the experience of leisure, as characterised by choice, enjoyment, relaxation and intrinsic motivation (Shaw 1985).
39 According to Perren et al (2003), working class older men are more likely to be involved in social clubs than community and religious organisations or sports clubs, and divorced men were least likely to be involved in any group.
7. Being a volunteer

Mrs Dickinson: Well, there’s a sense of satisfaction being able to produce what we feel is a very good meal. And the people enjoy it and that’s what we find enjoyable.

Interviewer: You must like cooking?

Mrs Dickinson: I do, I do like cooking yeah. I think that’s basically it. I like to think of a meal that I’d give to say my father who died a few years ago but something that he probably wouldn’t make for himself. They come and have a home cooked meal that they wouldn’t be able to produce themselves for one person. And that’s the sort of sense of satisfaction. (Mrs Dickinson)

The reactions of those who have been touched by the actions of the volunteer can also be intrinsically rewarding.

And you do, you do feel rewarded when you’ve helped somebody when they go out and say, when you talk to them because they’ve been on their own, and they get up and say eh well thank you very much pet, you know. And I say OK, that’s what we’re here for, and off they go, you know. And you can see well you know and they’re more cheerful and yes, you are rewarded for it. (Mrs Hetherington)

But I just like dealing with people because to me we’ll put it in the context of cleaning [place]. All when I clean [place], all I see is whether the floor’s clean and the toilet’s clean, there’s a shine on the table, you’re not getting nothing back from that. With the people you get back, you get back what you give. (Mrs Armstrong)

The pleasure people experience from volunteering relates to their specific biographies, social histories and family circumstances, and so is to a degree individualised (Clarke and Roberts 2004). A consequence of volunteering is often an increased knowledge of oneself:

But no, as I say, you find out about yourself, you find out a lot of things about yourself that you know, people do sort of value you just for what you are, you know sort of, as a person rather than sort of well oh I’ve got to be nice to her because she’s the boss you know. (Mrs Hetherington)

The enjoyment that people experience when they volunteer is much more than ‘leisure like’ as it lays the foundation for personal change and development. Mrs Fraser provides a striking example of this. From being one who lived in the shadow of her husband and ‘content to bask in his glory’, she found her own identity and self-confidence through volunteering for Age Concern Newcastle. In the section for individual comments in the postal questionnaire, she wrote:

‘One of the best decisions I ever made – from being introvert I found my potential and confidence’

40 However, volunteering does not occur independently of social and cultural contexts (see Chapter 6), and is constantly negotiated by people within socio-economic constraints (Chapter 8).
Satisfaction and pleasure can also come from the development of knowledge and skills, adding to personal social capital:

I’ve learnt a lot through doing volunteering. I’ve gained a lot of knowledge. My friend’s always saying that she’s been to university - the university of life. Well so have I! You learn a lot as you go along and you learn different skills too as you go along which your own life and your own family and extended family can get benefit of. (Mrs Benn)

Mr Adamson is explicit that he has learned how to undertake caring tasks:

[volunteering] got me doing things, which when I look back I wouldn’t have thought I’d have been capable or prepared to do, sort of, taking them to the toilet and all the rest of it. (Mr Adamson)

Thus volunteering builds up self-worth, and provides valuable opportunities for personal development and lifelong learning. In a word, volunteering builds active citizenship.

Volunteering as choice or commitment?

You do it because you want to do it and you like doing it. That’s the main thing. (Mrs McAllister).

Common to all the volunteers is the fact that volunteering is what it is: doing things voluntarily, out of their own free will, and often on their own terms. This intrinsic quality of volunteering, of being able to ‘set your own stipulations’ (Mrs Davidson), described as ‘the beauty of volunteering’ by Ms Graham, is what makes many volunteers emphatic that there should be no financial rewards. ‘You volunteer because you want to. That’s reward enough’, says Mrs Dutton. This is important to bear in mind as having independence, control and autonomy contribute much to the quality of life of older people especially as they face the challenges of later life (Bowling et al. 2002).

Volunteering out of choice in this sort of way corresponds to some extent in the way in which people participate in leisure or recreational activities. Volunteers can be considered ‘consumers’ who have a choice over what they do in an increasingly consumer-oriented society (Fischer and Schaffer 1993). But often volunteers say that they are doing what comes naturally to them, or as Mrs Granger puts it: ‘it just comes automatic to me because I love people’.

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41 Handy and her colleagues found that ‘remuneration (monetary or otherwise) to the individual has a definite negative impact on people’s perception on who is a volunteer’….but ‘private benefits of either kind reduce the net cost to the volunteer’ (Handy et al. 2000:63).

42 Later life is also seen as ‘a time of new opportunity and freedom from responsibility’ (Wray 2003) and ‘ageing successfully’ is all about remaining active [cf. ‘activity theory’ (Wilson 2000)].
7. Being a volunteer

However, other volunteers view their volunteering in the light of paid employment. Mrs Singh constructs her volunteering as ‘working’ like the younger people, a way of feeling that she is not ‘old’ (as well as a way of belonging to society).43 For those men who have had a life-time of employment, the social contacts and networks are a valuable part of what they get out of volunteering, and can provide a substitute for employment experience:

That’s why I got into it, plus what I get out of it myself because there’s got to be a bit of self-interest there, altruism, you know, it can be ninety percent but you need to have something that, you know, you get a kick out of it, a contact out of it, you know. I mean in some positions you get involved, you get invitations which is quite nice, you know. (Mr Moore)

I mean you see them in different places and this networking and keeping in touch, something which when you’re working you have naturally….Even when people retire some people tell me that they do miss very much that network of people in there, which I don’t miss, because I get it from this. (Mr Lawrence)

The overlap between understandings of volunteering and paid work is demonstrated by the way that many interviewees frame their experience of volunteering in terms of ‘work’:

And I keep saying, “I’m going back to work” and my children say, “You can’t work” and I say, “Well you know, back to [Age Concern Newcastle]” “It’s not working”. And I said, “It is working, volunteering is working, don’t run away with the idea it isn’t!” (Mrs Benn)

The ways in which some interviewees describe their volunteering confirm it as having work-like characteristics. For example, volunteering can mirror paid work as tightly scheduled or unpredictable:

I came to realise it’s like working in a restaurant you know, sort of for two parts of the day you’re rushed off your feet and you feel that your head’s breaking and then the rest of the day you’re sitting around like this and there’s nothing can be done, that’s just how it is, the nature of it. (Mrs Mitchell)

Volunteers highlight features of voluntary work as purposeful and productive activity that provides structure and meaning to life (Jahoda, 1978). This is also evidenced by several references to a ‘work ethic’ that goes beyond economic need.

it’s this work ethic you know that we’ve been brought up with, plus the Catholic background that I’m from and I thought eeh, I’d better do some voluntary work. (Ms Dodds)

43 Interestingly, her desire to be a part of society was framed not around her ethnicity but her age.
7. Being a volunteer

One of the characteristics of paid work is its centrality in people’s lives in the sense that it generally occupies a large proportion of people’s waking hours. Some people would be bereft without volunteering, would hate to give it up:

I don’t like to stop! If I stop I will be finished. My own health, own brain - what I do for people. I’ve nothing left in my life. My husband not here. My children have own life. I’m a lonely person, so how I can live without being a volunteer. I will be depressed, you know? (Mrs Singh)

Mrs Hedley has a host of health problems but vows she won’t stop volunteering till she is 90. For Mrs Gibson, the lunch club is so much a part of her life that she couldn’t get away from thinking about its needs on a day to day basis. Ms Forster, who is single and aged over 90, has spent more than 30 years volunteering and spends most of her week at the centre. For such people with lots of commitment and time invested in the voluntary activity, the effects of leaving volunteering can be similar to someone in paid employment being made redundant.

On the other hand, for a small minority it is the comparison between employment and volunteering that underlies a refusal to volunteer. Mrs James is a leisure and learning user who worked from 14 till she was 67, one of very few who has never volunteered. Mrs James had an ingrained work ethic that emphasised dutiful commitment and disciplined compliance which means that she could not see herself adopting a ‘voluntary’ attitude.

Mrs James: that’s your job, you’re going to get paid for it at the end of the week, but you see you’re not going to get paid for the volunteer job…..So you can more or less, to me, please yourself, oh I’ll not come in tomorrow but that’s not, that’s not

Interviewer: That’s not you.

Mrs James: No, that’s not my attitude towards it.

Indeed volunteering, like paid work, can often impinge on home life, crossing the private boundary of the household:

when I do letters to them I put my home telephone number on the letter and I say, “If you’re not able to come ring my number but ring before 8am in the morning” because after that I’m out of the house I’m down at my daughter’s at 8am usually or “ring the night before to say you’re not able to come.” They tend to ring up and say, “Is that the Day Club” and my husband says, “No. It’s not!” (Mrs Black)

When volunteering gets too much like paid work and does not lead to an employment opportunity, it can result in volunteers leaving, as we shall see in Chapter 8.

44 The consequences for such people need to be considered, if volunteer posts become paid posts and volunteers are made ‘redundant’ for all sorts of reasons, e.g. around reliability, professionalism, to make room for younger volunteers etc.
In the same way that volunteering is sometimes discussed as an extension or replacement of paid work, it can also be compared with the informal or family care-giving that (particularly female) volunteers have devoted many years to. Often this is dependent on the type of person the volunteer is:

I’ve been touched by some people that come in and they’ve either lost their husband or wife or they’re at a very low ebb …. I’m a very emotional person anyway so I get quite affected by that and when I see them getting distressed I want to go round them and give them a big cuddle and say it’s ok and that everything will be fine. Then there are others that come in that can be really stroppy. And I usually can deal with them as well. I try and offer them a cup of tea. And I chat to them. (Mrs Benn)

These comparisons tend to be made in volunteer roles such as befriending, where people who have been looking after elderly parents or relatives go on to volunteer to visit older people in their homes. But volunteering in a lunch club can have elements of caring, particularly where volunteers go beyond the activities expected of them.

**An example of caring**

Mrs Burn described how as someone who had the responsibility of giving out birthday cards to club members, she discovered that one lady was in hospital. As this blind elderly lady was on her own but not in sheltered accommodation she decided to make a trip to visit her to give her the card. Mrs Burn then explained how she arrived at the hospital to find that the lady she was visiting had a pile of get well cards that no one had read to her, and proceeded to spend the rest of the afternoon with her.

Many of the interviewees acknowledge the informal caring content of the volunteering work they do:

And again, sometimes people might just want to come and sit and have a chat and you can go and sit next to the table and have a bit of coffee and chat to them as well. (Mrs Campbell)

But most of us are like that, the older ones, we’re there to try and help people. But this is what we like to, and we want to get out and see other people and things like that. (Ms Forster)

Sometimes volunteers go beyond their role to make that extra effort to see to the welfare of the people they serve:

So anyway I was struggling but I did get her out of the house and down the steps and out you see, took her to hospital. And then I says well you know, we couldn’t get anybody to take her back. So I went and saw the hospital people. I got on to them. I explained the whole situation and there was a lot of argy-bargy but in the end I did get an ambulance. So I organised that and got her taken home in the ambulance. I
told them I said well I said I could just walk away from here, I said I just come to sort of be with her in case she wanted anything. (Mr Nesbit)

Formal volunteering places limits on the role of the volunteer in terms of the amount of time and the kinds of activities undertaken, whereas being a family ‘carer’ or being a ‘good neighbour’ is less likely to have formalised limits. However, volunteers assume that the jobs they do are not paid, because being located in charitable organisations, resources are limited. If the volunteers see certain jobs as paid, while others of a similar nature are not, tensions can arise:

I do feel a little bit about some of the people, they call them volunteers, that do like take the, take the line dancing for instance or take the computer classes and whatnot, they’re volunteers but they get paid and that’s why they [service-users] have to pay more money to compensate for the payment they give these volunteers. Now I, I say well I don’t think they should call them volunteers if they’re getting paid. They’re instructors you know and that’s it. (Mr Dawson)

To sum up: volunteers see their work in terms of enjoying a freedom to choose how they conduct their day to day lives, a take which bears certain similarities to leisure. Yet volunteering comes with a level of commitment to the volunteering role. In many volunteer roles, volunteers are not only committed in terms of time, but committed to their service-users, attempting to do their best for them. The ways in which volunteers express commitment to their volunteering role can be described in two ways: ‘work-like’ and ‘care-like’. The degree of commitment to the volunteering role is a function of the kinds of meanings and values attached to the work: volunteering as giving, helping, belonging to a group, enjoyment, satisfaction and learning.

Summary

Interviewees’ accounts of their volunteering experiences revealed that volunteering has meanings and outcomes in relation to society as well as in relation to the individual. The interviewees constructed volunteering in terms of contributing to the community, as helping people and giving back something to society - often in return for benefits that they had received over the course of their lives. The consequence is that volunteers feel useful and needed as a member of a group, often characterised by mutual aid and self-help. This has implications for citizenship and belonging to society (see Chapter 10).

The personal rewards gained from volunteering are often tied to individual histories of work and caring. Most volunteers loved volunteering and expressed what it meant to them in terms of enjoyment, intrinsic rewards, sociability, personal development and fulfilment. This gives some mileage to the conceptualisation of volunteering as a form of leisure. Volunteering promoted self-respect, building and strengthening the personal networks of older people, and developing active citizenship. These are all valuable for enhancing the quality of life of older volunteers.
7. Being a volunteer

One of the key understandings that interviewees attach to volunteering is that it is independent of financial rewards. Although volunteering is appreciated for some of its paid employment characteristics - for example, the way that it can structure time - volunteers see independence, control and autonomy as valuable characteristics of their volunteering work. The chapter concludes by exploring the ways in which volunteering is experienced as employment-like or caring-like, as this can give volunteers positive models of day to day life as a volunteer. Ultimately the meanings that volunteers construct around their volunteering activity are a complex mix of comparisons with leisure, employment and unpaid caring. Underpinning this complexity is the straightforward understanding that volunteering is just that; it is voluntary.

The evidence reported in this chapter supports some of the most positive expectations of volunteering. Moreover, it shows volunteering can make a significant contribution to the policy agendas of promoting active ageing and increasing social participation. We return to these themes in Chapter 10 where we discuss how volunteering for older people is linked with ideas of citizenship. We turn in the next chapter to the capacity of older people to give time to volunteering.
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

Chapter 8 What affects the capacity to volunteer? Time and other constraints

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with factors that enable and constrain the capacity of older people to volunteer. Much of it is about time and daily activities. We also discuss other factors e.g. location that impact upon the time people are able to give to volunteering. The last two sections discuss the special needs of those aged over 75 and the factors leading people to stop their volunteering activity.

In the questionnaire survey ‘to put my spare time to good use’ was the most popular response to the question about reasons for volunteering. It was selected by nearly three fifths (56 per cent) of current volunteers aged 55 or over but by only 40 per cent of their younger counterparts. This suggests a residue of unused time among older citizens that can be accessed by volunteer-using organisations. As reported in chapter 6, retirement was an event that many interviewees described as contributing to their interest in volunteering. Fiona Devine (2003) found that older people recounted that they ‘jumped for joy’ at the opportunity to volunteer after retirement. A recent study of volunteering after retirement, however, observes that older people find it difficult to fit volunteering into their increasingly busy lives (Davis Smith and Gay 2005).

In chapter 5, we provided a snapshot of the social and civic participation of volunteers by gender and age. In this chapter, we focus firstly upon the 107 questionnaire responses from current Age Concern Newcastle volunteers aged 55 and over in order to describe the time they devote to volunteering and other activities. Then we turn to the 40 in-depth interviews with Age Concern Newcastle current volunteers. These richer data enable us delve below the surface of the figures and interrogate how people understand their volunteering and time use, and how they manage volunteering alongside other activities and commitments. Older people face specific constraints on their volunteering and their attitudes to these are then examined. Some constraints however, affect volunteers to such an extent that they decide to leave volunteering altogether.

Volunteering and time use

 Volunteers aged 55 and over reported, overall, quite substantial time commitments in various caring and community roles:
- More than half (56%) volunteer informally
- More than two fifths (43%) volunteer for another organisation
- Just over two fifths (42%) are members of a church or other religious organisation
- More than a third (37%) have caring commitments
- A third (33 %) regularly visit an elderly or sick person
- One fifth (20%) care for grandchildren.
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

Only four per cent of this age group were doing any paid work (employed or self-employed) at the time of the questionnaire and only one individual was in full-time employment.

Volunteers aged 55 and over who responded to the current volunteers’ questionnaire reported time commitments to Age Concern Newcastle that varied from half an hour up to 20 hours per week. The most typical weekly hours were between two and four, with more than half of all responses falling within that range. Some volunteers contribute only intermittently, such as two and half days a month, or five hours a week but only when required. The average (mean\(^{45}\)) weekly time given to Age Concern Newcastle for all respondents aged 55 and over was 4.2 hours. Time spent volunteering was similar for women and men and tended to decline with age. In the 55-64 age group, a weekly average of 4.7 hours was given to Age Concern Newcastle. This fell to 3.9 for those aged 65-74. It was a little higher at 4.2 for those aged 75 or over (see Table 8.1).

A large minority of respondents, as indicated above, volunteer for more than one organisation. Age Concern Newcastle volunteers give their time to a wide variety of volunteer-using organisations. These were most typically associated with religion and health but also included schools and colleges, charity shops, children’s charities, residents’ and community associations, support groups for ex-service people, and women’s groups. The amount of time given to these organisations by Age Concern Newcastle volunteers is high. Nearly half (46 per cent) of those who responded positively to the question about such activity reported giving more time to other organisations than to Age Concern Newcastle.

Of the 46 respondents who volunteer for other organisations, 35 gave an indication of the time involved. There was a very wide range (half an hour up to 20 hours per week) with an average (mean) of 6.8 hours. The difference by gender is marked – a mean of 9.7 hours for men and only 5.4 hours for women. Table 8.1 summarises the average hours per week volunteered for Age Concern Newcastle and for other organisations by age and gender. There were only four individuals (one man and three women) aged over 74 who reported volunteering elsewhere in addition to Age Concern Newcastle.

\(^{45}\) The ‘mean’ is the arithmetic average of a set of numbers and is what is most commonly understood by ‘average’. It is calculated by adding all the values in a set of data and dividing the result by the number of observations. It is affected by extreme ‘outlying’ values.
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

Table 8.1: Formal Volunteering by Age and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 and over</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>20&quot;o</td>
<td>7.2&quot;&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time given to all formal volunteering (i.e. Age Concern Newcastle plus other organisations) is presented in summary form in Figure 8.1. The bar chart illustrates the quite substantial amount of time spent in formal volunteering especially by men in the ‘younger’ older group, whose contributions average more than ten hours per week. These hours are certainly underestimates as there were 11 respondents who indicated that they volunteer formally outside Age Concern Newcastle but did not give an estimation of the time involved. The time male volunteers report giving to formal volunteering is higher than their female counterparts in each age group. Time spent volunteering appears overall to decline with age. It should be noted however that this overall trend hides very marked individual differences.

Figure 8.1 does not include men aged over 75 because of the low number (four) in that group who responded to the questionnaire. Of these four older men, one volunteered for a total of 34 hours per week and the others for two or three hours.

\[\text{Footnotes:} \]
\[\text{\footnote{46}} \text{ One case} \]
\[\text{\footnote{47}} \text{ Three cases} \]
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

![Graph showing average time spent in formal volunteering by age band and gender]

**Figure 8.1: Average time spent in formal volunteering**

So far we have discussed ‘formal’ volunteering, i.e. giving time to others through an organisation or group. Formal volunteering is distinguished by its context from informal neighbouring and time giving on a one-to-one basis. Giving time to others informally (outside any organisation) was reported by more than half of the questionnaire respondents. The most typical informal activity they reported was visiting an elderly or sick person.

In the survey (cf. Chapter 5), we asked questionnaire respondents to quantify the time they gave to ‘informal’ volunteering. We also asked them about caring commitments or responsibilities (e.g. if they cared for grandchildren or for disabled/elderly relatives). Time spent in these ways is not easy for people to calculate and a lower proportion of respondents attempted to do so than for formal volunteering. We have taken the answers to these questions from the older respondents (aged 55 and over) in order to estimate patterns of time in informal volunteering and caring alongside formal volunteering. These figures are indicative of the complexity of people’s responsibilities and time commitments.

Of the 60 volunteers aged 55 and over who indicated that they undertook informal voluntary activity, two thirds (40) recorded the time they gave to it. The range was half an hour up to 24 hours per week. An average (mean) of 3.4 hours was reported by this group. Those who indicated that they volunteered informally but did not attempt to
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

quantify the time involved gave explanatory comments including ‘only when asked’; ‘random - unable to calculate’, and ‘whenever needed’. Weekly hours reported for formal and informal volunteering are put together in Table 8.2. The figure for men aged 75 and over is in italics and must be read with the low number of cases in this cell (just 4) in mind.

Table 8.2: Combined formal and informal volunteering by age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Combined formal and informal volunteering (mean hours per week)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (N=20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 and over</td>
<td>10.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One third of respondents aged 55 and over indicated that they had regular caring commitments or responsibilities. A fifth of the age group (20 women and two men) cared for grandchildren. Six volunteers (five women and one man) said they cared for a spouse and four (all women) for others. Altogether 35 individuals aged 55 and over reported that they had regular caring commitments or responsibilities but only 16 quantified the number of hours they spent on caring. The weekly time given to caring by this group ranged from just two hours up to 72. There were six individuals – five women and one man – who cared for 20 hours per week or more. We also asked respondents to indicate if their caring was ‘every day’ or ‘depending on situation’. Nine indicated that it was ‘everyday’, including six who did not quantify the time spent. Open ended comments on the nature of caring included childcare cover during school holidays, and caring for a 90-year-old sister living in the same house.

The hours devoted to caring by volunteers were extremely varied, sometimes high, and much more difficult to quantify than the other activities about which we requested information. It was female volunteers who characteristically devoted time to caring although one male volunteer cared 40 hours per week for his wife.

Scarcity and abundance of time

In the volunteer interviews we asked forty people aged 55 and over to talk about their current day to day activities. We used prompt questions such as, ‘please describe a typical day’ to encourage them to elaborate. Often their accounts of time use are quite bland, consisting of description and lists. Typically the allocation of time to volunteering and

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48 There are only 4 cases in this cell
other activities was not identified as a difficult issue by these volunteers. In general, this suggests that they are comfortable with the way they balance activities on a daily and weekly basis. There was a minority, however, who did make strong statements about time in relation to their volunteering. Some of them value volunteering because it fills up unused time while a few, in contrast, report that they struggle to find enough time for volunteering and other activities.

For some volunteers time was actually or potentially a burden. Volunteering was important in their lives because it gave the much desired structure to the day and week (see also Chapter 7). This was typically articulated in terms of replicating the time use patterns of full-time employment:

Since I’ve been retired I’ve obviously I started straight away to need some structure to the days and some end project to be part of. Freedom and holidays are all very well provided they contrast with something else. But if you’ve got nothing but that it’s terrible (Mrs Mitchell)

I mean fair enough my husband was still coming in from work and me son came up and visited and what have you but anyone who’s kind of on their own and with no structure to your week at all, not sort of, I would have to join more clubs and societies and things like that in the village. (Mrs Hetherington)

Another retired volunteer – who unlike Mrs Mitchell had been volunteering in some form for all his adult life – expressed the relationship between retirement and free time more lightly. Time, in his experience, does not need to be accounted for in retirement as in working life and as a result volunteering expands:

Maybe if I added it all up [time spent volunteering] I would wonder whether I should be doing as much so it’s a dangerous exercise.....I guess in common with many retired people, time isn’t of the essence so things that I’m wanting to do can be stretched over a longer period - and nobody minds except my wife [laughs]. (Mr Wheeler)

Volunteering could also fill a gap in people’s lives associated with the loss of caring roles. Mrs Davidson for example explained that excessive free time followed both retirement and changed family circumstances. In common with Mrs Mitchell she talked of the short-lived elation of unaccustomed free time:

I was a widow when I retired and my children had left home - I was actually looking after my mother-in-law - suddenly when all your responsibilities go you can be very selfish. And it’s lovely to be selfish for six months or so! You think I can do all those things that I’d never had time to do before. And then you think, well what’s the point of doing all these things just for yourself and it’s nice to do things for other people and feel you’re communicating with other people and you’re useful to other people. (Mrs Davidson)
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

As indicated in Chapter 6, it was not typical for women who had been in caring and domestic roles for most or all of their adult lives to enter volunteering for the first time in later life. An exception was Mrs Singh. She became a ‘later stage’ volunteer initially in a hospital and more recently as a befriender. She explained that without volunteering in her life she would be reduced to sitting at home, sighing and wondering how to pass the day.

For a few interviewees, in stark contrast, time was scarce and subject to conflicting demands. This was the case, for example, for one of the very few older volunteers who had any form of paid work at the time of the interview. Mr Wheeler is a multiple volunteer in several roles and also offers consultancy services part-time on a self-employed basis. He commented that he was able to manage the tensions of his ‘time and work commitments’ by reducing his (very flexible) paid work and accepting the financial loss. The most extreme account of time for volunteering as a difficult balancing act, however, was from Mrs Armstrong who in common with the majority of older volunteers has no paid work. She is a multiple volunteer and cares for her now severely disabled husband, who spends Tuesdays and Fridays at a day centre. She preferred not to volunteer on those two days because she wanted time for herself:

I didn’t want to do a Friday [at the lunch club] I really didn’t but I couldn’t not do it now because that club is so short of volunteers….you feel like even when your personal life intervenes you feel guilty because you think oh God, they [fellow volunteers] are doing all this on their own, you know.

Much more typically, however, the current volunteer interviewees talked about volunteering (for Age Concern Newcastle and for other organisations) that fits comfortably into their daily lives. This is true of volunteers in all volunteer roles and whatever the amount of time they give to volunteering.

As highlighted in Chapter 7, the theme that was re-iterated again and again in various words was freedom to choose, including when, and how much, to volunteer. This apparent truism can hide a strong sense of obligation, which explains not only the amount of time given to volunteering but the commitment to be a reliable volunteer.

Sometimes the freedom associated with volunteering time was expressed in terms of lack of compulsion from others:

I mean you’ve got choice when you’re a volunteer!! [laughter] They don’t say, “You’ve got to do it!”….You can give as little or as much as you need to give
(Mrs Campbell)

Other interviewees explicitly contrasted the flexibility of time given to volunteering with what they thought of as the rigidity of paid work (see Chapter 7). This is how Mrs Mackenzie (who had very little employment experience in her adult life) expressed her views:

I’m happy to volunteer. I don’t want anything paid or something that you would have to turn up to. I’m not looking for that at all.
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

A similar contrast, but with an emphasis on payment, was made by a retired manager:

You’re not getting money for doing it [so] you don’t have to do it.

Generally, however, interviewees were of the opinion that volunteers should not be out of pocket. In Age Concern Newcastle, where travel expenses are involved, volunteers have a choice of getting these reimbursed. Some volunteers, because of their financial circumstances, do not claim these expenses, or gift-aid them to the organisation. One volunteer in another organisation who receives a travel allowance quite willingly pays tax on it.

Despite these claims of autonomy, each of these three individuals performs her voluntary activities on a regular basis. Indeed, in other parts of the interviews they assert their reliability as volunteers and their sense of obligation to be present at the volunteer ‘workplace’ for the sake of other volunteers and clients. This is sometimes at personal cost. Mrs Campbell is frail following a stroke; Mrs Mackenzie finds tasks at the lunch club physically exhausting; and Mrs Hetherington describes her office role as ‘extremely stressful’. Freedom to be present or not is important in principle but - as these examples illustrate - many volunteers in practice accept obligations to treat time in a ‘work-like’ way by committing themselves to a schedule of volunteering on which others can depend.

Constraining and enabling factors

When we asked current volunteers to talk about their daily lives they spoke most of other volunteering activities and of time spent with family and friends. Some recounted time devoted to caring within the family (usually for grandchildren and less often for dependent relatives). This set of activities only occasionally came into tension with volunteering. An unexpected need from family members could interrupt volunteering. For example, Mrs Baxter explained that she cancelled a lunch club on one occasion when her much older sister (who had suffered a fall and needed care) had flu, and other volunteers were off sick. But this was an extreme event which would not, she hoped, be repeated. She envisaged volunteering for some time to come:

I’m thinking, “How much longer can I keep it going?” I probably will for a few years yet! [laughter] I mean there’s people older than me that still do Lunch Clubs.

Some interviewees did comment however that their volunteering would have to be stopped or curtailed if family members were to become in need of care in the future. Women who volunteer and do not have paid jobs, as Mrs Mackenzie explained, are seen by family members as responsible for care:

If [husband’s] Dad, I suppose, needed constant care …… family would have to take first place I suppose. Because I’m the only member of the family that has more free
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

time. As I say the other two daughter-in-laws they work every day whereas I, I don’t, you know, I’m more available.

Caring for grandchildren, as indicated above, was reported by a fifth of survey respondents in the over 55 age groups. On the surface it seems surprising that this is not higher given other evidence of the importance of the older generation in providing childcare to enable young parents to participate in the labour market (Wheelock and Jones 2002). The survey, however, represents a ‘snapshot’ picture at one point in time. Grand-parenting is described in the in-depth interviews in some detail and was usually managed alongside volunteering without either activity impacting significantly upon the other. For some volunteers a phase of intensive commitment to providing care for pre-school and young school age children is now in the past. Mrs Atkinson describes her past grand parenting:

I watched - I had them two children from them first being born and they used to sleep here of a night time, and they used to sleep, like the little girl she used to come on a Friday and she didn’t used to go home till a Sunday so we used to have them all weekend, same as him when he was born. …………of course they’re older now, they don’t want their grandmas you know when they’re older.

Mrs Baxter similarly explains how her role in family childcare is declining although her youngest grandchild is only six years old:

The older one, she likes to go out with her friends now. And the younger one, she’s six and she’s into computers just now, they all are! [laughter] And I haven’t got a computer, never mind working one!! So she likes to be at home with her friends as well.

Grand parenting is a responsibility that typically falls to people in their fifties. For many older people the period of intense commitment to care of their children’s children is relatively short and may be over when they are in their sixties. For Mrs Black on the other hand who had her children later in life, her time is fully taken up with grand-parenting and volunteering.

Distance of family members’ residence affected time and capacity for volunteering. The need to take blocks of days and weeks to visit family members across the UK – and sometimes care for grandchildren in times of need – could restrict commitments people would make to volunteering or their ability to be reliable. It was also commented, on the other hand, that a widely dispersed family could prevent taking a paid job, leaving volunteering as the alternative.

I was thinking that I’d do any part-time jobs somewhere in the shops [but] two of my daughters are in London [and] I can’t get time off from where I work. But for volunteering I can take whenever I want the time off and just go when I want to go. (Mrs Tandon)
8. **What affects the capacity to volunteer?**

For some of the minority ethnic respondents with family ties overseas, such issues were magnified. One aspect of their transnational lives was long periods of time individuals or their families spend overseas. Mrs Chen, for example, pointed out the preparations she made and the problems that arose in the club when she went on holiday. Some volunteers with whom she works go to Hong Kong for periods of up to six months. In these cases, it is difficult for the organisation to manage their absence and include them again when they return.

As indicated in the survey, the amount of time given to Age Concern Newcastle and to other organisations is extremely varied. People who suffered illness or disability talked of how long things took them to do although they were able to perform volunteering tasks while accommodating physical lack of capacity. A few had withdrawn temporarily or reduced volunteering. For volunteers whose mobility or physical strength are restricted by illness or disability, it is important that quite small time commitments – a morning per week or a day per month – are valued by volunteer-using organisations.

Transport and the ability to move around the city could also be a significant constraining issue. However, this should not be overstated as individuals could be extremely resilient – walking long distances and struggling with public transport, which did not always meet their needs well. Mrs Campbell’s husband (who was present at the interview because of her frailty) explained:

Mr Campbell: I just take her there and leave her. I go somewhere else and then come back and pick her up!

Interviewer: As a chauffeur?

Mr Campbell: But we don’t have a car we use the buses.

In common with Mrs Campbell, some volunteers reported relying on a companion (often a husband who was a driver) in order to get to their volunteering. Indeed, the time contributed by volunteers’ spouses could be significant in enabling volunteering. Volunteering is usually seen as an activity that individuals decide to participate or not participate in. While a number of interviews include accounts of others – usually spouses – who facilitate volunteering, obligations to these relationships can also limit volunteering.

And on a Monday he (husband) couldn’t have the car because I needed the car cos the stuff I used to carry up, I mean was immense. I used to take all the stuff and everything, so I needed the car and I think eventually he said, you know, I think you’ve done enough voluntary work, I had done it for fourteen years and he said I think, you know, it’s about time we had time together and things like that and I thought well he’s probably right, you know, and he was getting a bit irate about it. (Mrs Gibson)
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

when he [husband] retires I don’t want to be out two days a week. I mean I’m still going to keep on one day a week because I don’t want to be tied to him, you know.
(Mrs Hetherington)

Older older volunteers are likely to be single in their old age, and such family obligations are often reduced. However other constraints can impact on their volunteering, and these will be considered in the next section on the perspectives of the older set of volunteers.

What it means to be an ‘older volunteer’

I think people sometimes forget that older people have had a working life and held responsible positions, you know, and know perfectly well what should happen. (Ms Graham)

The stereotype of older volunteers as ‘do-gooders’ and as women with ‘twin-set and pearls’ still exists but this is being challenged by the new cohort of older people, who have had more education and work experience, are alert, healthy and active. Among the current volunteers, there were nine volunteers who were over the age of 75, and some of them brought a particular perspective to volunteering. Older volunteers thought of themselves as still able to contribute, with a perception that ‘all elderly people are willing to help each other’ (Mrs Cooper), enjoy meeting people, and that they could be distinguished from younger volunteers who expected certain rewards.

Older volunteers are more likely to be widowed and living alone, which makes their voluntary activity even more significant to them, in giving them a role and status (cf. Chapter 7). The greater dependence on information technology and the trend towards learning activities can however impact on older people who prefer the social side of things. Volunteering is also seen as more formal now, compared to the time when you could just do things ‘off your own bat’ (Mrs Fraser).

Older volunteers bring definite advantages to Age Concern Newcastle as an organisation catering to the needs of older people. Older volunteers are better able to empathise with those belonging to a similar cohort and era. There is greater compatibility between them. And in spite of being older people themselves, they were willing to learn from the experiences of other older people. 49 ‘Age’ was recognised by most of the interviewees as a social construct, with many of them not wanting to be considered ‘old’ but asserting that they were ‘young at heart’ (Mrs Dutton). Indeed, Mr Dawson said he met a 92 year old volunteer who told him she goes shopping for the ‘old people’ and he followed up with this comment:

But I mean over sixty these days is nothing really, they run around like two year olds [laughs], they do, they’re very active

49 In her response to the statement about ‘older people helping older people’, Ms Dodds however thought it was presumptuous and provocative that volunteers in Age Concern are assumed to be older people.
What affects the capacity to volunteer?

While older people are now healthier than in the past because of medical advances and a higher standard of living, they are still more susceptible to health disorders than the rest of the population. Organisations that employ older volunteers have to take into consideration their health constraints, adapt working conditions to their volunteers’ needs and provide a socially inclusive environment. Older people are prone to common old age deficiencies such as hearing and sight impairments. This could for example affect their ability to serve customers and handle money. Old age also limits the physical ability of people to lift and carry heavy objects thus preventing them from carrying out shopping for example. Our interviews however have not highlighted these problems to any significant extent, and our impression is that under supervision, most volunteers were working well within their physical capabilities, with those who are unable to continue their volunteering for health reasons withdrawing from the activities when necessary.

By far the most commonly reported health problem among the interviewees was orthopaedic conditions that are a result of injury or disease, particularly arthritis. This can affect younger volunteers and for some, the disease is in more advanced stages than for others:

there’s some days with my arthritis I can’t get out of bed and if he’s not here then
I’ve to sort of roll, put myself on the floor to get up (Mrs Parker)

The effects on volunteers are various: for some, it prevents them from standing for long periods, it impedes their mobility, their ability to work with speed and their ability to drive. However, with motorised scooters and other aids, older people have still been able to volunteer as long as there is access to buildings, adequate space to manoeuvre and security for their vehicles. Sometimes the availability of equipment such as computers and comfortable chairs can make volunteering easier for older people. Volunteering can have a positive effect on sufferers as it encourages them to be active in spite of their disability:

I have arthritis very bad in me hands. And sometimes you just don’t feel like making the effort…. But then you think these people are depending on me ’cause they enjoy coming for their meal and their bingo. And you cheer up, you know, once you get there ’cause they’re lovely, lovely people. (Mrs Baxter)

The next most common complaint is cardiovascular disease. In some cases, cardiovascular and orthopaedic conditions required stays in hospital, which took the volunteer away from their ‘workplace’. But returning to volunteering can be a form of rehabilitation as Mrs Campbell explains:

So I would think that helping others is helping yourself in a way. It’s like I thought, “right, if I can get back and help others then I’m helping myself.” The way I was at the time was I could hardly walk and couldn’t use my arm and things like that. Once I got back and I was sitting and saying to somebody, “do this and do that” (helpdesk) I forgot about myself. You know what I mean?
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

What is striking about many volunteers is their determination to continue to volunteer as far as their abilities allow them:

I know of lately I’ve been tired and I haven’t been so well because I’m troubled with arthritis as well. And I think to myself, “can I continue?” and I thought, “yes you will! You’ll get out there!!” (Mrs Douglas)

No, I’ve got arthritis, it can live with me but I’m not living with it, so there you go (Mrs Green)

But sometimes health and disability is also a reason for older people being discouraged from volunteering altogether:

I wouldn’t like to take anything on that I couldn’t carry out and I know that probably there’d be times when I’d say oh, I can’t possibly do that today, in which case you’re letting a lot of people down aren’t you. (Mrs Gray)

If such people can be persuaded that there are various less demanding roles that volunteers can undertake, and that the organisation is understanding and flexible to accommodate the volunteer’s needs, there might be less difficulty in recruiting older people as volunteers.

Another way of dealing with the constraints that older volunteers face is through working cooperatively. With older volunteers, teamwork was important because of the age of the volunteers:

So that we need quite a strong team because of the age of everyone. In our team we have somebody who’s in their 80s who’s helping me to cook. (Mrs Dickinson)

Leaving volunteering

While many older volunteers refuse to be beaten by their health circumstances, a number referred to the fact that if things were not working out, they were not forced to stay on. As it is, Mrs Baxter stopped her voluntary work on a committee at a community centre because of the stress placed upon her as the chair and the lack of support from the rest of the committee. Others stopped volunteering because of health reasons or care responsibilities or a change in work circumstances such as a promotion at work. The majority of former volunteers ended their volunteering when the lunch club closed (see Chapter 9). The enjoyment of their volunteering role that these former volunteers had, contrasted with those who left volunteering of their own will because they no longer found pleasure in it. Reasons for this included unhappy relationships, a disagreement with the aims, or with the nature of what they were doing, which was too stressful or not up to their expectations, or simply boredom.
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

Mrs Fletcher could not tolerate the complaining attitude of one of the volunteers where she volunteered. Because of this, she left as she felt that ‘life was too short’ to spend being unhappy. Mrs Gibson (see above) finally left volunteering not because of her husband, but when she fell out with one of the staff at the warden-assisted accommodation where she held her popular lunch club. Although she was fully committed to it, she felt she didn’t have to put up with the unhappy atmosphere.

The non-financial element in a voluntary post can make a difference to whether one continues in it or not. For example, Mrs Hill, a former volunteer in the insurance office was comfortable in her work as she liked computers. If it had been a paid job, she would have loved it, but it was too demanding as a voluntary post. As time went on, there were more and more products to be sold and questionnaires to be filled. When she eventually felt that the organisation was benefiting more than the customers were, she left altogether. The comparison with paid work is made by another volunteer:

And it’s getting to be a case of I don’t want to get up this morning, which is not good. I mean I was like that when I left work, I thought oh God, do I have to get up and go, and I’m feeling the same way. (Mrs Hetherington)

On the other hand, a small minority feel caught in a situation where they are unable to leave because they are depended on and they feel they are letting people down, but taken for granted at the same time:

And I mean like I suppose if you’re a conscientious person like I am, I can’t just walk away from it and I’m doing something I really don’t want to do once a week. (Mrs Armstrong)

Because I was getting a little bit pressurised and I think sometimes when you’re a willing horse you get it all the time. With respect, I mean that kindly, don’t get me wrong, I mean that very kindly but I think when you’re a willing horse they depend on you and they just expect you to be there. And I felt that I was just getting a bit [taken for granted], you know. (Mrs Willis)

This indicates that at times, volunteering has a strong ‘obligatory’ element that can put pressure on volunteers to be dutifully compliant, making it more characteristic of paid work than of leisure (see Chapter 7). This can push people to their limits of staying on as a volunteer.

Summary

Age Concern Newcastle is an organisation that deploys older volunteers in large numbers in various roles. The majority of these volunteers devote some of their time to other forms of volunteering (for another organisation and / or informal help and support in the community.) While most do not have caring responsibilities, a substantial minority do. Older people can combine volunteering with caring roles and responsibilities, including
8. What affects the capacity to volunteer?

some time-consuming and demanding ones. Grand parenting is an important part of many older people’s lives, especially women’s. However childcare for children’s children is usually restricted to a few years, often in late middle age. For many older volunteers, it is an experience that has already passed.

When capacity to give time to Age Concern Newcastle or other organisations was restricted, this was most typically related to mobility and place. Families who live in other parts of the country, and overseas, often expect support from older people in ways that are particularly difficult to reconcile with volunteering roles. While the older cohort of volunteers tended not to have such family obligations, they were more susceptible to health disorders than the rest of the population. What is striking is their determination to continue to volunteer as far as their abilities allow them. For these much older volunteers who are more likely to be widowed and living alone, their voluntary activity is much valued for giving them a role and a status. Sometimes however, poor health or disability can be reasons for withdrawing from volunteering or being discouraged altogether. Other reasons that people gave for choosing to leave volunteering were lunch club closures and dissatisfaction in their role, often a result of unhappy relationships. There were also cases where people left when volunteering became too much like paid work. These involve issues of organisational and volunteer management that will be considered in the chapter to follow.
9. Supporting volunteers

Chapter 9 Supporting volunteers

This chapter starts by providing an overview of volunteering activity within Age Concern Newcastle and the changing organisational context within which volunteers fulfil their roles. The organisation’s volunteering policy and support structures are also outlined. Drawing on the rich material from the in-depth interviews with volunteers, the chapter then presents the perspectives of volunteers starting with what they understand are the aims of the organisation. This is followed by their experience of volunteering in the organisation, and the ethos that volunteers encounter. The focus then moves to consider relationships between paid and unpaid workers, followed by the more practical issues to do with the management of volunteers. These include managing change, role boundaries, the importance of training, and finally volunteer perspectives on their role in service delivery which can sometimes come under threat from short term funding and the need for innovation. Finally, the services available to minority ethnic communities and the volunteering that goes on within them is examined. The chapter raises specific implications for the management and support of volunteers in Age Concern Newcastle, but many are of generic interest to all volunteer-using organisations.

Service provision and volunteering within Age Concern Newcastle

Every voluntary organisation has its mission, goals and objectives that serve as a guide to how the organisation is run. They contribute to a culture of working that can have a great impact on the ability of the organisation’s ability to recruit and retain its workers, be they paid or unpaid. As outlined in the Introduction, Age Concern Newcastle is an independent local charity which aims to improve the quality of life of older people living in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne by providing services for both frail and active older people. Its mission statement is “to promote the status and well-being of all older people in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and to make later life a fulfilling and enjoyable experience”. This is fulfilled through its four functions of services and support, education and social advocacy, innovation and research and partnership and cooperation.

Reform in the framework of support for the voluntary sector (see Chapter 2) has affected voluntary services nationally and locally through the increase in their service-provision role in partnership with statutory agencies, time-limited funding and a shift towards a social enterprise culture so as to reduce dependency on public funds. Voluntary organisations are required to adapt quickly and strategically in the face of these ongoing changes in order to remain viable and to fulfil their mission. However, such adaptations can impact greatly on the volunteer workforce and the general ethos of the organisation.

Age Concern Newcastle has developed particularly rapidly in the past few years to meet its aims and objectives whilst adjusting to various changes. The following table (Table 50 According to the latest NCVO Voluntary Sector Almanac, the sector now earns 47 per cent of its income, and receives 38 per cent of its funding from statutory organisations (Wilding et al. 2006)

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9. Supporting volunteers

9.1) summarises the main services in Age Concern Newcastle that use volunteers, showing the number of ‘clients’ or service users, and the number of volunteers involved in each service. It also highlights the main structural changes in services and the volunteering issues arising from these changes. In order to fully understand the accounts that volunteers give about their volunteering experiences, it is important to consider the changing contexts within which they are placed. Sometimes these changes are the result of the adoption of new national regulatory frameworks, in other cases they are a result of contractual agreements with the local authority and concomitant staff re-organisation.

Table 9.1: Summary of main Age Concern Newcastle services that use volunteers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Service-users</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
<th>Structural changes and volunteering issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lunch and Leisure Club Service</strong></td>
<td>545 older people</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>Social Services Directorate: funding withdrawn, service restructured and new contract in September 2002 Two-tiered service i.e. volunteer-led lunch clubs and supported lunch clubs. Partnership with Newcastle College to provide activities at these clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leisure and Learning Service:</strong></td>
<td>1,213 enrolled users each week</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>Rapid expansion in 2002-2003 Partnership with Newcastle College (capitation fee) New Opportunities Fund (NOF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee Shop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Healthy Living Centre Grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathway Project</td>
<td>Learning disabled Further 208 older people</td>
<td></td>
<td>NOF Lifelong Learning Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT Project</td>
<td>BME participation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Big Lottery funding in 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriending Service</td>
<td>41 housebound and frail older people</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Three services: bereavement, visiting and sitting. Staff member in charge redeployed to Quality of Life Partnership, new appointment of Volunteering and Befriending Officer made in 2005.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and Advice</td>
<td>1,524 people</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Trading arm of Age Concern England, profits covenanted to Age Concern Newcastle. In 2004, new regulations by Financial Services Authority required re-training of staff and volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Concern Newcastle (Services) Ltd</td>
<td>Selling insurance and other financial products to the general public</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

51 Figures collected from Annual Review 2003-2004
52 Figures based on Volunteer Development Manager’s database dated 13/5/04. Note that some volunteers may have more than one role.
9. Supporting volunteers

The service that uses the largest number of volunteers is that of the Lunch and Leisure Club Service, 149 in all. Volunteer numbers had been even higher, but in 2002, the Social Services Directorate negotiated a new contract for what had been the Day Care and Lunch Club Service. When the new ‘Lunch and Leisure’ groups were launched, in which all the Day Care service users were reassessed according to their needs, the number of volunteers in this service fell from 221 to 134. Two tiers of service provision were developed, one being a more supported environment with paid staff at every session, and the other much like the previous lunch clubs run by volunteers in community venues across the city. The title ‘Lunch and Leisure Groups’ reflects Age Concern Newcastle’s partnership with Newcastle College in providing activities such as glass-painting and music-making at some of these clubs.

In contrast, the Leisure and Learning service has benefited from an expansion in its services due to successful funding bids. The number of volunteers in this service has increased from 78 (cf. Annual Review 2002-2003) to 92 in May 2004. The service covers a wide range of duties from working in the coffee bar, to assisting at the computer helpdesk, IT and other leisure and learning classes. The service has recently been boosted by the appointment of a catering and facilities manager. As a result, volunteers in the coffee bar provide a service that is of comparable standard to other catering outlets, except for the price of food and drink.

The Befriending Service uses volunteers (28 in all) on a one-to-one basis, and has recently undergone staff changes and improvements to its recruitment and support for volunteers. Age Concern Newcastle (Services) Limited uses just seven volunteers. It has experienced recent structural changes as a result of the Financial Services Authority imposing new requirements. As a result, both staff and volunteers had to undergo considerable re-training and skill learning. This coincided with staff sickness resulting in a particularly stressful period for staff and volunteers as they adjusted to the new regulatory framework. There are the further administrative, consultative and ad hoc roles for volunteers,53 including ten trustees, who act in a governance role.

As Age Concern Newcastle’s Volunteer Policy sees it:

‘Age Concern Newcastle recognises that volunteers make a unique contribution to the delivery of services to older people. Volunteers assist in promoting opportunities for older people to be involved in defining their own needs, deciding on priorities and taking control over decisions which affect their own lives’.54

According to this and other policy documents, there is recognition that volunteers make a vital contribution to fulfilling Age Concern Newcastle’s four functions through its many services. The organisation is committed to ensuring that all volunteers have an active, enjoyable and rewarding role to play in helping improve the quality of life for older

53 Figures for these volunteers are more variable than in other categories.
54 This quote is taken from the section ‘Age Concern Newcastle Volunteer Policy’ in ‘Age Concern Newcastle: General Volunteer Guidelines’, a document compiled for volunteer induction.
9. Supporting volunteers

people in Newcastle. They achieve this by listening to the views and ideas of volunteers, providing them with opportunities to meet and exchange ideas with other volunteers. Volunteers are also informed and consulted about changes in the organisation.

Age Concern Newcastle provides training and support, and promotes good working practice while respecting the skills and achievements of volunteers. In line with the greater formalisation of volunteering, Age Concern Newcastle has developed induction and training packages for volunteers. Age Concern Newcastle is also a member of the Northeast Volunteering Forum and the Age Concern ‘Volunteering Partnership’, which comprises members of the Age Concern Federation.

A Volunteer Development Manager manages volunteers to ensure that the best volunteer practice is adhered to. His responsibilities included the overall management of the Age Concern Newcastle Volunteer Programme, the recruitment, selection, induction, training and support of volunteers, as well as fulfilling an advocacy role on behalf of volunteers. He is also responsible for compiling the quarterly Volunteers’ Newsletter and running the Volunteers’ Forum three times a year.

Volunteer perspectives

**Understandings of the aims of the organisation**

In analysing how volunteers perceive their experiences within the formal structures just outlined, it is useful to start with what they know of the aims of organisation.

I think it’s to look out for the older people. To make sure that they get all that they’re due. To fight for what they think they should be due. Facilities for them to do these things because they cater for everything, the blind and everything. (Mrs Burn)

Mrs Burn had a clear perception of the importance of recognising the dignity of older people, defending their rights and getting them a better deal so that they would have a better life, very much in line with Age Concern Newcastle’s aims. In general however, volunteers were vague and unsure about the wider aims of the organisation in promoting the needs and welfare of older people. Just a few interviewees referred to some of its aims. This included a handful who recognised the role of the organisation in lobbying on behalf of older people and having access to the government because of its status as a national charity.

I mean they act as a sort of voice at higher levels, at government levels you know, to sort of put forward the case for older people. They kind of defend older people, you

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55 It should be noted that many of those interviewed had however been recruited before these formal structures were established, and some already belonged to community and voluntary organisations that had their own mechanisms for recruiting and training volunteers. Longer term volunteers in community lunch clubs did nevertheless mention having attended courses on health and safety or first aid organised by Age Concern Newcastle.
9. Supporting volunteers

know, where older people wouldn’t have, when you’re working you’ve got a voice. (Mrs Hetherington)

A certain number of interviewees also made reference to Age Concern Newcastle’s aims to change attitudes and to combat the social exclusion of older people.

In contrast, many were aware and informed about the service-provision aspect of Age Concern Newcastle as an organisation. Most interviewees spoke about its role in ‘helping’ older people and more practical aspects such as ‘looking after older people’, supporting them with advice and guidance, making life more comfortable for them, especially those without family, providing services and classes and encouraging older people’s participation and activity. It is the various services provided by Age Concern Newcastle such as ‘Leisure and Learning’, ‘Information and Advice’ and the ‘Involving Older People’ strategy that are most visible to volunteers, and which inform their perceptions of Age Concern as an organisation.

But the aims of Age Concern I suppose are really to provide services for people over fifty and all sorts of, and they probably do, you know, from what I’ve seen that’s going on in MEA House, it’s going on there. I’m not sure of what’s going on outside. (Mrs Bainbridge)

It is interesting to note that when asked what they knew about Age Concern Newcastle before they joined the organisation as a volunteer, many said that they knew little. This was particularly the case for volunteers around the city in the lunch clubs.

Nurturing an ethos of volunteering

How do volunteers experience Age Concern Newcastle as an organisation within which to volunteer? What do they have to say about its volunteering ethos? Most commonly, volunteers spoke of the organisation being ‘caring’, ‘very friendly’, and of the head office as a place where there was a ‘family feeling’, where there was ‘comradeship’ without an ‘us’ and ‘them’ attitude.

I had many friends there, you know, and when I was on the course we used to have a nice social chat to each other and then when I was in the computer cyber-café people would come in and say hello and, you know, kept in touch with everybody, you know. Yes, you felt part of the family, you know, family group like. (Mr Harrison, former volunteer)

Mrs Hetherington: [The coordinator] did a thing for the Volunteering Week last year which I went too and I manned the stand for a couple of hours and you know, as I say you’re really sort of, it’s very inclusive you know, you’re one of the family, you’re part of our little, part of our gang now kind of thing you know.

Interviewer: That sounds great.
9. Supporting volunteers

Mrs Hetherington: It’s great, it’s excellent. It’s a smashing set up, it really is, and by virtue of that you’re part of the wider Age Concern network as well. Because when we’ve been on training courses we’ve met people from other Age Concern offices. So you’re part of the wider concern as well.

A number of those interviewed had been involved in one way or another in participating in events at the organisation’s city centre premises such as the annual raffle, the Christmas fair, fund-raising events and seasonal celebrations at Christmas and Easter. These various activities contributed to a sense of belonging to an organisation which has its hub at MEA House. The Leisure and Learning activities available at the city centre premises were much appreciated, and a few volunteers took the opportunity to participate in activities such as tai-chi, dance and bowls.

..embarrassing how much they appreciate volunteers, I don’t mean just me but volunteers, they’re very, very hot on training and they’re very hot in including volunteers on the mailing list, whatever’s happening they let you know, do you want to come to this, do you want to come to that, and you often get nice thank you letters and Christmas Cards and it’s very nice, lovely, (Ms Dodds)

Most volunteers reported on the activities that were organised specifically for them such as subsidised outings, day-trips and meals, and other special functions including cooking demonstrations and thank-you parties that brought those who worked in the community into the hub of MEA House. The friendly environment of the Age Concern Newcastle offices in MEA House was much appreciated. The opportunities to socialise with other volunteers and get out on trips to the coast or the Lakes and for meals were particularly welcomed.

Yes, oh they’ve got a lot of volunteers all over the place and three coach loads of us used to go away. At one time it was free when it first started off but then of course with all the cutbacks and everything, I think they charged you a couple of pound, you know, for all the way to Edinburgh or somewhere like that, you know, for a day out right, it was nothing, you know, but yes, aha. (Mrs Green)

oh yes because always somebody came up from there and [name] was running it then, …..and yes, we felt part of it. And then each year there would be a trip out for the volunteers and then in the autumn there would be a sort of a thank you party, which of course when you left they can’t keep taking all the old ones in when they have new ones so it’s only, only last year we didn’t get an invitation. (Mrs Patterson)

The ethos of family-belonging is also found among the trustees whose work is characterised by their personal commitment.

Male volunteers appeared to be less enthusiastic about social events than the female volunteers. Events where certificates of appreciation were given out were not so
9. Supporting volunteers

commonly mentioned. There were also reservations from some volunteers at church and community-based lunch groups with no direct involvement in the activities held in the city centre premises, who did not feel they belonged to Age Concern Newcastle as an organisation.

Interviewer: And did you feel part of Age Concern as an organisation?

Mrs Thompson: No, I feel part of the church where the lunches are held and basically it seems to me a very caring church.

This lack of a sense of belonging is not because there are no opportunities for volunteer interaction:

Mrs Willis: And then sometimes they have a party for the workers at Christmas but I never bother.

Interviewer: Do you not?

Mrs Willis: I’m not really concerned about that kind of thing. I’m more concerned with helping the old people. So I would go on a trip to help them. But I’m not worried about having parties for workers or co-ordinators, that doesn’t affect me at all.

A proportion of volunteers are involved in formal and informal feedback and consultation processes within the organisation. The Volunteer Forum meetings are an opportunity to provide feedback but while not many volunteers who were interviewed participated in them, those who did were positive about them.

Mrs McAllister: Sometimes there’s little meetings for volunteers and that. And you just sit and discuss things and find out what’s going on in the other half. You know? You can’t be everywhere at once.

Interviewer: Are those meetings helpful?

Mrs McAllister: Oh yes. They’re good because you always get someone else’s opinion and how they’ve reacted to something that’s happened. And it’s good because it lets you know what other people are doing.

The Involving Older People project provided an umbrella under which consultations were sought with volunteers. The transport provided to enable volunteers to attend meetings was much appreciated.

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56 Two interviewees did however take the trouble to show the interviewer the certificates they received from their volunteer work.
9. Supporting volunteers

They take me for the meeting. They take me - they go to Sunderland. We been to Byker, you know. So they telling them my address. So still I am with [name] going in meeting everywhere. (Mrs Singh)

At a more formal level, volunteers have been nominated to join the Liaison Committee which was set up after the Charity Commission review of the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the company in 2002 to provide a discussion forum for representatives of the charity and its other member bodies.57

What of the role of staff in promoting an encouraging environment for volunteering? Paid staff were described by volunteers as ‘professional’ and ‘a superb team’, working in a well managed office environment. In general, volunteers spoke positively about their relationship with Age Concern Newcastle and about how supported they were by the staff.

They’re a superb team to mix with, very, very friendly. Everybody from the Chief Exec downwards is approachable. Even when they’re rushed of their feet ‘cause they are most of the time, everybody has a smile on their face. That makes a lot of difference. (Mr Cameron)

Many spoke warmly of how the organisation made them feel valued, and of how individual members of staff had shown care and concern for their welfare, such as ringing up to enquire about their health, or sending flowers when a volunteer returned from a period of hospitalisation.

The staff are very nice. The staff are very understanding, very supportive. Very grateful. They do treat us quite frequently to trips to various places and a meal out and things like that. One really feels appreciated and wanted. You feel that you’re doing a good job and realise that if you took all the volunteers out of Age Concern it would just collapse. So you feel an important part of the process. (Mrs Davidson)

Positive comments also mentioned staff who took time to speak to you even though they were busy, and someone being always available to help if you were in trouble.

Oh yes, she rang up straight away on Monday when she knew I wasn’t going in to reception because I wasn’t well enough. Don’t you come in tomorrow she says. You get yourself pulled together. (Mrs Atkinson)

But [name], so if you’ve got a problem with someone, I just need to go and see [name] and she’ll come down and sort it out. (Mrs Atkinson)

57 The committee exists to bring together in discussion those appointed to represent the Charity and other bodies and representatives of other bodies in membership of the Charity. The committee meets at least twice a year prior to Ordinary Meetings of the Charity to receive written reports from its members and conduct its business as determined by the Board of Trustees.
9. Supporting volunteers

Supporting volunteer relationships within the organisation

Age Concern Newcastle provides support for volunteers by assigning each volunteer to a support worker who is the paid member of staff with whom they work most closely. The nature of the relationships that volunteers had with their assigned member of staff was of key significance. Most volunteers confirmed having a staff member who supervised their work, and spoke highly of the positive feedback they got. Thus a volunteer in the financial services felt a sense of relief that a full-time paid member of staff present in the office provided a ‘fall-back position’, to give support and a safety net. Volunteer Befrienders benefited from a paid member of staff taking responsibility, for example when something untoward happened to the person being visited. The partnership between paid and unpaid workers in the organisation is thus very important to managing the volunteer environment.

Volunteers spoke highly of certain key members of staff. For example, when a lunch club member was causing difficulties, a former member of staff was reported to have stood up very effectively for her lunch club volunteers. What comes through is the importance of the personal relationship that staff develop with their assigned volunteers, as well as the professionalism and efficiency with which all staff go about their job. Yet despite the role of support workers, some of those volunteers not based at MEA House felt the volunteer manager’s role could have been more visible and active. Volunteers who work beyond the confines of the organisation’s head office especially on a one-to-one basis appreciate more support than those who are in group settings, who are able to work more autonomously. There are also some volunteering contexts in which Age Concern Newcastle takes a less hands on role. This is case for the Chinese lunch club which is an autonomous activity under the North East Chinese Association. Here Age Concern Newcastle is not closely involved in the recruitment or management of the volunteers.

Most volunteers described good relationships with Age Concern Newcastle staff. A small minority however, were of the opinion that there is an invidious distinction within the organisation between the paid staff and the volunteers, between the ‘organisers’ and the ‘frontline troops’, and that those at the ‘management’ level need more ‘feel’ for what is happening on the ground. Most, however, thought such distinctions important, and that both volunteers and staff needed to realise the value of each other’s role and not to mistake volunteers for ‘free employees’.
9. Supporting volunteers

Volunteering in the community: the Lunch and Leisure Club Service

Most club volunteers spoke positively about paid members of staff coming regularly to their clubs and giving them the support they needed. If staff were not physically present at the club, they would ring up to enquire about how the session had gone. Many volunteers said that members of staff made them feel appreciated for the work they did. Staff were punctilious if a session had to be cancelled due to volunteer illness, contacting the driver escort, and the caterer, while the other volunteers took responsibility for ringing around to inform club members. If a club member did not turn up, the lead volunteer could ring Age Concern Newcastle to let them know, and they would arrange for someone to pay the club member a visit. If the escort had no answer at the door when they arrived to fetch a club member, they could likewise contact Age Concern to arrange a visit. During Christmas, Age Concern would provide volunteers with special festive items like wine and special decorative serviettes.

Issues of the practical management of volunteering

The interviews threw up a range of issues relating to the practical management of volunteering. How can available volunteers be best matched to volunteering opportunities? How does organisation change affect volunteers? How can practical solutions to these problems be found whilst keeping volunteers on board?

Time issues have already been raised in Chapter 8. It can be difficult to find volunteers to work at certain times of the day, for example, the morning shift in the coffee lounge, or to do certain tasks such as working in the kitchen as opposed to at the counter. There are also issues about occasional times when volunteers are not able to be there. Based at MEA House, volunteers at the Help Desk reported that there was always someone to cover their role if necessary. For example, Mr Cameron was appreciative of the fact that he is able to go off on holiday.

Well, you know, I just enjoy being there because the people are so nice. And they accept the fact that I go away for long periods, well, not long periods but I go off for about a month at a time; it’s only a week in Dublin and a week in the Shetlands but it’ll probably be two Tuesdays in both cases. (Mr Cameron)

Some volunteers who had been used to certain ways of working in the past were not willing to change, for example to meet the new demands in the coffee lounge. Relationships between volunteers such as jealousies and personality conflicts can also pose problems. Some people who had been volunteering for a long while found it difficult to give up their role to someone else who might be in a better position in terms of skills and experience.
9. Supporting volunteers

Continuing change in a Lunch and Leisure Club

Mrs Bartley started volunteering at a centre in the East End for four years till it had to close. The club then shifted to another venue which was later found to be limited in space. They then moved to a church hall which was offered temporarily as a stop-gap measure for four months, and were promised a venue at another church which was undergoing a major reconstruction and refurbishment. However, the building work was not completed according to the time promised so the club had to move yet again to a temporary place for another few months before finally shifting to their present venue.

Finding volunteers to take on leadership roles can also pose problems. Not many volunteers were keen to take on the leadership of lunch clubs as they thought there was too much expected of the role, particularly because of the responsibility for the money. True, some volunteers, like Mrs Black, revelled in such responsibility as she enjoyed dealing with money matters.

I also like doing the book keeping. I like doing things with figures. I always have. If I hadn’t gone into teaching I was going to be a statistician. (Mrs Black)

Others were put off:

I don’t want to be an administrator, I don’t want to do the monies, I didn’t want to do anything like that and I feel that they expect a lot out of their leader, Age Concern…..because it’s not, you have to do these returns where you have to put this for the dinners, that for the transport, this for the savings…..Deduct this and deduct that and tot it all up et cetera, and then you’ve got to bank that money too and I think it’s too much. (Mrs Armstrong)

The additional responsibilities falling on volunteers within Age Concern Newcastle (Services) Ltd as a result of the new requirements from the Financial Services Authority were generally unwelcome. As a volunteer in this service comments:

But I think it’s a bit onerous, asking people to do this kind of thing because really it’s what you expect core centre staff, it’s sort of like turning a voluntary organisation into a commercial profit seeking, you know. And that’s what I feel it is, to my mind it isn’t sort of doing things to help the older people, because you have to ask all of these intrusive questions and I’m not happy about it.

There were Leisure and Learning volunteers who were excited about the progress made in the service, but others who harked back to the days past when things had been different.

Volunteers do not always find it easy to manage or appreciate the boundaries to volunteering – whether between volunteering and friendship, or between volunteering and self-help. Most volunteers were of the opinion that clear boundaries were important
9. Supporting volunteers

to help them to know what exactly their role comprised. Befrienders wanted clear rules about whether or not to give ‘clients’ their personal contact numbers for example. One of the participants in the focus group put it succinctly when she said that the question volunteers should be asking is: ‘is that part of what you volunteered to do?’

Leisure and Learning activities are generally led by paid workers, but a number are led by volunteers who are not paid, e.g. in the choir, music appreciation and bowls group. The latter could perhaps best be described as ‘self-help’ leisure groups. (‘But we’re a sort of self-help group you know, we help each other’ – Mr Dawson). Volunteers were not always happy with what was taken as a rather fuzzy boundary between these two types of group. There was some perception that not enough support was given to volunteer-led self-help groups - beyond the provision of the room, heating and lighting.

Training opportunities were much appreciated as a means of addressing the issues that have been discussed. Volunteers in the Befriending Service and those involved in services based at the organisation’s centre premises often mentioned the formal structures of induction and training. According to one of the first to volunteer for the Befriending Service, new courses were put on soon after volunteers encountered the need for more training. There were other positive comments from volunteers in the Befriending Service including the on-going training provided, and meetings for counsellors every one or two months in the form of a group exercise. Supervision meetings were felt to be helpful in keeping the volunteer accountable. Some volunteers spoke about the very specific training available to cater to their line of work, such as day courses for those selling financial products. More generally, a need was identified for refresher courses to remind all in the organisation about ‘what it’s all fundamentally about’ (Mr Adamson). With regard to risk assessment, volunteers seemed aware of the necessity and importance of precautions such as the Criminal Records Bureau checks, but there was also some ambivalence because of excessive accountability hindering their role as volunteers.

Finally, it was of key importance to volunteers that they could feel confident in the quality of the service that they were providing and know that they were doing a good job with the support of the organisation. From the point of view of the many volunteers in Leisure and Lunch clubs, they were providing an extremely valuable service because of the opportunities they gave to older people to get out of their homes, to meet other people, and to enjoy a good meal in the company of others.

Mrs Edwards: No, no. I vowed and declared that I would only do a Luncheon Club if we could cook the food ourselves. Buy it and cook it.

Interviewer: And you’ve done it all this time?

Mrs Edwards: It was, it was hard but I enjoyed doing it and I found it better because you knew what people were going to have, you knew what they liked and from what I gather these meals that some of these other clubs got in were not the food I would have served.
9. Supporting volunteers

Mrs Baker certainly did not approve of changes to the service, even though these were out of the control of Age Concern Newcastle.

that’s right, they (Age Concern Newcastle) did the financial side of it and they did the transport side and as a result of them withdrawing, someone from the church had to take on the financial side and we no longer had any transport so any clients that wanted to come had to come either on the bus or make their own way. And in fact many of them spend twice as much on their transport as they do on the lunch in order to come because they like coming. (Mrs Baker)

Another valued feature of the lunch club service that the volunteers spoke of was the entertainment and leisure element that was a result of the volunteers and club members pulling resources together to organise a raffle, a game of bingo, and savings towards outings which were much enjoyed. This engendered a sense of belonging and camaraderie in the club, and a feeling of satisfaction and achievement among the volunteers. Re-organisation meant in some cases that such activities were no longer possible.

Changes to Age Concern Newcastle (Services) Ltd were seen to take away the spontaneity of conversation between volunteer and enquirers, which was a valued aspect of this volunteer role. Volunteers began to feel that the underlying reason for their volunteering - the desire to provide a friendly, personal service to older people - was under threat from the new formal requirements mentioned at the start of the chapter. Most crucially, volunteers felt that the service that was required by them went against the ethos they wanted to adopt in helping older people.

A clash between a changing legal framework and doing a valued job

According to the volunteers in Age Concern Newcastle (Services) Ltd, they were given two days of training that involved paid staff from Age Concern offices in other regions, following changes to the Financial Services legislation. They then had to pass a test. Previously volunteers had chatted informally to enquirers; they were now required to fill in a questionnaire before they could supply a quote. Volunteers found this intrusive and changed the atmosphere of their relationship with their customers. Volunteers were also not allowed to recommend products other than the ones that they were selling, even though they knew that there were other products that were more appropriate. Volunteers also reported feeling stressed about making a mistake and losing the spontaneity of customer contact that they used to enjoy in the past. This led to a degree of discomfort for volunteers, and eventually a number left.

Minority ethnic services and volunteers

Age Concern Newcastle has made efforts and has been successful not only in involving and encouraging the participation of volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds, but
9. Supporting volunteers

also in including volunteers from minority ethnic communities. The following account is
drawn from a discussion with the Ethnic Minority Development Worker at Age Concern
Newcastle at the start of the project and at a focus group, participant observation at lunch
clubs and six interviews with Minority Ethnic participants.

Since 1987, Age Concern Newcastle has been providing assistance to minority ethnic
elderly in different ways. A group of Asian women (Pakistanis, Indians, and Sikhs) meet
on a Monday at a sheltered housing scheme for the elderly. They travel from different
wards in the city, and transport is provided by Age Concern Newcastle. There are around
30 in this group, and the food is catered in. On Thursdays, a small group of Asian men
meet at another sheltered housing scheme, where transport and food are provided.

On Tuesdays, a lunch club for Chinese elderly people meets at the regional Chinese
association with between 40-60 members attending it. The numbers vary because
Tuesday is the day-off for most Chinese takeaways when family events and festivities are
held. Age Concern subsidises the food, makes sure that Health and Safety regulations are
followed, and pays for aprons, gloves and washing up liquid, but does not provide
transport. Regular health checks for the elderly are provided by a medically qualified
volunteer assisted by other volunteers. 58 Sometimes Age Concern runs advice and
information services at these clubs.

It should be mentioned that the Chinese lunch club was initiated by a church near
Chinatown but after a few years was unable to continue. It was then that Age Concern
approached the Chinese association for the use of its facilities. Like other lunch clubs, the
Chinese club is staffed by women who supply most of the hard labour of shopping, food
preparation, cooking, serving, washing and cleaning up the premises. In the Chinese club
however, there is a clear demarcation between male and female volunteers as the men are
only involved in the collection of money, the administration (issuing membership cards,
helping with official documents, interpreting and translating, paying out expenses etc),
giving out announcements and planning events. One or two women have taken on
leadership roles more recently but those interviewed have also spoken about people
volunteering in their club for the prestige and honour of leadership without the proper
commitment. Younger volunteers had been recruited in the past but had not stayed for
long, although it was recognised that younger volunteers had the advantage of being able
to speak English and to have the strength to carry out the heavier tasks.

Age Concern Newcastle used to hold a regular South Asian and Chinese elderly drop-in
at the Minority Ethnic Community Support Services centre on Fridays, but that was
discontinued because of funding cuts. Currently, they are holding meetings twice a month
on the first and last Friday, mainly to provide information and talks from speakers. The
Volunteer Development Manager and Involving Older People Strategy Manager attend
this group which comprised about 16 Asian women, and the Ethnic Minority
Development Worker interprets. Additionally, there are Asian people who make use of

58 Consisting of two English volunteers with an interpreter (a Chinese volunteer). They thoroughly enjoy
the home-cooked Chinese cuisine.
9. Supporting volunteers

the organisation’s Leisure and Learning services. A small number of people from the minority ethnic communities are involved as volunteers in these services.

Five current volunteers (all women) and one former volunteer (a man) from the Chinese and Indian communities were interviewed in the research. Two women were South Asian: one Sikh and one Hindu. Both were volunteering in other organisations as well. The rest were Chinese volunteers are from Hong Kong, three of whom also volunteered in other organisations. All except the Sikh volunteer have been involved in paid work for most of their lives. Three of the Chinese have owned or worked in takeaways and all of them have been associated with the regional Chinese association which collaborates with Age Concern to host the lunch club.

The recruitment of minority ethnic volunteers is strongly influenced by their community networks. Five of the six volunteers were recruited in this way and the remaining volunteer’s recruitment was facilitated by her contact with the Ethnic Minority Development Worker. Volunteers at the Chinese lunch club are recruited by Chinese association from their membership. According to the development worker, while South Asians are generally not keen to volunteer because of their busy extended families and family businesses, those in Age Concern Newcastle hold the traditional belief that helping the elderly will bring good rewards in their future life.

The two South Asian women volunteered in organisations that were serving the general public and so were more integrated in the majority white community. In comparison the Chinese volunteers were volunteering in groups that catered to the Chinese community such as a Chinese lunch club, a new Chinese association south of the river and a national organisation for Chinese women. One volunteer was involved in other mainstream organisations but mainly as a representative of the Chinese community.

The Chinese volunteers were of the opinion that there should be more recognition given to volunteers for their efforts, despite the fact that the Chinese association does on occasions put on a banquet for volunteers. They felt that recruitment could be improved by more rewards such as free tokens or tax breaks. One volunteer would like Age Concern Newcastle to recruit more volunteers to help out when their volunteers are away. The Chinese lunch club is sometimes affected by volunteers taking long periods of absence because of their ties with Hong Kong and family in other parts of the world. The running of the club was recently adversely affected when a key leader was away for these reasons. A discussion with another volunteer highlighted difficulties working with non-Chinese volunteers because of the language barrier.

Summary

According to the latest NCVO Voluntary Sector Almanac, well over twice the number of full-time equivalent paid employees would be needed to replace formal volunteers in the

59 There are many voluntary helpers in the Sikh gurdwara but they do not consider themselves ‘volunteers’.
9. Supporting volunteers

voluntary sector (Wilding et al. 2006). Organisations that use volunteers vary considerably in the ways that they approach the recruitment, support, retention and training of volunteers. As a large established local organisation, Age Concern Newcastle has developed systems of monitoring their recruitment of volunteers as well as support mechanisms and training packages for their volunteer workforce. Apart from these formal structures, the organisation has established an ethos of volunteering that nurtures a sense of family-belonging. Within a context of short term funding and constant innovation which marks the relationship between voluntary and statutory sectors, consideration of how both values and structures combine to support volunteers will have lessons for other voluntary and community organisations that use volunteers.

Our findings show that volunteers had a general idea of Age Concern Newcastle’s aims but these were mainly perceived in terms of the direct services provided by the organisation. The positive ethos of volunteering in the organisation was achieved through involvement in social events together with other tokens of appreciation. However, those within the hub of MEA House tended to identify with and benefit more from the organisation than those who were situated in the community. It is to Age Concern’s credit that in spite of (externally driven) changes, the ethos of a ‘family’ sense of belonging to the organisation continues to be maintained among volunteers and the staff they work with.

For many volunteers, the reliable presence and accessibility of a staff member provided the supportive context within which the volunteer could work best. This applied even for volunteers who were highly skilled but who still relied on the backing of the organisation to confirm their role and identity. This confirmed the importance of the relationship between paid and unpaid workers in the organisation and the need to develop and support such relationships in practical ways.

Volunteer perspectives on the management of volunteers raised several issues. Sometimes, the volunteer role can involve heavy responsibilities that make the position difficult to fill. For many volunteer roles, training was a crucial aspect, particularly where clear boundaries within which volunteers should operate were required. The effects of well managed support can be extremely positive for the organisation. Many of the views of volunteers regarding their role were based on altruistic values, which in the context of change, can sometimes come under threat.

The involvement of minority ethnic volunteers in the organisation is an important achievement, but these groups face issues specific to their communities that should not be ignored (such as long absences because of travel abroad). This is another example of the need for organisations to exercise flexibility in making volunteering accessible to a diverse older population with many different lifestyles.
Chapter 10 Conclusions

The first part of this final chapter focuses on the implications that arise from this research. These are addressed to volunteer-using organisations, to volunteering umbrella organisations and to policy makers concerned with the voluntary and public sectors, including funding bodies. Indeed they address anyone interested in the well-being of older people. The implications are grouped under five different headings. The first set are concerned with building a volunteer workforce. Next we look at the institutional and organisational factors that encourage volunteering. The timing and placing of volunteer opportunities can be important factors determining willingness to volunteer. Building on both the intrinsic and the instrumental rewards of volunteering - and keeping an appropriate balance between them - comprises the penultimate grouping. Finally we look at the provision of a socially inclusive and safe environment for volunteering. The chapter ends by highlighting the ways in which volunteering amongst older people contributes to citizenship: belonging and giving to society and the community. We pinpoint the failure to link debates on citizenship with those on work life balance, and the particular impact this has on clarifying citizenship issues as they relate to older people.

Building a volunteer workforce

Nearly three quarters of current volunteers (73 per cent) had volunteered elsewhere before volunteering for Age Concern Newcastle. This raises two important questions for consideration. How can people be helped to make the best choices between volunteer-using organisations? This is a question for voluntary organisations in general and volunteering umbrella organisations in particular. It is also important to ask how volunteer-using organisations can interest people who have not volunteered before. Other points that are raised in the course of these conclusions will assist in seeking answers to both these questions. The research found that those who took their own initiative in looking for a volunteer role would have found it useful to have a ‘broker’ to help match them as volunteers to volunteer posts, a role that volunteering umbrella organisations could take on.

Word of mouth was by a long way the most typical mode of recruitment to volunteering within Age Concern Newcastle. Ways of exploiting and making use of this situation should be considered, whether by voluntary or umbrella organisations. The problem with word of mouth recruitment is that personal networks are likely to bring in similar sorts of volunteers. For an inclusive volunteer workforce, new groups of people need to be recruited as well. There is thus a need to consider alternative ways of recruiting volunteers besides word of mouth.

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60 The implications are available in summary form as a tool for undertaking self-reviews of volunteering policy and practice within any organisation.
10. Conclusions

Age Concern Newcastle recruits its volunteers from a diversity of groups including lower income groups. This suggests a valuing of the contributions that people from these groups can make to services for older people. Age Concern Newcastle demonstrates that voluntary organisation recruitment policies can challenge volunteer stereotypes of the middle class ‘do-gooder’ as well as stereotypes of older people as ‘takers’. Our study of the Age Concern Newcastle context indicates that social networks which are based on trust and reciprocity are significant in encouraging volunteering by older people, particularly those with less educational and cultural capital. Formal avenues are less likely to succeed with such groups. Moreover, the informal unpaid work which takes place in community settings is sometimes not recognised by those who do this work as ‘volunteering’ at all. This is rather seen as ‘helping’. Mrs Mackenzie both volunteers in a lunch club and gives informal help (see Box).

‘Just helping’ the elderly

‘And apart from the Age Concern lunches the other things are really just helping my father-in-law and my neighbour [name] who doesn’t have any close family at all…. I mean she’s eighty-eight, bless her, or coming up to eighty-eight…. She’s got a cousin who’s ninety-odd in a nursing home. We take her to visit her now and again and she’s got a sister-in-law over in [place] who’s ninety-four as well, so she’s quite elderly too. So we take her to Tesco on a Monday and hospital visits and I try to get her out once every two or three weeks but it has to be indoors at this time of the year, so it’s really the medical centre. She doesn’t like going to the town. She doesn’t like being seen in her wheelchair [laughs]. And she doesn’t like having a blanket on because it makes her look old and an invalid.’ (Mrs Mackenzie)

More affirmation of the importance of what takes place informally could mobilise people to volunteer more formally, using the experiences and skills that they have gained in ‘helping out’.

Institutional and organisational factors

As an organisation that has the welfare of older people at its heart, Age Concern Newcastle is able to recruit older people as volunteers more easily than people in other age groups. The implication is that the nature of the organisation’s mission and how that is conveyed are important elements in the recruitment process. Mrs Campbell expressed it like this:

So I think they let themselves down by not promoting themselves, not pushing themselves…..I mean they push themselves for other things, for us you know but not for themselves if you understand?

Interviewer: They push themselves for you as volunteers?
Mrs Campbell: Like they push themselves, for like as an older person, if I went into Age Concern off the street they would be very good and they would look after us and do everything. But for themselves…

Interviewer: As an organisation?

Mrs Campbell: …as an organisation, they’re not saying, “look, we’re having this and we’re doing that.” Maybe they need to promote themselves a bit better.

An ethos of volunteering within the organisation together with a positive image of the organisation and the values it stands for can contribute to attracting volunteers to work in the organisation.

Good practice in the voluntary organisation is an effective advertisement for encouraging volunteering. This includes well-run formal structures to manage volunteers. However, it is equally important to develop, nurture and sustain a volunteering ethos. Thus Age Concern Newcastle has been very successful in nurturing a family-like atmosphere. This can enable the organisation to retain its volunteers through difficult periods of change, for example as funding streams and organisational priorities alter. This can be achieved by staff nurturing a sense of ownership in the activities of volunteering. Events and outings are very helpful in developing a sense of belonging to the organisation among volunteers.

Volunteers emphasise their commitment to the service-user or user group, and - to a lesser extent - to fellow volunteers. Volunteer managers should ensure that the conditions for good relationships between the different parties are provided within the organisation. Emphasis on the instrumental benefits of volunteering (for example, accreditation of work) without acknowledging its intrinsic benefits may have negative consequences for volunteering in general. The research shows that faith groups and schools are key institutions for routing individuals into volunteering, and that these are perceived as institutions which encourage and support volunteering based on intrinsic rewards.

The boundary that volunteering has with paid work needs to be carefully negotiated. When a volunteering role becomes as demanding as an equivalent paid post, the rationale and incentive for volunteering can be undermined. Certain one-to-one volunteer roles have caring work dimensions that also need careful specification, for the mutual safety of volunteers and client. It is undoubtedly true that the service-delivery role of voluntary organisations often benefits from the ‘value-added’ that volunteers bring, but careful attention needs to be paid to role definition.

Government initiatives to promote volunteering can be perceived negatively by older volunteers as exploiting a form of ‘cheap’ labour. Changes to services resulting from changing funding opportunities and priorities can also be experienced as disempowering for volunteers, as Mrs Atkinson indicates.

And I lost all three [lunch clubs] of mine [sic], they all closed.
10. Conclusions

Interviewer: Because of the cuts?

Mrs Atkinson: Because of the way the funding was going. They amalgamated so many into other clubs and some became core clubs which is less able people, but what they do with them, which I didn’t like, you had so many in the morning, they went home, then you had so many of an afternoon. Well to me that’s, that wasn’t my intentions and that’s not the way I wanted to run the lunch club.

The careful communication of organisational strategic priorities in line with funding received from government or other sources, and changes in funding mechanisms, could improve volunteer perceptions.

The timing and placing of volunteer opportunities

Retirement from a time-structured lifestyle leaves a gap that many wish to fill with worthwhile activities, giving retired people a particular reason to volunteer. However, retired individuals face multiple demands on their time from family, leisure activities, informal volunteering and other forms of social participation. Expectations of volunteers should take these demands into consideration. It was notable that only a very small minority of volunteers spoke of pre-retirement courses as an influence on taking up volunteering. Volunteering umbrella organisations in particular could target such courses and encourage them to take a greater role in assisting retirees in making informed choices about volunteering in the context of other leisure and learning activities.

Retired older people are generally more available to volunteer during the daytime when those in paid work are not. This makes them a good source of potential volunteers. Volunteer-using organisations should aim to recruit older volunteers who could volunteer in regular blocks during the daytime. It is nevertheless important to realise that some older people – especially those in their fifties – are likely to have grandparenting responsibilities. The times at which grandparents can commit to volunteering may be restricted. This is particularly the case for grandparents who have family members in other parts of the country. Volunteers from the minority ethnic communities may travel abroad for blocks of time to fulfil their family obligations. The timing of volunteer opportunities could be structured outside holiday and visiting seasons.

The amount of time given to other organisations by Age Concern Newcastle volunteers is high, a fact that should be taken into consideration when making demands on volunteer time. Indeed, all voluntary organisations need to deal with the fact that they do not have a monopoly on volunteers’ time. Volunteers will have loyalties and commitments to other organisations. Organisations may therefore be competing with the same pool of people who are inclined to volunteer. Large and small voluntary organisations could look to ways of co-operating in using the contribution of volunteers rather than competing with each other. An example could be the shared provision of training. Volunteering umbrella organisations could fulfil a facilitating role here.
10. Conclusions

**Building on intrinsic and instrumental rewards**

Volunteering that is structured around intrinsic rewards respects the control and autonomy of older people, who at their stage in their lives do not appreciate external pressures to perform. Older volunteers often emphasise their ability to *choose* to volunteer, yet they also have a strong sense of obligation too. However, this sense of obligation should not be presumed upon to sustain volunteering. Tokens of appreciation have a place alongside the intrinsic rewards people gain from their volunteering experience.

Volunteering can give the volunteer a role and an identity. It can be a form of respite from other stressful life experiences, and volunteers report general benefits to their health. For most volunteers, the opportunities to interact with others that come with volunteering are highly valued. Volunteer-using organisations should do all they can to facilitate the social interactions that are important and rewarding to volunteers. Volunteering has been described as a way of belonging to society, and about being a valued member of society. The family-like ethos at Age Concern Newcastle nurtures and sustains such a sense of belonging. Events and outings are much appreciated as a means of promoting this ethos.

While volunteering is seen as unpaid *work* that is undertaken from (voluntary) choice, concomitant meanings of volunteering derive from its caring, leisure and enjoyment aspects. Volunteer-using organisations should assess whether volunteering within their particular context could be promoted in ways that can appeal to different types of volunteer. Volunteers who gain enjoyment and meaning from volunteering primarily as work, caring or leisure could be targeted in different ways.

Volunteer development and training is an important aspect of volunteer recruitment and training. Personal accounts from volunteers indicate that volunteering provides a context for the learning of new skills and gaining knowledge, and is a form of personal development and appreciated for its own sake.

The research showed that supporters, mainly spouses, can make a considerable contribution to enabling and facilitating volunteering, for example by providing transport. Volunteer-using organisations should seek ways to acknowledge this kind of supporting contribution.

**Providing a socially inclusive and safe environment**

The visible presence of the organisation in public space can contribute to volunteering, as can outreach into community spaces where people meet. It is also important to recognise that the physical environment and infrastructure within which volunteers work are important factors contributing to a sense of safety and wellbeing; this in turn assists in the
10. Conclusions

recruitment and retention of volunteers. Volunteers who work beyond the confines of the organisation’s head office premises, especially on a one-to-one basis, appreciate more support. Those who are in group settings are able to work more autonomously.

The needs of specific groups of volunteers require consideration, whether disabled, frail, elderly, or minority ethnic. For some older people, it may be appropriate to ensure that less physically demanding roles are valued. Organisations should be flexible enough to manage small commitments of time at least in some roles. The resource implications of such considerations have to be weighed against the benefits of greater inclusiveness.

Volunteer-using organisations need to recognise that volunteers are agents in their own right who are capable of demonstrating this in a number of ways and therefore should not be taken advantage of or taken for granted. Organisations should involve volunteers in more decision-making around service delivery for example. At a more micro-level, while volunteers appreciated that staff and volunteers were treated with equal respect within Age Concern Newcastle, they valued a greater recognition of their role as workers ‘on the ground’ and prompt attention to the concerns that they raised.

Volunteering and citizenship in later life

An underlying rationale for undertaking this research is that volunteering by older people can challenge the stereotypes of old age dependency. Active aging is a policy priority within the European Union, while in the UK the Performance and Innovation Unit recognises that volunteering addresses the wider agenda of improving civic society and promoting civil renewal. Volunteering is thus intimately – but for older people, ambivalently - linked with ideas of citizenship. For there is a danger that volunteering is seen as a panacea for the problems of society without considering the very different constraints of and opportunities available to different age groups. Indeed, volunteering is an expression of citizenship roles and responsibilities, but it is also taken as a key indicator of social capital. With continuing major socio-economic changes, volunteering may be identified as a means of transforming the economic and social well being of individuals, households and communities. The ambivalent link between volunteering and citizenship is most apparent in the ways in which older people must negotiate the allocation of time across the fuzzy boundaries between paid work, unpaid family and caring work, informal volunteering and formal volunteering.

With more and more women in the labour market, there are greater pressures on retired people to fill the gaps in family care, whether for grandchildren or for their fellow elderlies. This calls for more informal unpaid work time from older people. At the same time, government policy emphasises ‘welfare to work’ and ‘making work pay’, encouraging an image of the ‘citizen worker’. Volunteering is then seen in instrumental terms as a route back in to paid work for those who are not currently active in the labour market for whatever reason. Furthermore, the role of volunteering in public service delivery brings new and greater demands on volunteers, as partnership between the
statutory and voluntary sectors results in tighter specifications and greater accountability. This can make volunteering even more ‘work-like’, despite the lack of pay.

So how important is the link between paid work and volunteering and what is the significance for citizenship with respect to older people who may not be involved in paid work at all? Can an ethic of paid work have a happy co-existence with (unpaid) volunteering, or do they tend to undermine each other as elements of citizenship, particularly for older people? Citizenship is both a status and an active practice. As an active practice, citizenship needs time inputs to make a contribution to the common good and to social capital. As argued earlier in this report, time is relatively little discussed in the context of citizenship, with citizenship all but invisible in the ‘work life balance’ agenda. As Chapter 8 in particular emphasised, older people may have considerable demands on their time from family caring responsibilities and from informal volunteering.

Age Concern Newcastle’s mission and functions support older people as citizens. Citizenship entitlements are catered for through services and support, through meeting needs and through consultation and advocacy. Age Concern Newcastle encourages the participation and inclusion of older people, challenging negative images of older people as burdensome. Volunteers are key to the organisation’s activities. ‘Volunteers assist in promoting opportunities for older people to be involved in defining their own needs, deciding on priorities and taking control over decisions which affect their own lives.’61 In what ways does Age Concern Newcastle achieve this promotion of citizenship amongst its older volunteers?

The survey (see Chapter 5) confirmed that Age Concern Newcastle recruits volunteers from low income groups, from deprived localities, and with disabilities. The data thus suggests that older people from a wide range of social backgrounds are active as citizens through their involvement in volunteering with Age Concern Newcastle. Overall, these volunteers are more active in social and civic activities than the general population, with 68 per cent involved in at least one social group and 43 per cent involved in at least one form of civic participation. Nearly 80 per cent of the survey respondents voted in the last local election, well above the national average. When it came to reasons for volunteering, making an active contribution to society and to older people specifically proved the most important. The most prominent reason given for volunteering was ‘to put my spare time to good use’ (53 per cent) followed by ‘to improve the lives of older people’ (42 per cent). Nevertheless just over half the volunteers reported difficulties in trying to juggle volunteering with the rest of their lives. This is not surprising given that more than half of Age Concern Newcastle volunteers aged over 55 also volunteer informally, that more than two fifths volunteer for another organisation as well, and that more than a third have caring commitments. This management of time has a gendered dimension in that women respondents in particular had relatively high levels of responsibility for looking after home and caring for family.

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61 Age Concern Newcastle General Volunteer Guidelines
10. Conclusions

The different forms that their commitment to volunteering take become apparent once we turn to the data from the in-depth interviews. Volunteering was widely seen as something that should not be financially rewarded, and its intrinsic rewards were very much appreciated. So volunteering was conceived of as being quite distinct from paid work, although some volunteers were keen to point out that their previous work experience could be relevant to their volunteering activities. The expression of their commitment to volunteering brought out two distinct, if related, conceptualisations of citizenship on the part of interviewees. One group emphasised the norms and values they held, and saw a need to ‘give back’ to society at this stage of their lives in the light of what society had given to them over their lifetime. Another group placed more emphasis on self help and mutual aid as the driver for their volunteering activities. ‘We’re all in this life together’ was a rallying point, and volunteering was seen as part of being wanted, being part of society and of a national charitable cause defending the rights of older people. Both groups gave expression to volunteers as the ‘consumer-citizen’, emphasising the importance of independence, control and autonomy for older people. Older people, in other words, have the right to exercise agency as volunteers or community activists. It was notable that volunteers from the minority ethnic community brought rather different perspectives to volunteering and citizenship, based on their own community or religious background.

What are the limits, then, that older people place on their citizenship contributions through volunteering? Chapter 8 discussed this issue in terms of the opportunities and constraints on volunteering: what might be called the capacity to volunteer. As already suggested, time constraints are a major issue, whether in terms of overall hours available or the timing of those hours over the week or the year. Interviewees made it clear that either intense careers or caring responsibilities had impacted on their ability to volunteer in the past and that particularly the latter could continue to be constraining. Volunteering can be described as leisure and recreation and in terms of pleasure and satisfaction and is then an opportunity. But when volunteering takes on a more work like quality – whether due to over-commitment or a sense of obligation or because volunteers feel taken for granted – this will tend to limit volunteering activity. Management practices can damage the spirit of volunteering among older people when demands on their time and effort exceed their expectations.

Both time and the intensity of effort required may constrain the volunteering contribution of those with disabilities or with ill health, whether mental or physical, and older older people. Age Concern Newcastle has been able to incorporate people in all these groups into its volunteer force, but it requires additional support and management effort to achieve this. The opportunity to volunteer for small amounts of time and in less demanding roles can have a very positive effect on those with disabilities or health problems as it encourages them to be active in spite of their disability. Indeed, volunteering is a way of sustaining self-esteem and well being in the later stages of life for all volunteers.

62 See Chapters 7 and 8.
10. Conclusions

All this suggests that the capacity to enable, foster and nurture the undoubted contribution that older people make to the citizenship agenda through their volunteering activities is of key importance. The need for sensitive and supportive management of the volunteer force within any voluntary organisations cannot be underestimated. Encouraging diversity of participation is equally important. This implies that organisations using volunteers should wherever possible employ someone in the role of volunteer manager.

Let us conclude with some of the wider issues that can facilitate citizenship through volunteering. Voluntary organisations working together with government and statutory bodies can create the environment and provide the infrastructure and opportunities for civic participation. However, too much government input into encouraging volunteering – particularly as a route into paid employment - can have the opposite effect, and lead to volunteer perceptions that they are being foolish to work for nothing. It is very important for policy makers to appreciate the distinction between paid work and volunteer activity with respect to citizenship for the older population. One way of doing this would be to incorporate time for volunteering and active citizenship into the work life balance debate. For example, the evidence of this research is that volunteering with children and young people is likely to have a significant role to play in nurturing the next generation of citizens. The importance of good public transport for facilitating volunteering - as well as sane travel to work - requires much more attention than is currently being given to it. Volunteering is no cure-all for the threatening care deficit in our society, and older people certainly reject the notion that they have a special obligation to volunteer. It would be useful if funding bodies were to appreciate the input from volunteers by making specific provision for funded volunteer manager.

This research has shown not only that volunteering contributes to citizenship and civic participation, but also that it can help to combat age discrimination, social exclusion and the isolation faced by many older people. In the longer term more fundamental questions may arise. What of the pension crisis and any shift in the pension age, with more people encouraged - or constrained - to work beyond the age of 65? Should we be giving consideration to a looming volunteering deficit in a scenario where well off pensioners opt to spend their time on holidays abroad, while the rest have to continue in paid employment?
Appendix

APPENDIX A

Project steering group members:
Sue Pearson (Chief Executive, ACN)
David Shipley (Volunteer Manager)
Julie Tait (Community Development Manager)
Prof Jane Wheelock (Principal Investigator)
Dr Susan Baines (Senior Research Associate)
Mabel Lie (Research Associate)
Sarah Walsh (Research Associate)

Publicising the research

The results of this project will provide great benefits to the wide range of organisations concerned with volunteering. An Advisory Group will play a key role in supporting our dissemination plans and ensuring effective engagement with as many relevant audiences as possible. This will include organisations that are reliant upon volunteers and aim to promote their active involvement; national, regional and local government and charitable bodies concerned with policy development around volunteering and caring to identify the constraints and opportunities for older volunteers; policy organisations, including charitable, educational and professional bodies, wishing to promote ideas of active citizenship amongst older people and aiming to counter stereotypes and prejudice.

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‘Volunteering, self-help and citizenship in later life’

April 2004 – May 2006

A collaborative research project by Age Concern Newcastle and Newcastle University

Funded by the Big Lottery Fund
Appendix

Introduction

Age Concern Newcastle is unusual in depending heavily on the contribution of volunteers who are over retirement age and sometimes very elderly. Recognition that older people can provide, as well as receive, voluntary services and care is at the heart of this project. Older people are often stereotyped as ‘takers’ rather than ‘givers’. But there is evidence that caring and neighbouring by older people make a vital contribution to families and communities. Older people provide care to the young (for example grandchildren) as well as to other older people, and they give support to neighbours. Many are also volunteers.

Project questions

1. What is already known about patterns of volunteering amongst the older population and what are the characteristics of those who volunteer for Age Concern Newcastle?

2. What are older people’s understandings of how and why they volunteer, and how does volunteering activity fit into the rest of their lives?

3. What makes for best practice in recruitment, retention, support and training and for accessing and encouraging volunteering from older people?

4. What does citizenship mean for older people?

Who will be involved?

- Volunteers
- Former volunteers
- Older people who participate in Age Concern Newcastle’s activities

Stages in the research

1: Review of sources
This first stage of the project involves a review of what is already known to tease out the nature and extent of voluntary activities and attitudes to volunteering by different groups of older people.

2: Focus groups
Three focus group meetings are planned to draw upon the knowledge and expertise of Age Concern Newcastle volunteers. This will enable the researchers to inform volunteers about the research, and to plan and carry out the field work and dissemination of findings.

3: Survey
This will comprise a short questionnaire survey of all Age Concern Newcastle active volunteers and a sample of former volunteers, aimed at finding out how volunteering for Age Concern fits into their daily lives.

4: In-depth interviews
This is the most substantial stage. We want to interview volunteers and former volunteers to ask about their experience, commitments and attitudes and to interview service users about their views on volunteering and what is provided by Age Concern
ETHICAL STATEMENT

Thank you for responding to the questionnaire survey sent out in August 2004 and agreeing to participate in the final and most important stage of the research. As we have explained, this research will look at the vital contribution that older people make to their families and communities. It will also help Age Concern to improve the recruitment, retention and support of volunteers.

In order to do this, we would like to hear about your experience of volunteering and how it fits in with your other commitments. With your permission, we would like to tape record the conversation. This is so that it will be a true record of what you have told us. Once the discussions on the tapes have been transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed. While we value everything that you will say to us, we have to be selective in the use of material in our reports. We will maintain confidentiality by giving you a different name and may change details so that you will not be recognised.

We have consulted with Age Concern staff and an advisory group of Age Concern volunteers about this stage of the research and the ethical guidelines we should follow. Thus as researchers, we have agreed that we will:

- not use your name when we use the information you have given us
- only use the information for the purposes of research and dissemination
- keep the information you have given us safe and maintain confidentiality
- not expect you to talk to us about things if you don’t want to
- stop the interview at any point and for any reason
- change the way we record the interview if you prefer
- keep you informed of reports and findings from the research

__________________ _____________________
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m.l.s.lie@ncl.ac.uk   s.walsh@ncl.ac.uk
**APPENDIX C**

**FEMALE CURRENT VOLUNTEERS in alphabetical order**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pseudonym</th>
<th>age</th>
<th>area</th>
<th>work situations</th>
<th>living arrangements</th>
<th>years volunteered for ACN</th>
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<td>Mrs Armstrong</td>
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<td>With others</td>
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<td>4-8 years</td>
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<td>With others</td>
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### MALE CURRENT VOLUNTEERS in alphabetical order

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<tr>
<td>Mr Metcalfe</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Moore</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>4-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Wheeler</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### FEMALE FORMER VOLUNTEERS in alphabetical order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pseudonym</th>
<th>age</th>
<th>area</th>
<th>work situations</th>
<th>living arrangements</th>
<th>years volunteered for ACN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Baker</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Bartley</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>4-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Douglas</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Dunn</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Edwards</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Fenwick</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Fletcher</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Fraser</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Gibson</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Green</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Hill</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Patterson</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Smith</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Nelson</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### MALE FORMER VOLUNTEERS in alphabetical order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Work Situations</th>
<th>Living Arrangements</th>
<th>Years Volunteered for ACN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Armitage</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Chao</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Gordon</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>4-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Harrison</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Nesbit</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>6-12 mths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Sutton</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Tindle</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>6-12 mths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### LEISURE AND LEARNING USERS in alphabetical order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Work Situations</th>
<th>Living Arrangements</th>
<th>Years Volunteered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Hodgson</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Milburn</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Canon</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Granger</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>4-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Gray</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Henderson</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>4-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Hutchinson</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Jackson</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>6-12 mths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs James</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Lawson</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>6-12 mths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Lewis</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Maddison</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>With others</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Martin</td>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>4-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Parker</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>Not in 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>9 or more years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Wallace</td>
<td>75+</td>
<td>In 10% deprived</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Living Alone</td>
<td>-</td>
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</table>
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