

Scottish Volunteering Forum

Thematic Discussion: Volunteer Motivations and Barriers

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.

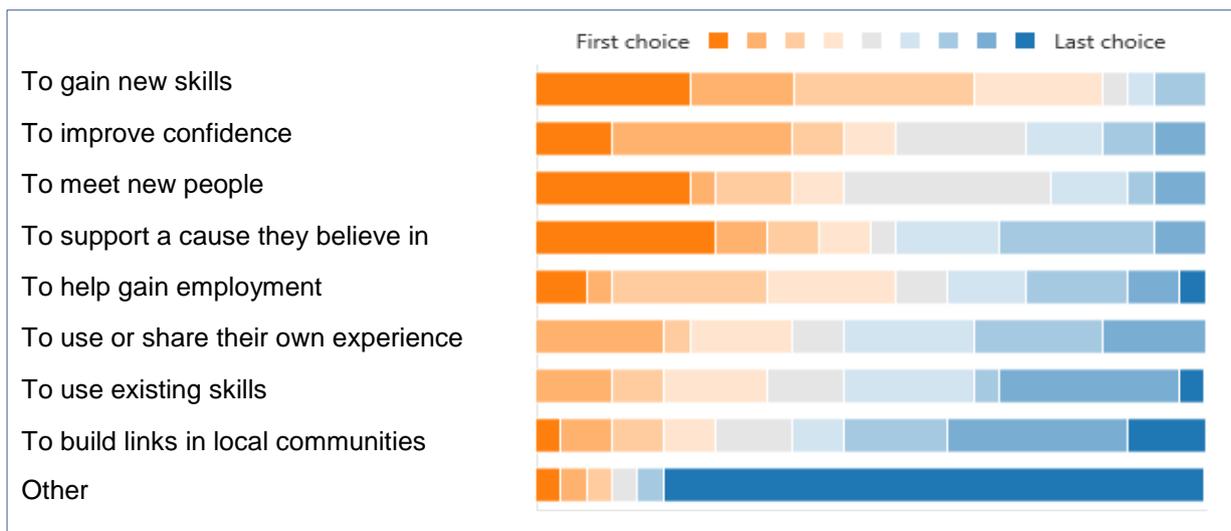
In October 2019, all Scottish Volunteering Forum members and Third Sector Interfaces were sent a survey about Volunteer Motivations and Barriers. The following month, representatives from 7 Scottish Volunteering Forum member organisations and 3 Third Sector Interfaces met to share their collective knowledge and expertise on the same theme. We also invited 2 volunteers from Shelter Scotland, one of our members, to share their experiences.

The purpose of these discussions was to identify the most prominent issues affecting volunteer participation, and raise awareness of some of the key priority areas.

Survey Findings:

In the survey, we asked respondents to share key information about their organisation. As a result, we were able to ascertain that the findings detailed in this report reflect the experiences of over 8000 volunteers in Scotland, as well as organisations operating at a UK-wide, Scotland-wide, regional and community level.

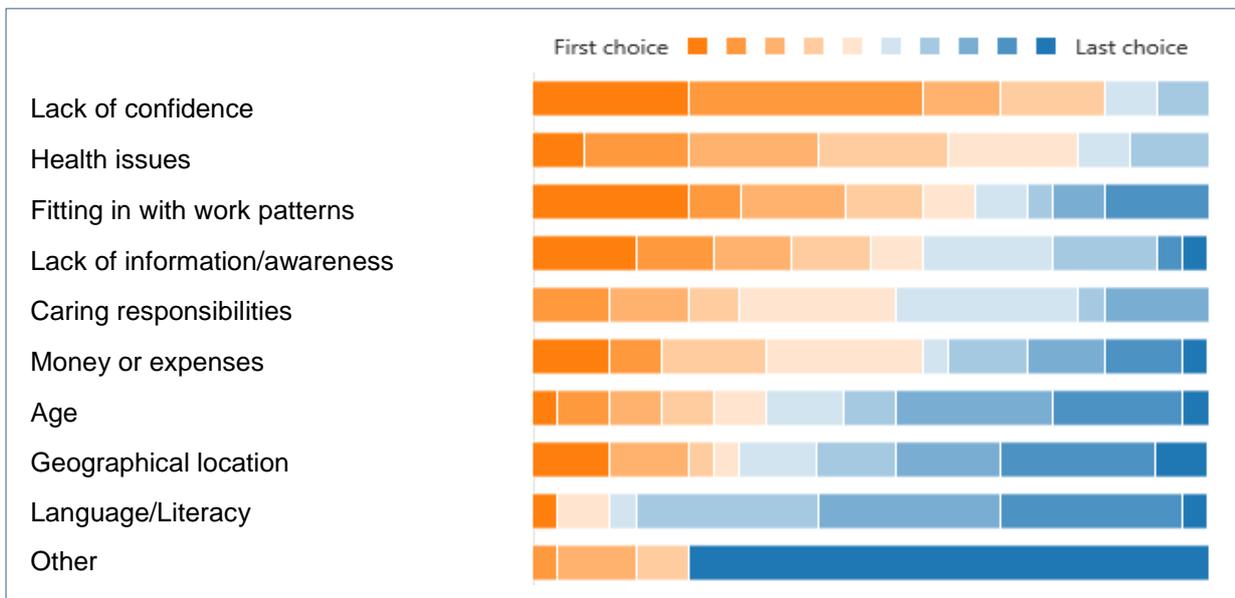
We asked respondents to rank common volunteer motivations according to their prevalence:



As you can see from the table above, ‘gaining new skills’ was found to be the most common motivation, followed by ‘improving confidence’ and ‘meeting new people’. This suggests that many people recognise the personal benefits of volunteering for improving their situation.

Interestingly, ‘to support a cause they believe in’, whilst 4th overall, was ranked number 1 by the highest proportion of respondents. This suggests that a significant number of people, perhaps in certain types of organisation, are motivated for altruistic reasons.

We then asked respondents to rank common barriers to volunteering.



The biggest barrier to volunteering reported by respondents was ‘lack of confidence’, closely followed by ‘health issues’. This suggests that people with poor mental and physical health should be a key target demographic for increasing participation.

Time is also a clear barrier, with 'fitting in with work patterns' and 'caring responsibilities' featuring 3rd and 5th respectively. As such, it is also vital that more flexible volunteering opportunities are explored to maximise participation.

Interestingly, 'lack of information/awareness' also scored highly as a barrier to volunteering, suggesting that there is still significant need to address how we communicate about volunteering in the public domain.

Discussion Summary

1) The role of 'influencers' for participation

For many individuals, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, there is little or no personal motivation to volunteer. This largely results from stigma associated with volunteering, whereby it is seen as something reserved only for individuals who are well-educated, middle class, healthy and wealthy. This is particularly concerning given that recent research by Volunteer Scotland suggests that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are likely to experience significantly more benefit from volunteering on their health and wellbeing.

For individuals who are less likely to be personally motivated to volunteer, the role of people who have influence in their life is vital in encouraging participation in volunteering. Often, this takes the form of very informal 'helping out' whilst still in a service user role, but often leads to more formal volunteering in the long term.

For young people this influencer is likely to be a teacher, and it was suggested that the emphasis on active citizenship in Curriculum for Excellence is in part responsible for the high volunteering rates in school age children. However, Jenni Snell from Youthlink highlighted that this points to a significant gap for young people who are disengaged from school. She stated that some young people 'have the burning passion to participate, but don't have the support to do so'. Youth work therefore has a vital role in influencing young people who are disengaged from school to become active in their communities, but Jenni raised concern at the decreasing funding for youth work in many parts of the country.

David Maxwell from Volunteer Glasgow suggested that this 'influencer' role is significantly lacking for many adults who perhaps lack the personal motivation to volunteer or to get involved in their local community. Jim Dunachie, a Shelter Scotland volunteer with lived experience of homelessness and mental health issues, suggested that he wouldn't be volunteering if it wasn't for the support he received from his support worker at Glasgow Association for Mental Health. He also intimated that his volunteering has had a transformational impact on his mental health, and stated that it gives him 'purpose' and stops him from 'reverting back to the dark days' of anxiety and self-isolation.

2) The importance of language

When promoting volunteering, formal or informal, the language used can have a major impact on engagement. Paul Wilson from Volunteer Edinburgh highlighted that his organisation regularly has to suggest to volunteer involving organisations that role titles and role descriptions are often overly complex or jargonistic. This language, often more reminiscent of that used for paid roles, can be a particular barrier to volunteers with low confidence.

Louise McGinty from Quarriers also highlighted this issue, and mentioned that she has started asking her volunteers to suggest which role titles works best for them. Jim, the volunteer from Shelter Scotland, shared an experience where he was asked to participate in a 'peer emotional exchange programme' whilst receiving support from GAMH. He found such a 'grandiose' title intimidating but, when he explained that he didn't feel qualified, he was told he was already completing the role on an informal basis by welcoming new people to the support group. This suggests that the language we use has an important role in encouraging, or indeed discouraging, participation.

3) *Volunteering as a 'political' act*

Increasingly, a key motivation for volunteering is that people are disillusioned or frustrated by the current political system and want to effect change. In essence, volunteering is viewed as a form of political engagement. Sarah Latto from Shelter Scotland shared feedback that she received from volunteers when consulting them about volunteer recruitment materials. She found that vast majority of volunteers reported that their core motivation for volunteering was anger about the number of people affected by bad housing or homelessness in Scotland.

Similarly, Morven MacLean from CHAS reflected that an increasing number of volunteers feeling angry at what is happening in society, and wanting to feel part of something positive. Jenni Snell also recognises this in the field of youth work. She reported that many young people want to be 'agents of change' and are motivated by the current political climate. This is reflected in the participation on climate strikes and interest in volunteering for food banks.

4) *Therapeutic value of volunteering*

The therapeutic value of volunteering for those in receipt of support is increasingly being recognised, and was described in the discussion as a 'win-win'. Sarah from Shelter Scotland highlighted the Time for Change project as a way for those who have experienced homelessness or bad housing to co-produce and co-deliver Shelter Scotland's services and campaigns. For many of these individuals, their involvement with Shelter has provided

a way to reflect on their experiences, help others and for some it has led to a career in a relevant field.

Morven from CHAS also reflected that families receiving support from the organisation are increasingly asking to volunteer, either after their support has ceased to give something back, or whilst they are receiving support as a way to maintain normality or remain busy. Currently service users are not permitted to volunteer as the organisation does not want to retraumatise or institutionalise families, but Morven suggested that the organisation are changing their thinking about this.

5) *Resource and Place as barriers for participation*

We discussed the significant percentage of the population who engage in informal volunteering, where an individual identifies a need in their local community, and highlighted the significant barriers that exist for such activities in SIMD areas. Jim identified that ongoing support for people experiencing mental health issues was lacking in his community. As a result, he set up an informal peer support group in a room donated by a local college. He stated that if it wasn't for the generosity of the college, it is unlikely he would have been able to do this.

David Maxwell reinforced this observation, suggesting that in areas where people are likely to be income poor, it is less likely that social connections and social capital will be developed without resources or freely available spaces to utilise. He mentioned some of the data that exists on health inequality in Glasgow, and suggested that wealthier communities have a 'protective factor' because they are better able to build social capital.

Matthew Linning suggested that this reflects an issue further up the pipeline, whereby people are so isolated that they are never able to build meaningful connections with their community. He suggests that we need to better understand and address root issues which are making people more isolated in the first place.

In a similar vein, Morven highlighted the issue of transport for people who want to participate, particularly in rural areas. This is a particular issue for young people or those who do not have access to their own vehicle. Again, this leads to an inequality of opportunity. CHAS have recently started providing transport for a group of volunteers from a school in an area where a significant number of pupils come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The young people volunteer as a group and are given a range of opportunities to contribute.

6) *The need for flexibility as a challenge for small organisations*

We spoke at length about the need for organisations to provide more flexible volunteering opportunities to meet the needs of volunteers who struggle to find the time for volunteering. The larger national organisations present – CHAS, Quarriers and Shelter Scotland – all

presented some of the initiatives they were implementing to promote more flexible contributions such as volunteering from home, outwith working hours or utilising technology.

However, Paul from Volunteer Edinburgh highlighted that it is not always feasible for smaller organisations to develop or implement such initiatives, particularly if they are already facing reduced capacity due to funding cuts or difficulties recruiting volunteers. He mentioned a community transport initiative in Edinburgh where staff, including the manager, regularly have to drive buses if they are facing volunteer shortages.

This highlights the vital role of the Third Sector interfaces in sharing best practice information with smaller organisations, facilitating connections with other volunteer involving organisations and supporting volunteer recruitment.

Actions Identified:

1) Collaboration to support volunteering

As a sector, we need to be better at sharing intelligence and opportunities to ensure that volunteers are getting the best experience. This could involve Volunteer Involving Organisations supporting volunteers to find more appropriate opportunities in other organisations, or participating in mentoring/peer support schemes where intelligence and ideas are passed on to others in the sector.

2) Ensuring 'Volunteering for All' is reflected in Policy Output

Since the publishing of Volunteering for All in the spring of 2019, we have seen little progress in the development of an implementation plan. We have also experienced several examples of policy decisions which do not reflect the principles in Volunteering for All, such as the ongoing barriers presented by the benefits system and the proposal to stop providing PVGs for under 16s.

The Forum were heavily involved in the development of the Volunteering for All framework and are invested in its future success. As such, we will liaise with the Third Sector Unit to ensure that the implementation plan continues to progress, and that the outcomes are reflected in policy decisions in other government departments.

3) National Volunteering/Active Citizenship Campaign

It was agreed that a national campaign was required to raise awareness of volunteering – formal and informal – with the public to encourage participation. However, such a campaign would need to be developed with the involvement of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. It is also reliant on having an appropriate infrastructure in place to

respond to enquiries and facilitate connections. Finally, such a campaign would only be of value once other structural barriers – such as uncertainty regarding volunteering on benefits or completing regulated work under the age of 16 – have been resolved.

4) *Building our Influence*

As a forum, we need to actively build our presence and influence in the public domain to better influence change. The SVF steering group will discuss the best way for this to be achieved.