



The value of working with volunteers on Time to Shine projects

Time to Shine toolkit
September 2019



Time to
Shine



About Time to Shine

Run by Leeds Older People's Forum, Time to Shine aims to reduce social isolation and loneliness of the older population in Leeds.

Our vision is that older people need not experience loneliness and social isolation as an inevitable consequence of ageing but that our project will offer opportunities for fulfilment by breaking down barriers and building strong communities.

Time to Shine is one of fourteen areas which form Ageing Better; an ambitious large scale programme funded and developed by The National Lottery Community Fund. Ageing Better aims to improve the lives of people aged 50 and over by reducing social isolation and loneliness.

Introduction

The Time to Shine programme is delivered by a wide range of delivery partners. Most are third sector organisations used to working with volunteers as a matter of course. Organisations delivering projects across the Time to Shine programme planned to work with volunteers in different ways. For some projects, especially those working with men, recruiting individuals as volunteers has been a key part of their recruitment strategy.

Working with volunteers was not always appropriate and some projects learned useful lessons about when to use them.

Volunteers are not always a low cost or easy option but the overall feeling about working with volunteers has been a positive one.



What information have we collected on volunteer involvement?

Time to Shine has funded over 90 projects (2015-2019). Delivery partners collect case studies, quotes, insights and learning from participants, volunteers and staff. Our evidence for this report is based on those case studies and insights. We also ran a workshop with a range of delivery staff who wanted to share their on working with volunteers on older people's projects.

Research is integral to the Time to Shine programme and so far 1,600 participants and volunteers (aged 50+) have completed an evaluation questionnaire. We have not recorded quantitative information linking volunteering to wellbeing or loneliness. We do have records of volunteer numbers and volunteer hours across the projects.

This report is therefore based on the qualitative information gathered which shows clearly, for some participants at least, that volunteers offer them support. For other people who start out as participants and who then start to volunteer, being able to 'give back' by volunteering is also a valuable thing.



How do Time to Shine's partners work with volunteers?

“Volunteers enhance what we can deliver” *Carers Leeds*

The majority of Time to Shine projects involved, or tried to involve, volunteers as part of their delivery. Clearly every project worked with volunteers in a slightly different way but some general themes emerged.

- Volunteers enabled delivery hours to be extended
- Volunteer befrienders enabled staff to work with more people
- Volunteers offered additional support to individuals so they could join a group
- Volunteers were recruited to share specific skills with others
- The chance to volunteer was a specific offer made to recruit members
- Volunteers offered intergenerational activity
- Volunteers were given the skills to run independent groups
- Finally, volunteering enabled younger older people to become active in social projects as preventative for older old age.



Is volunteering accessible to everyone?

Staff tend to perceive barriers to volunteering in terms of time, finances available and so on, and plan ways to reduce or remove those barriers.

However it transpired some of the barriers for individuals resulted from their perceptions of their place in the world and their feelings of self-worth.

“We have never really considered ourselves as potential table hosts as it is a volunteer role and the volunteers seem quite middle class”

“I assumed that the table hosts would need to be car drivers and have organisational skills. If the venues were on bus routes I wouldn’t mind being a host if we were asked, as I am confident in mixing and chatting” (Shared Tables participants)

This indicates that the role of ‘volunteer’ comes with a set of implications whereas, for some people, ‘helping out’ is something they would be happy to do.

People frequently needed to be asked as they were unsure of whether their help is wanted.

“Many see the role as an informal activity, helping out and would not class themselves as ‘official volunteers’.” (Leeds Community Connect)

Organisations note that it is possible to reduce the effect of formal barriers by:

- being very clear about why checks or paperwork might be needed
- keeping in touch with people throughout the process



Challenges

Uncovering a higher level of need than expected meant volunteers were not always an appropriate answer.

The Cara project at Leeds Irish Health and Homes identified that a proportion of those referred to the project initially had needs greater or more complex than could be met by volunteers who were addressing social isolation. They were able to change their system so that individuals could be seen initially by the project manager who was then able to refer them for more intensive support or pass them onto a befriending volunteer as appropriate. This meant the role continued to be manageable for the volunteers.

Staff in the SWIFt projects (working with older people experiencing frailty) found that initial contacts had to be with a worker who had the time needed to build a rapport, and the knowledge needed to provide complex support. It was then possible to introduce support from volunteer befrienders, drivers and so on as the individual wanted. One of the SWIFt projects was able to supplement paid staff by working with a student social worker on placement who was able to commit long term and had a comprehensive skill set.

It is still possible to work with volunteers to deliver challenging projects but recruitment and management of those volunteers needs to be carefully considered.



Summary

We worked with delivery partners to identify how they felt working with volunteers had helped their projects; this qualitative learning is summarised here:

For the organisation

- Volunteers bring knowledge of a local community and help to create sustainable projects
- Volunteers can bring their life experience
- Volunteers keep the organisation fresh and offer challenge
- So much more can be done by working with volunteers

For the volunteer

- The experience can develop great confidence. This can be a fantastic outcome for those who don't start off planning to volunteer as they find their niche and are trusted with responsibility
- It can fulfil their personal motivations, whether that is fun, friendship or the experience of working with a variety of people. An ability to find their personal motivations and put volunteers in the right roles can be key to their experience
- They will learn new skills, or come to recognise the strengths they already have.

For participants

- Volunteers are often able to give more time to individuals than paid members of staff. This can be invaluable when people need support to regain their confidence.
- Participants are often able to identify with the volunteers, especially if they are also older people, and are able to act as intermediaries
- Volunteers can make it possible for participants join groups or attend events as their efforts make things work logistically - by offering transport, or translation or moral support



Recommendations and references

- Working with Volunteers: case studies
- Working with Volunteers: a toolkit
- Elderberries poem portrait (for Shirley)

The Centre for Ageing Better undertakes research into ageing in the UK. There is a booklet for volunteer-involving organisations which sets out six principles for age-friendly and inclusive volunteering and ideas for how to put them into practice.

There is also a review of community contributions in later life. It calls on charities, voluntary organisations and the public sector to do more to support and sustain the good will and effort of older volunteers: visit www.ageing-better.org.uk

Find these reports and other resources on the Leeds Older People's Forum website www.opforum.org.uk/resources



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