Scottish
Volunteering
Forum

Thematic Discussion: The Spectrum of Volunteering

Summary Report

Introduction:

The Scottish Volunteering Forum is a collaborative group of cross-sector organisations that are committed to developing and improving volunteer participation in Scotland. We exist to influence the strategic landscape and champion innovative approaches using our collective intelligence and expertise. Discussions had by the forum have already been used to inform meetings with the Scottish Government and drive influence over key strategies.

The Volunteering for All outcomes framework expands the vocabulary of volunteering and for the first time includes acts of neighbourliness and informal actions including donating clothing to charity shops as part of volunteering. The inclusion of this thematic session will help the forum to establish what organisations can learn from informal volunteering.

Wider evidence for the changes in how people are defining volunteering comes from new research from NCVO and the Time Well Spent report, which indicates that people continue to volunteer based on place, but see volunteering as overly bureaucratic, too structured or too formal. The need for greater flexibility and balance is the key takeaway from this report when we see that formal volunteering has dropped by 2% but people continue to volunteer in informal contexts.

In December 2019 all Scottish Volunteering Forum members including Third Sector Interfaces were sent a survey about the Spectrum of Volunteering. Survey responses came from a broad spectrum of organisation, including TSIs, Scotland- and UK-wide organisations, and organisations working across local authority areas. These organisations represent the voices of over 100,000 volunteers.

The responses showed that most organisations are providing more flexible volunteering opportunities or a range of opportunities with varying degrees of formality, including micro volunteering and digital participation, and use informal volunteering as a gateway to formal roles. Responses identified the current political climate as a key motivator where frustration with the government and cuts to local services inspire active citizenship. These responses could form the basis of a national campaign to address the structural barriers in volunteering.

Discussion Summary

1) *Definition of volunteering*
   Sistema have adopted definitions of volunteering that sit on the formal end of the spectrum and that are in line with the Scottish Executive's definition. Louise McGinty added that when defining volunteering at Quarriers they needed to reassure paid staff that volunteer roles would not be used to replace their jobs.

   Feedback from volunteers at Quarriers has been that volunteers do not want to stop formal checks like PVGs and references because for many volunteering is a pathway into employment where these checks are standard. As a social care organisation they are obligated to run these checks to ensure that all vulnerable persons are protected.

2) *Inclusion of service users*
   At Shelter Scotland the inclusion of service users has become a deliberate volunteer pathway. This has required specific commitment and adaption of processes, needing Shelter Scotland to see their service as a pathway rather than a role.

   Sarah added that just because a volunteer does not identify with this label (seeing themselves as activists or peer supporters) does not mean that organisations can drop the responsibility and time commitment required to volunteers.

   For Shelter Scotland if a person is representing their experience it is referred to as 'involvement', not volunteering, if they are not delivering part of the service. This often becomes a pathway for service users to transition into formal volunteering roles. Ruth Leonard questioned where this pathway and role would fit on the definition spectrum.

3) *Paid roles and service replacement*
   Paul Wilson added that the definition of volunteering is a daily discussion for Third Sector Interfaces and they often have to push back against adverts for 30 hour/week roles, where there is a clear issue of what constitutes a voluntary role. We need to achieve a balance between getting more people to volunteer, and ensuring it is appropriate.

   For some volunteers if they know the requirements of the role they are getting in to then there is no reason for restrictions on time; small or unincorporated charities that work through a board are likely to require more time commitment with less structure. Social enterprises in particular vary on levels of compliance, but this is the choice of the individual.

   Sarah questioned when an action becomes volunteering, and when it stops being volunteering. A distinction from paid roles is needed, but with more cuts to services

expected the third sector might feel pressure to relax the definition and time expectation. Paul agreed that with the closure of services like libraries and community hubs communities are stepping in to take on formerly paid roles. Louise has seen greater collaboration in the face of service cuts, with Local Authorities donating a building or space and volunteers donating their time to continue services. How can we restrict the definition of volunteering when people want to do it?

Damian summarised this tension over time: on the informal side of the spectrum you can give unrestricted time, but on the formal side organisations generally do. Sarah questioned whether encouraging this level of volunteering is enabling local authorities to cut services and erode job satisfaction. Sarah cited the use of volunteers to provide patient care in the NHS, a part of the role that many nurses love, as demonstrated in the BBC 'Hospital Experiment' programme last year.

CHAS took a different view of this role, believing that it gives nurses more capacity and shows that volunteers can be trusted. Emma Picken added that these roles are supplementing staff capacity and are particularly important for volunteers from a refugee background who want to learn new specialisms because their qualifications do no translate in the UK.

Formal roles have created a new pathway in CHAS from volunteer to paid staff. Quarriers have also experienced this and use word of mouth to recruit from volunteers. Louise added that paid staff roles won't be replaced, but volunteers add to its success. When people are thriving because of volunteering we can't restrict them because of red tape; it is a testament to the benefits of volunteering that organisations can be flexible and let people grow. Restrictions on time spent volunteering should therefore be approached carefully. Ruth Leonard suggested that we stop looking at volunteering through an employment lens, and approach it as a leisure pursuit.

4) *Language*
Impact Funding Partners support a lot of organisations who need formality in their volunteer roles, but continue to be supported by people who don't recognise themselves as 'volunteers'.

CHAS are increasingly using models more akin to fundraising supporters that traditional HR, taking on the culture and relationship management focus of this team, with more emphasis on supporter journeys. This has been a logical step for CHAS as two thirds of volunteers are also donors. Shelter Scotland have adapted in a similar way, for example using different language on applications to Disclosure Scotland than on volunteer role descriptions. The structure of these checks are set up to show volunteers in an employment lens that doesn't fit, particularly when many Shelter Scotland volunteers have a criminal history.

Morven is interested in investigating how we manage fundraising volunteers alongside service volunteers. CHAS have been seeing an increase of gift in kind donations/skills bank, but struggle to decide whether these are volunteer or fundraising responsibilities. Cancer Support Scotland has also struggled to manage fundraising volunteers to the same level as service volunteers. Running a marathon requires high levels of training and commitment, and Stacey is keen to capture this commitment better through support squads or similar angles.

Macmillan have an action team but fundraising and volunteers are still different teams. Shelter Scotland have done some mapping on these issues: community volunteers are flexible and informal roles that are centrally managed by the volunteering team but can be a light touch on training and bureaucracy because they are just leafleting or talking to people. The Red Cross have 'crisis teams' that appeals to the neighbourly end of the spectrum, where people want to give time during an emergency or crisis.

These new systems and methods need to be captured and shared on a national scale. For Quarriers fundraising volunteers remain informal, but when they want to start doing different activities they have to immediately jump through Disclosure hoops. Sarah would like to see this as more of a staged journey.

5) *Inclusion agenda*
Whilst reducing bureaucracy and increasing the informality of volunteering was a key goal for most contributors to the discussion, there was a lack of clarity on how to balance this change with appropriate risk management. In particular organisations have struggles to convince their boards to make changes to established risk and safety management.

Sarah reflected that this process takes time; at Shelter Scotland the team went through a year of incremental change with evidence gathering and adapting systems that were in place to convince their Safeguarding Panel that changes to recruitment processes, such as removing the requirement for references, do not present additional risk. Shelter Scotland are keen that this change in practice is shared across the voluntary sector. Paul Wilson agreed that these innovations should be shared beyond the steering group as an adaptive process for every organisation, rather than a prescriptive formula.

Small organisations will have a different experience of adapting their processes. Micro organisations will not always have a long history where they need to evidence a considered change in policy, and Emma reinforced that small organisations can manoeuvre reactively to changes needed in practice. There was some discussion of the extent to which larger organisations are over-complicating their processes to justify their own roles. Small organisations have an advantage in that their activity

will be under significantly less scrutiny. Stacey raised the issue that we may be putting processes in place because we have the resource to do it.

Laura raised an issue faced by Sustrans of ineffective reporting on informal volunteering. Damian agreed that the sector has a responsibility to show that public money is not being squandered, and that our approaches are improving. Sarah gave an example of monitoring Shelter Scotland's Acts of Kindness campaign through website clicks that allowed them to show how many people had visited the site, although this does not show action taken.

Paul raised the wider issues of monitoring and reporting on volunteering with regards to the Invest in Volunteers/Volunteer Friendly certification that have become increasingly inflexible and focused on bureaucratic processes.

6) *Reclaiming the definition*
The definition of volunteering given by Scottish Government is not convincing and a need to reclaim the term was widely expressed. Ruth Hutton asked the forum if having a spectrum definition helps people to get involved, which was agreed to show the diversity of volunteering but could overcomplicate it. Morven emphasised the need for an internationally recognisable term, which 'volunteering' provides, where terms live civic engagement are changeable.

Laura suggested campaign language around the number of volunteer hours given rather than the number of volunteers to better demonstrate impact, Damian agreed that this would shift the focus from driving numbers to the causes that matter.

Morven asked how we fill regular roles that are no longer appealing to the traditional group of retired women. For Shelter Scotland lots more flexible and organic opportunities have been created, including self-rotas for greater autonomy.

There is concern over capacity and the expectation to increase the number of volunteers if we are reducing hours. Damian also raised the benefits of formality, particularly where vulnerable people have services bungee jumping into their lives. Louise agreed that people need consistency from our services, and that diversity in our volunteer offer means that we can attract different types of people.

Bill raised the benefits of informal volunteering in getting people furthest from volunteering into roles. Damian raised campaigns like Shelter's Little Act, Big Impact that show the possibilities for informal volunteering. The issue of how to measure these acts was once again raised, particularly with regards to how organisations can justify putting resources into something that can't be measured. Sarah argued that just because you can't measure something doesn't mean you shouldn't do it.

7) *Actions*

Damian summarised these discussions as having no consensus but lots of opportunities for actions. Ruth Hutton is representing the Scottish Government and their delivery plans, and so is here to look for items to take forward.

Louise suggested that online time banks could provide a platform for how to volunteer informally, but that this would not be used unless it is incentivised. An online hashtag like #RandomActsOfKindness might help to track and measure impact. Stuart McMillan added that recording these activities is not in the ethos of volunteering, and that community pages could drive these activities.

There was agreement that a cross-sector hashtag or call to action would be appropriate for this and would build social capital. Sarah suggested a national campaign on active citizenship that did not become tangled in concern over measurement. Paul agreed that a hashtag campaign would work because this work is unlikely to be funded. He added that SCVO and TSI funding should be used for this work since it is a big part of their funding objectives.

Damian raised the issue that a lack of mapping meant that ideas were not spreading across the sector. Ruth volunteered to share some mapping that she has access to. **Action: Ruth Leonard.**

Sarah raised the issue that the SVF is not the voice of all the sector and that many organisations are not being heard. **Action: Sarah Latto** to discuss engagement with the forum steering group.

Margaret raised the issue that hashtags are being used by organisations rather than people, which may limit the success of campaigns. Jenni Snell agreed that hashtags can become an echo chamber. Sarah suggested that people are better at saying thank you rather than patting themselves on the back, and Volunteers' Week could feature a day of 'thank yous'. **Action: Margaret Starkie.**

Margaret suggested that Volunteering for All could be the call to action for this campaign. **Action: Margaret Starkie.**

The next thematic session is on **Lifelong Volunteering**. The meeting will be held in Glasgow on the **20th March in Glasgow**.

The following theme will be on the Impact of Volunteering. This meeting will be held in Stirling in June.