

EXPERIENCE COUNTS:
VOLUNTEERING AMONGST PEOPLE
aged 55 and over
IN THE DUBLIN CITY AREA



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Dublin City Volunteer Centre has produced this publication as a resource for Volunteer-Involving Organisations (VIOs), other volunteer centres, policy-makers, older people and others with an interest in ageing research and volunteering.

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About Dublin City Volunteer Centre

Dublin City Volunteer Centre was established in January 2014 from a merger between Dublin City North and Dublin City South Volunteer Centres.

Dublin City Volunteer Centre is a member of Volunteer Ireland, the national volunteer development agency and support body for volunteer centres in Ireland.

The mission of Dublin City Volunteer Centre is to help individuals find meaningful opportunities to volunteer and to build the capacity of not-for-profit organisations to involve volunteers in their work.

We share the vision of Volunteer Ireland to have a society in which: Everyone has access to volunteering opportunities that are fulfilling and engaging, and which contribute to the development of community and the betterment of society. Volunteers are respected for the time and effort they contribute.

There are 21 Volunteer Centres and four Volunteer Information Services in the Republic of Ireland. All are affiliate members of Volunteer Ireland, the National Volunteer Development Agency and support body for Volunteer Centres in Ireland.



VOLUNTEER CENTRES

Carlow, Clare, Cork, Donegal, Dublin City, Dún Laoighaire Rathdown, Fingal, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Limerick, Longford, Louth, Mayo, Meath, Monaghan, Sligo, South Dublin County, South Tipperary, Westmeath, Wicklow.



VOLUNTEER INFORMATION SERVICES

Laois, Offaly, Leitrim, Roscommon

For a full list of contact details visit www.volunteer.ie

WHAT DO VOLUNTEER CENTRES DO?

1

SUPPORT MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO FIND
MEANINGFUL VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



SUPPORT VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS
TO IMPLEMENT BEST PRACTICE IN VOLUNTEER
MANAGEMENT

2

3

PROMOTE AND MARKET VOLUNTEERING
IN THE COMMUNITY



ENSURE QUALITY WITHIN THE NETWORK
OF VOLUNTEER CENTRES

4

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Table of Contents

List of Charts	vii
Methodology	viii
Foreword	ix
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Volunteering in Dublin – Research Findings	2
3.0 Comparison of Research Findings in Dublin with the rest of Ireland and the EU?	8
3.1 Population	9
3.2 Range and Scale of Involvement in Formal Volunteering	12
3.3 Range and Scale of Involvement in Informal Volunteering	14
3.4 Volunteering and Active Ageing	15
4.0 Strategy for Engaging Older Volunteers	16
4.1 Levers to Volunteering	17
4.1.1 Active Citizenship	19
4.1.2 Enjoyment	21
4.1.3 Personal Development	23
4.1.4 Time	25
4.2 Barriers to Engaging Older Adult Volunteers	29
4.2.1 Financial and Time Considerations	30
4.2.2 The Recruitment Process	32
4.2.3 Information and Communication	36
4.2.4 Personal Barriers	38
5.0 Summary	40
6.0 Bibliography	42

List of Charts

Chart 1:	Current Relationship with Volunteering	viii
Chart 2:	Types of Volunteering in Past Year	3
Chart 3:	Types of Informal Volunteering	4
Chart 4:	Factors Preventing Volunteering	6
Chart 5:	Number of people over 55 years of age living in Dublin	10
Chart 6:	Age breakdown	10
Chart 7:	Levers to Volunteering	18

Methodology

The research methodology consisted of:

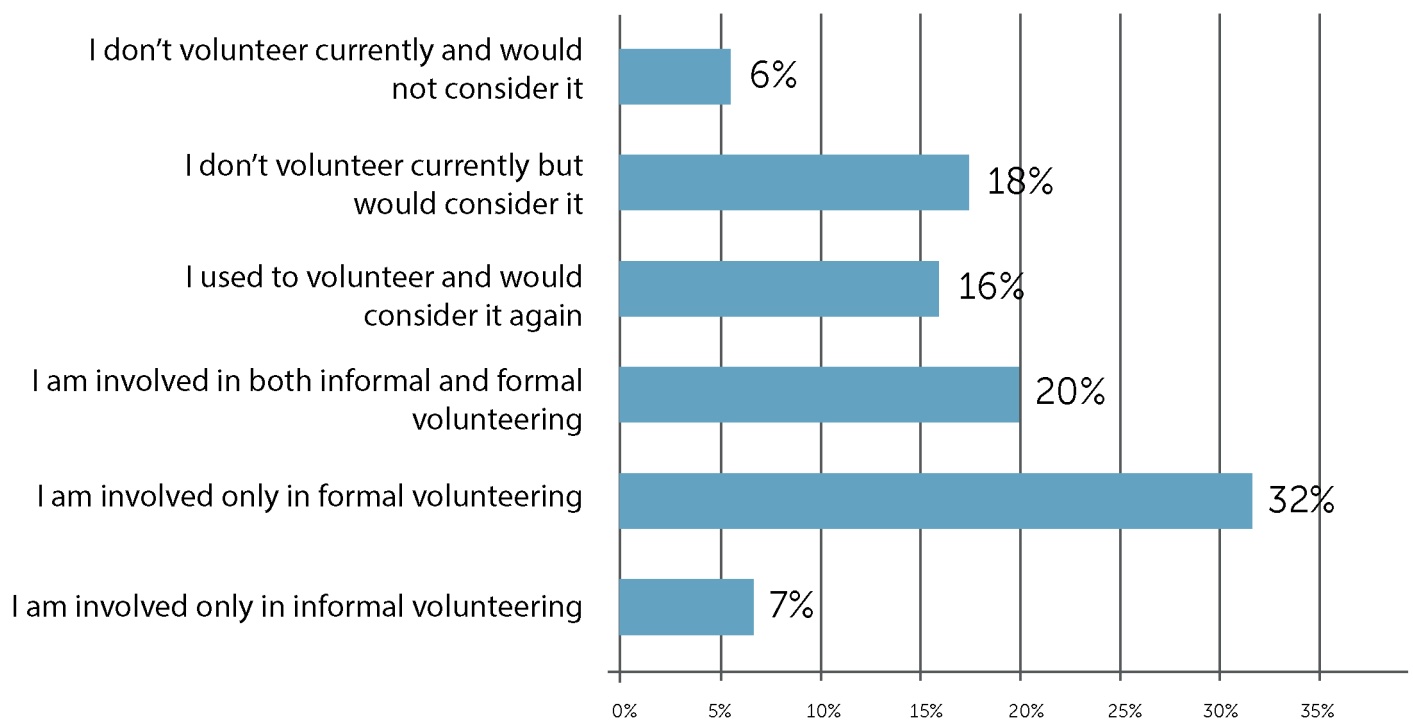
- Literature Review;
- Scoping interviews with volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) and Local Development Companies (LDCs) in the catchment area;
- Five focus groups with people aged 55 and over¹;
- 220 online and one-to-one surveys with those aged 55 and over;
- A workshop with over 20 representatives from local Volunteer Centres to 'test' and confirm findings.

The following definition of volunteering was used:

"The commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities, individuals outside the immediate family, the environment, or other causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person's own free will, without payment (except for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses)."

The White Paper Supporting Voluntary Activity (2000)

Chart 1: Which of the following best describes your current relationship with volunteering?



¹ The focus groups were divided into two groups – active volunteers and those who had never volunteered or had not volunteered in recent years.

Foreword

The European Union (EU) designated 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity Between Generations (EY2012). 2012 also marked the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Action Plan on Ageing. The purpose of EY2012 was to:

- Promote active ageing in employment
- Promote active ageing in the community through volunteering and caring
- Promote healthy ageing and independent living
- Enhance solidarity between generations in order to create a society for all ages

Research on the benefits of volunteering and active ageing is well documented both in terms of the positive impact it has on the older person as an individual, and the local community to which they gift their time. However, the contributions older people make or could potentially make to volunteering has yet to be realised, primarily due to societal attitudes and a lack of awareness. People are living longer and active ageing is about getting more, not less, out of life as people get older.

In this context and in celebration of EY2012, the Dublin City Volunteer Centres in collaboration with Volunteer Ireland, commissioned a piece of research on volunteering amongst people aged 55 or older in the Dublin City area. The purpose of the study was to provide a clearer understanding of volunteering amongst the 55+ age group, with particular emphasis on the levers/motivations and barriers that influence this demographic either to volunteer, or not to volunteer.

This research produced rich qualitative findings and was completed in 2013. Based on this we were interested in knowing if our findings at a local level broadly compared with European and international research in this area. We also wanted to get more information and ideas as to how we and VIOs might recruit more people over the age of 55 to volunteer. To do this we commissioned a supplementary piece of research and this publication combines both sets of data. The quotes included in this report are from those that participated in the focus groups.

We hope that you find this publication relevant, helpful and practical in nature. It has taken time to come to fruition but we hope that it will add to wider learning and research about volunteering in Ireland.

Edwina Dewart
Manager

Kasia Timofiejew
Development Officer

1.0 Introduction

The publication of *Experience Counts* is timely given that the 'National Positive Ageing Strategy', published in 2013, has developed four National Goals which strive to enhance opportunities for health, participation and security for people as they age, whilst promoting the importance of utilising research on ageing and older people to inform policy responses to ageing. While many older people already participate in and contribute to society in a variety of ways, the challenge for the future is to develop new social roles that preserve the skills and experience of older people.

The first of these National Goals is of particular relevance to this study as it aspires to "remove barriers to participation and provide more opportunities for the continued involvement of people as they age in all aspects of cultural, economic and social life in their communities according to their needs, preferences and capacities" (Department of Health, 2013). One of the main objectives of this goal directly refers to the promotion of active citizenship, the value of volunteering, and encouraging people of all ages to become more involved in and contribute to their own communities.



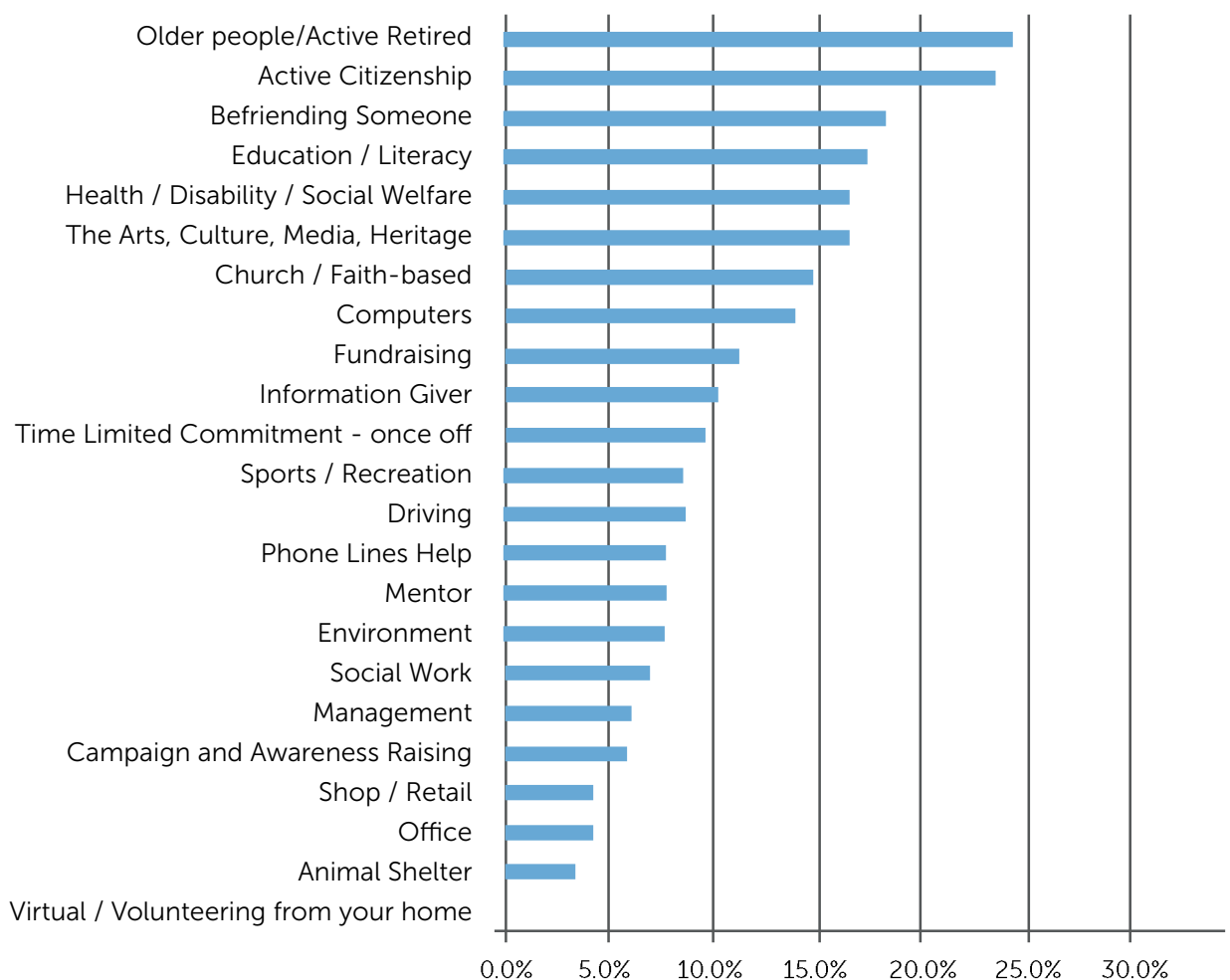
2.0 Volunteering in Dublin

In order to capture the full range and scale of volunteering in Dublin city, respondents were asked about formal and informal volunteering activity. Formal volunteering was described as volunteering with an established group, club or organisation or through the local volunteer centre. Informal volunteering included activities outside one's own family, such as shopping for a neighbour, cutting someone's grass, regularly giving someone a lift, collecting a neighbour's pension or paying bills on their behalf etc.

Formal volunteering

More than half of those who described themselves as formal volunteers (58%) indicated that they spend more than 11 hours each month on formal volunteering activities. One quarter revealed that they commit more than 20 hours to such activities on a monthly basis. 44% of formal volunteers said they would like to give more time to their club, group or organisation.

Chart 2: Which of the following groups, clubs or organisations have you volunteered for over the last 12 months?



Formal volunteers are typically involved in local / interest groups

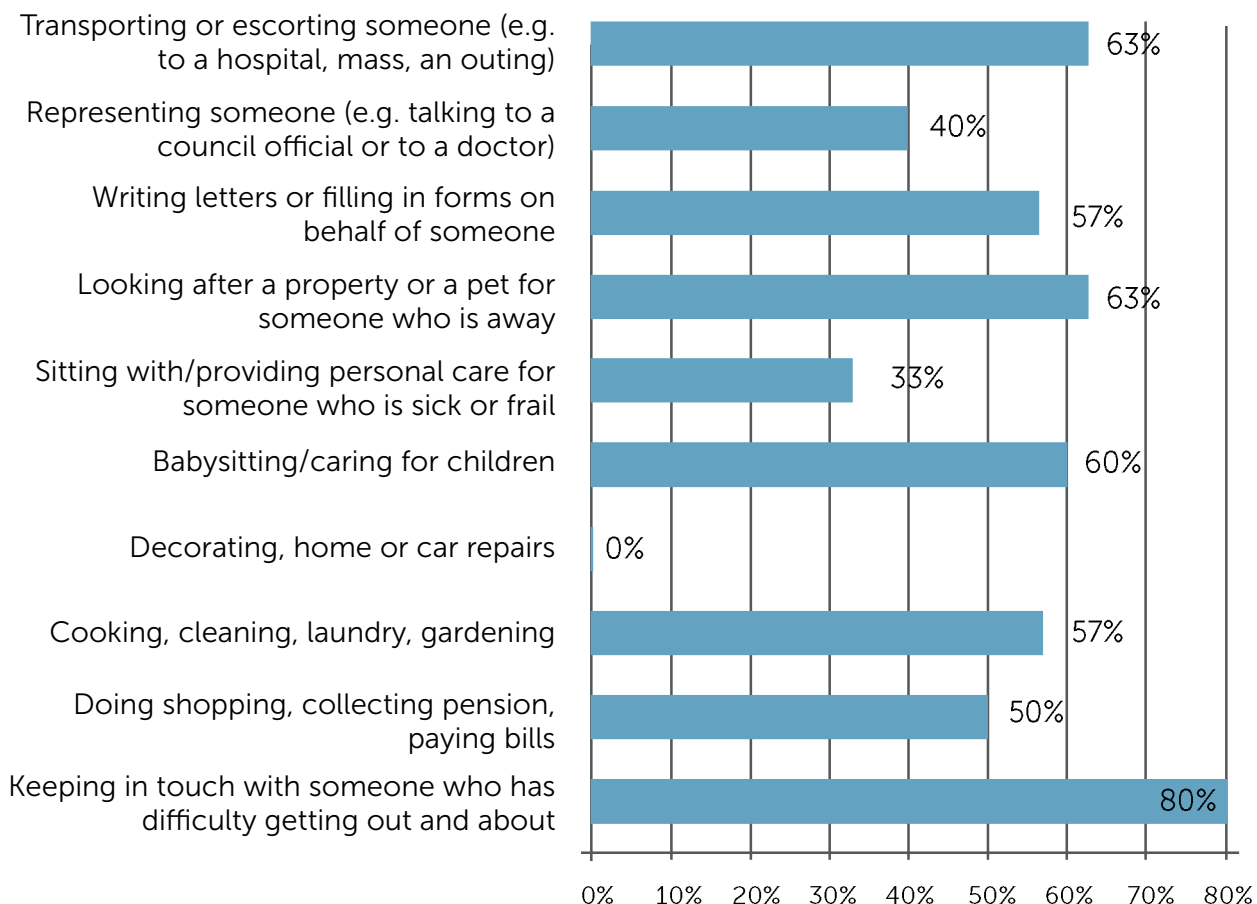
Respondents were asked to indicate what types of volunteering they had completed over the past 12 months. The most common volunteering activities were 'older people/active retired', 'active citizenship' (defined by involvement in politics, local community or neighbourhood groups, trade unions etc.) and 'befriending'. None of the respondents were involved in 'virtual or volunteering from home' and few involved with 'retail / shop', 'animal shelter' or 'office'.

Informal volunteering

Of the survey respondents who confined themselves to informal volunteering 40% indicated that they spend at least 11 hours per month on voluntary activities. A considerable 7% revealed that they would undertake more than 40 hours voluntary activity each month. Those respondents that classified themselves as informal volunteers found it difficult to gauge how many hours they volunteered per month, with one-fifth unable to estimate at all.

The activities carried out by informal volunteers are very much aligned with caring for or assisting the younger and older age groups (see chart 3). As the activities are so dependent upon a person's needs, the volunteer hours are irregular and responsive to the requirements of the person that they are helping.

Chart 3: Have you done any of the following, unpaid, for someone who was not a relative?



'With a formal volunteering role I can easily tell you that I spend ten to twelve hours each month on it...because it happens at fixed times on fixed days each week or month...With informal volunteering it's much lumpier...you are responding to a request or a series of requests...or you see something happening that you think someone needs a bit of help or support with and you get stuck in...So that can vary a lot from month to month depending on what's happening in your own family or neighbourhood'.

Why get involved in volunteering?

Over 60% of respondents answered that improving things or helping others was the most influential reason for deciding to volunteer. Approximately 40% said 'they thought they would enjoy it'. This was followed by 'making friends' as the most influential reason for deciding to volunteer. 'Being asked to get involved' was more evenly spread across the spectrum with nearly equal numbers stating that it was 'very influential' or 'not at all influential' in them making their decision to volunteer.

Respondents were influenced by their belief in a cause, their desire to keep active, their wish to use their skills in a meaningful way in their own communities and their availability of time.

Respondents were less influenced by the needs or experiences of their peers or families, career progression, the opportunity to gain additional qualifications or the idea that there was 'no-one else to do it'.

People want to participate in formal volunteering to meet new people, and they would like more information regarding how to go about it!

Nearly 100% of those asked, answered that meeting new people would make them consider volunteering through an organisation. Over 80% agreed that they would consider formal volunteering if they had more information about how they could contribute. Again, career progression was not a motivator for getting involved in volunteering, neither was the availability of time off work, likely due to the demographic participating.

'Loneliness is a huge issue in Irish society now...right across the ages...I was lonely before I got involved in volunteering...Now (through my volunteer involvement) I help people to deal with loneliness but if I weren't so involved I could very well be lonely myself'.

Those involved in the organisation are the best people to recruit new volunteers.

While respondents said that their peers' experience of volunteering was not very influential in them deciding to volunteer, they did think that hearing from somebody already involved in a group, or family / friends is the best way to hear about volunteering opportunities.

'I was weighing up a few different choices...but it really helped (my decision making) that I got to speak to a couple of people that were already volunteering there...That kind of brought it to life for me...After that chat I could see myself doing it'.

What matters to volunteers?

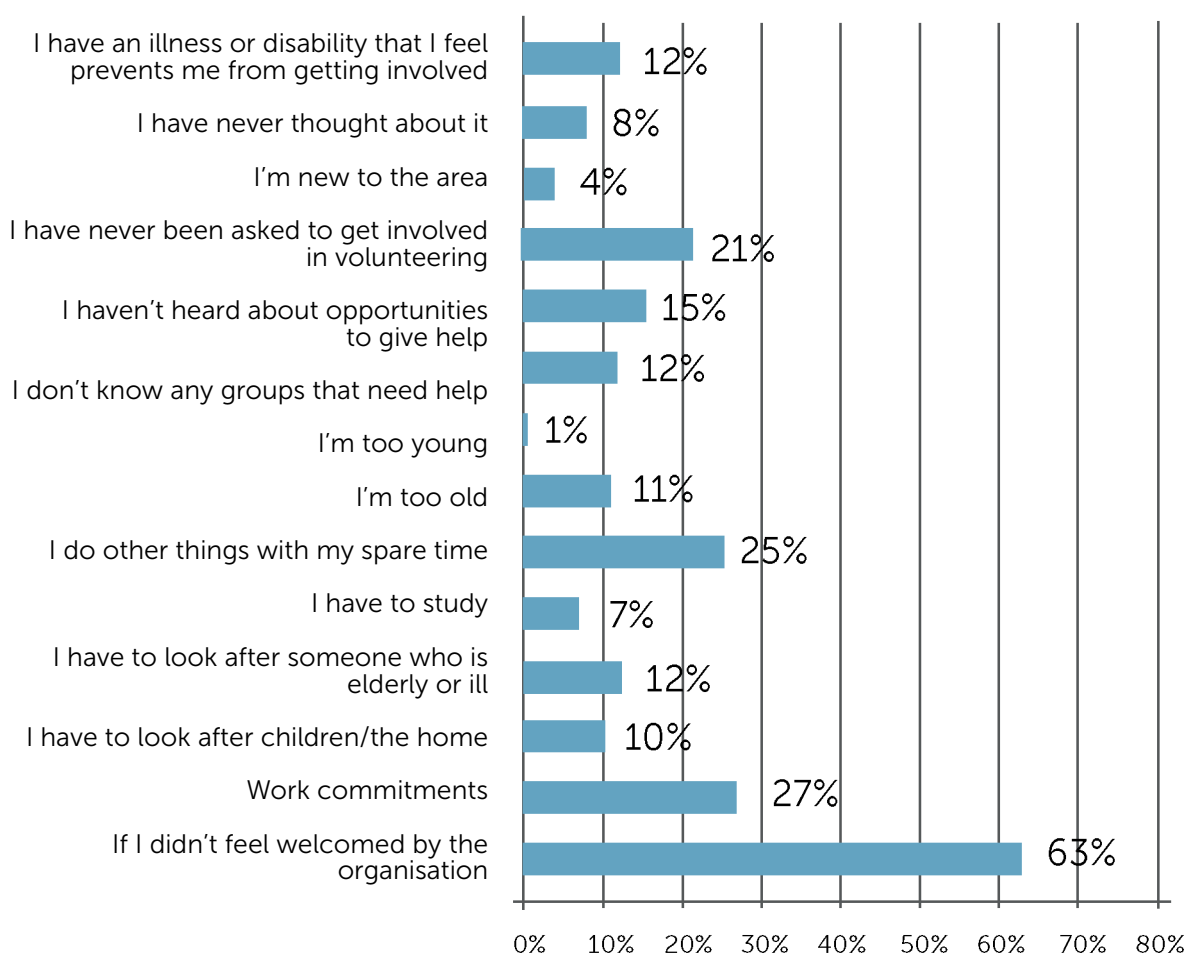
A welcome is very important!

A significant number of respondents - 63% - stated that not feeling welcomed by an organisation would make them think twice about formal volunteering. Work commitments (27%) and 'other things to do in my spare time' (25%) were also barriers to formal volunteering.

Just over one-fifth (21%) felt that the fact that they were never asked to volunteer would make them think twice about getting involved.

Other reasons for not volunteering were a lack of information ('I haven't heard about opportunities to help' (15%), 'I don't know any groups that need help' (12%)) and a perceived inability to volunteer ('I have an illness or disability that prevents me from getting involved' (12%), 'I'm too old' (11%)).

Chart 4: What would prevent you or would make you think twice about volunteering through an organisation?



'When someone you know or even someone you don't asks for your help it's a nice feeling...It's nice to be thought of...so that's how I have got involved in most things during my life and from what I can see that's how most people get involved...They are asked!'

Reward, Requirement, Recognition and Structure make for happy volunteers!

It is apparent that 'reward' is what keeps volunteers involved. The definition of 'reward' is individual and unique to each volunteer but common themes included: a sense of achievement, of doing something 'meaningful', camaraderie and friendship, better balance in life and a break from the norms of daily life.

'Supporting older people [in a nursing home] is so rewarding...It took me months to break through (make a connection) with this woman (resident) with Alzheimer's but when I did it felt amazing...she puts her hand out to say hello now and watches me walk around the room...It might sound strange but we have created a real bond...a friendship...even though I am the only one talking...It's really powerful'.

A need to keep services going was also mentioned as a reason for staying involved. Those involved appear to have a real sense of ownership and responsibility of the activities they carry out and feel that, if it were not for them, the services would not continue.

'With the huge cutbacks and staffing shortages in recent years what we (volunteers) do is even more important...the service I am involved in would fall apart completely were it not for the volunteers'.

While recognition was mentioned as being a 'reward' it also stood out as being important in retaining volunteers in its own right. Respondents felt that recognition of volunteers and positive reinforcement that what they are doing is valued and meaningful is very important to keep volunteers motivated, feeling supported and staying engaged.

The need for structure stems from the need for recognition. Respondents outlined that structure is important to facilitate dialogue and feedback between the organisation and the volunteers, to ensure that both parties are satisfied with the experience and that the exchange is as productive for both parties as possible.

3.0 How does the research findings in Dublin compare with the rest of Ireland and the EU?

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While our research was primarily qualitative with an emphasis on focus groups, some wide-ranging comparisons with research carried out in Ireland and the EU was identifiable.

3.1 Population

The age structure in the European population is under rapid change. This change is apparent in the balance between older and younger people and this has resulted in two firmly established and parallel trends: life expectancy is increasing and birth rates are remaining at a historically low level.

The 'Regional Population Projections' published by the CSO in December 2013 show that the number of older persons (65 years and over) will almost double in every region² over the life-time of the projections. All regions are also expected to see rises in the 'old dependency ratio' (those aged 65 years and over as a percentage of those aged 15-64) during the projection period. At national level the assumptions are that mortality rates will decrease by 3.5% p.a. for men and 2.5% p.a. for women, consistent with gains in life expectancy at birth from:

78.3 years in 2011 to 83.0 years in 2031 for males.

82.9 years in 2011 to 86.6 years in 2031 for females.

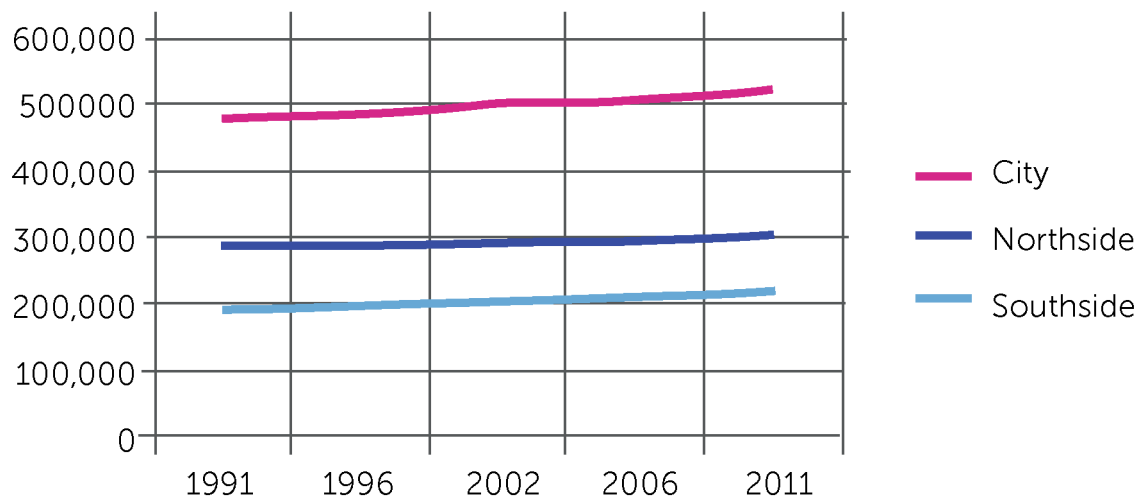
According to 'Think Dublin: Dublin Demography Report (2012)', published by Dublin City Council, Ireland is displaying different trends to the rest of Europe. Relatively speaking, Ireland has a younger population structure and high fertility rates. Ireland has the lowest old-age dependency ratio in Europe at 17.4% while the average in the EU27 is 25%. However, it is expected that Ireland's old-age dependency ratio will increase.

People aged 55+ comprise 21.8% of the state's population. Dublin City has a marginally lower percentage of people over the age of 55 at 21.6%. However, although Dublin City has a marginally lower percentage of people over the age of 55, it has a higher old age dependency ratio (18%) than both the State (17.4%) and the Greater Dublin Area (12.7%).

The pink line in Chart 5 indicates the growing numbers of people aged 55+ living in the Dublin City Council area from 1991 to 2011. 52% of the overall population lives on the Northside compared to 48% on the Southside; however, in terms of the population aged 55 and over these figures are 60% and 40% respectively. (Census 2011).

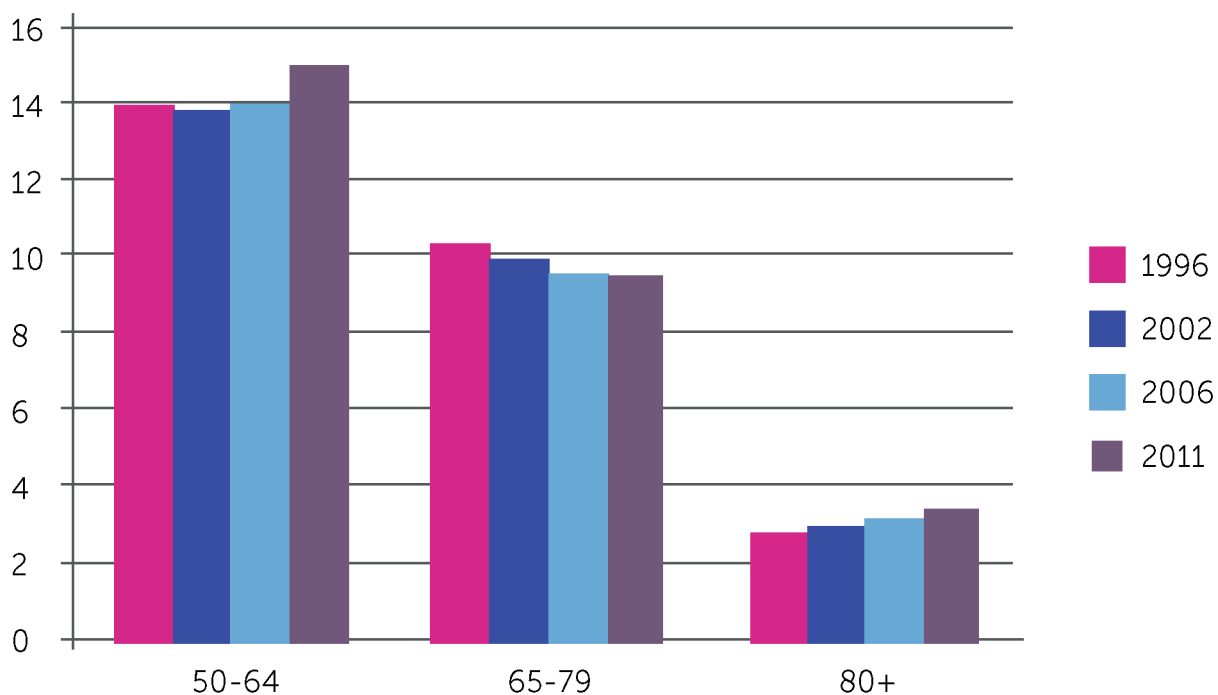
² The geographical sub-divisions used are based on the Regional Authorities; Border, Dublin, Mid-East, Midlands, South-East, South-West, Mid-West, West.

Chart 5: Number of people over 55 years of age living in Dublin, based on CSO 2011



As indicated in chart 6 below, the number of people in Dublin City aged 80 years and over has significantly increased from 2.8% in 2006 to 3.52% in 2011, reflecting predicted longer life expectancy.

Chart 6: Age breakdown, based on CSO 2011



This new demographic shift to healthier and active ageing is hugely positive. However, longer life expectancy does pose challenges: historically, there has never been a higher population outside the working age than within the working age.

A European Commission report entitled 'Demography, Active Ageing and Pensions' (2012) identifies the main challenges associated with an ageing population as:

- How to deliver future economic growth without a shrinking world population.
- How to provide adequate pensions, health care and other services for people.
- How to enable older people to remain independent and active citizens.

The increase in the older population should not be seen as a burden on society as "it is how we choose to address the challenges and maximise the opportunities, that will determine whether society can reap the benefits of the 'longevity divide'" (Department of Health, 2013).

It is important that we plan for this ageing population and focus on allowing people to live active and healthier lives for longer. Planning should not only recognise the challenges but also the great positive opportunities that come in parallel with this ageing population. This is an excellent opportunity for older people to "continue to contribute to society in their retirement – by volunteering to help to deliver social and community services, by making their experience and expertise available to younger people or simply by leading a full and active life which generates productive work for others." (European Union, 2012).

Volunteering should be recognised as an important part of the answers to these questions. With the number of people aged 60 years and over expected to increase at a rate of two million a year in Europe, particular attention should be paid to attracting and retaining the over 55s age cohort (European Union, 2012). Older people have "maturity of judgement, experience and accumulated knowledge and expertise" that can be very valuable for delivering social services. At the same time, employment or volunteering in these areas is attractive to older people because it gives them the opportunity both to work flexibly in terms of their commitment of time and to use their experience and abilities in ways that 'make a difference' to the communities where they live." (European Union 2012).

According to *I-VOL* (Volunteer Ireland's national database of volunteers and volunteering opportunities) 12,416 volunteers registered with volunteer centres in 2014. Over 20% (2,699) of these registrations were from Dublin city. Nationally the % ratio of female to male volunteers was 68:32. The top reasons for volunteering were:

Top reasons for volunteering:	Dublin City	Nationally
Do my bit to make the world a better place	22%	19%
Make a difference	12%	17%
I think it will be good for me	15%	16%
To develop my skills/education	17%	16%

Volunteers in the 50+ age categories accounted for 12% of registrations nationally and only 6% of registrations in Dublin city suggesting that older people may not be using online I-VOL.

3.2 Range and scale of involvement in formal volunteering

The reported range and scale of involvement in formal volunteering (through an organisation or association) varies from study to study.

According to 'The Second European Quality of Life Survey - Participation in volunteering and unpaid work' (EQLS) published by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011 the average amount of hours per week for all age categories spent on volunteering is 6.5.

As part of the 'European Year for Active Aging and Solidarity', the European Commission commissioned a survey to understand European citizens' views and attitudes towards older people, the contribution of older people in the workplace and society, and how best to promote an active role of older people in society. In the course of this survey, 31,280 respondents aged 15 and above were interviewed by the TNS Opinion & Social Network between September and November 2011. The survey found that 26% of EU27 citizens undertake some sort of voluntary work for an organisation. Ireland shows an overall participation rate across all age categories of 30%.

Those aged 55 and over contribute slightly more than the EU average retired rate at 27% and generally spend more hours per month volunteering. The EU27 average is 14 hours per month, with older people giving 16 hours of their time per month. Our research in Dublin shows that the average number of hours per month is 15 which is in line with the EU figures. The contributions made by those over the age of 55 appear to be appreciated. When asked to what extent people aged 55 and over contribute as volunteers, 68% of respondents in Ireland answered 'contribute greatly' with only two percent responding that those over 55 'do not contribute at all'.

In addition to this formal participation in voluntary work for an organisation, our research shows that two-thirds of people recorded that they have performed some sort of informal voluntary work (outside the organisation, often at community level or one-to-one basis) in the past year.



The 'New Agenda on Ageing', 2012 published by the Ageing Well Network looked at the role of volunteering in engaging older people in society, and the benefits of same for older people themselves, as well as society in general. The report outlines discrepancies between the rates of volunteering amongst retired people reported across the EU. While Ireland is above the EU average at 37% (retired people), the rates of participation of those over the retirement age in the Netherlands and Finland are higher again at just over 50%.

Research by 'TILDA' (The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing at Trinity College) shows that there is little difference in the participation rates of men and women in volunteering. However, based on an EC survey, TILDA research shows that older people (65-74) are likely to volunteer more often than those aged 50-64. The participation rates then reduce in those aged 75 years and older.



The National Positive Ageing Strategy published by the Department of Health in 2013 states that *"research has found that, in Ireland, the role of older people as volunteers has often been undervalued - some voluntary organisations have not always solicited older volunteers, while others have expected volunteers to retire from volunteering when they reach 65 years of age"*.

The Strategy also outlines that many older people provide volunteer support in childcare and education, as well as providing befriending services to older more dependent people who would otherwise be very isolated. This is reflected in our research and the participation of respondents in informal volunteering.

3.3 Range and scale of involvement in informal volunteering

In 'Developing Voluntary Activity: Some Policy Issues Arising from the 2001 Home Office Citizenship Survey' Colin C. Williams reviews the differences between formal volunteering and informal volunteering. The paper describes a 'ladder' rather than a 'spectrum' of voluntary activity. At the top of the ladder are the formal voluntary organisations, while the rungs below are made up of gradually less formal voluntary activities. The paper suggests that if people are to be encouraged to have greater engagement with their communities then **informal voluntary activity should be nurtured** and recognised in the same way as formal volunteering.

The EQLS survey showed that participation in both formal and informal volunteering is significantly greater in more affluent areas but that informal volunteering is more prevalent than formal volunteering overall. It also found that people with a higher level of educational attainment are more likely to be volunteers.

Our research has shown that informal volunteering is perhaps difficult for people to define. While 61 respondents stated that they are involved in either 'informal only' or 'both formal and informal' volunteering, only 15 out of the 246 surveyed answered the question;

'Informal Volunteering: About how many hours do you normally spend on informal volunteering activities each month?'

While the questionnaire stated that activities within the home or family should not be included as 'informal volunteering', references to such family activities were made by some respondents during the course of the round table discussions. It also appears that those who responded that they were involved in both formal and informal volunteering did not answer the questions related solely to informal volunteering.

There was a low response rate (13 respondents) to the question 'in the last 12 months, have you done any of the following, unpaid, for someone who was not a relative? However, it is interesting that eight out of the 13 respondents stated that they 'keep in touch with someone who has difficulty getting out and about'. This correlates with the high percentage of people participating in the formal volunteering activity of 'befriending'. 'Looking after a property or a pet for someone who is away' and 'transporting or escorting someone (for example to a hospital, to mass or on an outing)' was also given as types of informal volunteering carried out. These appear to be quite 'neighbourly' tasks, suggesting that informal volunteering activity remains closer to home.

3.4 Volunteering & Active Ageing

The National Positive Ageing Strategy outlines that over a quarter of males and females aged 50 years and over volunteer at least once a month.

A European Commission report on Active Ageing outlines the different types of voluntary work and activities undertaken by the over 55s. According to the survey, the most common type of voluntary work is with a sports club or recreational organisation where around one-in-ten citizens are involved (10%). Cultural work with education, arts and music is the next most common (5%), closely followed by voluntary work with charities/social organisations (4%) or churches/religious organisations (4%). The report stated that while the overall level of participation varies by country, there is comparatively little country variation in the types of voluntary work. Our research shows that there were a comparable number of respondents involved in sports/recreation but a higher response rate in the areas of church/faith-based and the arts/culture/media and heritage.

The national Census in Ireland contained a question on volunteering for the first time in 2006. Results estimated that one in six of the adult population volunteered regularly. Unfortunately, the Central Statistics Office did not include a question on volunteering in the 2011 Census. The 'Agenda on Ageing' refers to the 2006 Census and outlines that volunteering with religious groups is the most common volunteering type for older people in Ireland at 46.7%. Older people are also more likely to volunteer with religious organisations than younger people, and women are more likely to participate than men. After religious organisations, volunteers participate with social/charitable organisations at a rate of 41.4%. However, this disparity could be as a result of the classification of activities. Political / cultural organisations attract 9.9% of the share while participation with sporting organisations is slightly higher at 15%. However, while nearly one-fifth of those aged 15-24 were involved in sports groups, only two percent of people aged 75 and over were involved with sports groups.

By way of comparison to the research in the 'Agenda on Ageing' which refers to the 2006 census data, it is interesting that involvement with church/faith-based groups was apparently low in Dublin at 15% and behind 'health/disability/social welfare', 'education/literacy' and 'arts/culture/media/heritage' which were marginally higher at 17%. An inclusion of a question in the 2011 Census related to volunteering would have provided greater clarity on emerging volunteering patterns and trends.



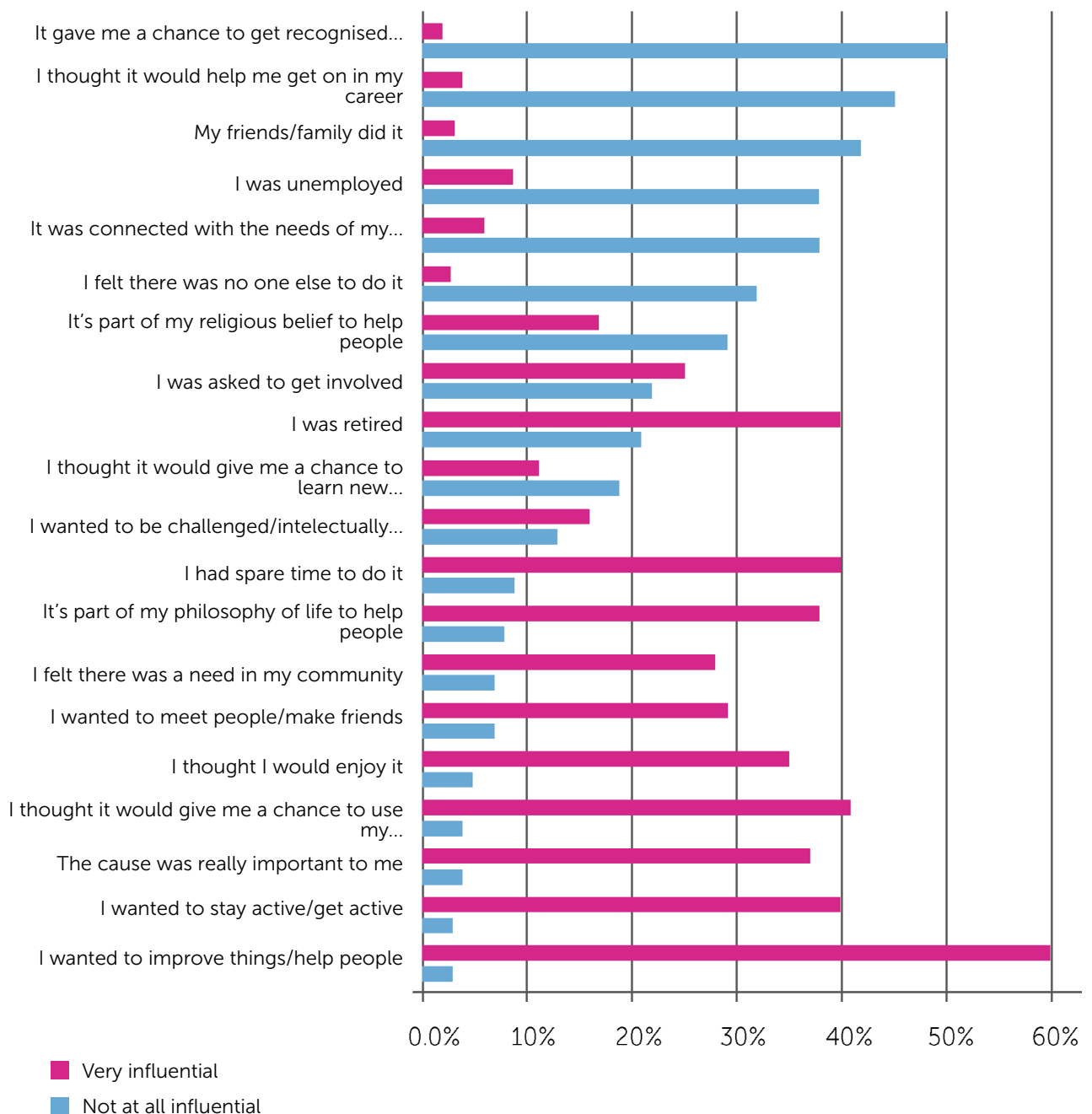
4.0 Strategy for Engaging Older Volunteers

4.0 Strategy for Engaging Older Volunteers

4.1 Levers to volunteering

The 'Agenda on Ageing' advises that older people should not be regarded as a homogenous group with identical motivations. At the same time, research has found that there are differences between the motivations of older volunteers and those of younger volunteers. The 'Agenda on Ageing' refers to 'Omoto et al. (2000)' which found that while older volunteers were more likely to be motivated by service or community obligation concerns, younger volunteers tended to be motivated by concerns related to interpersonal relationships.

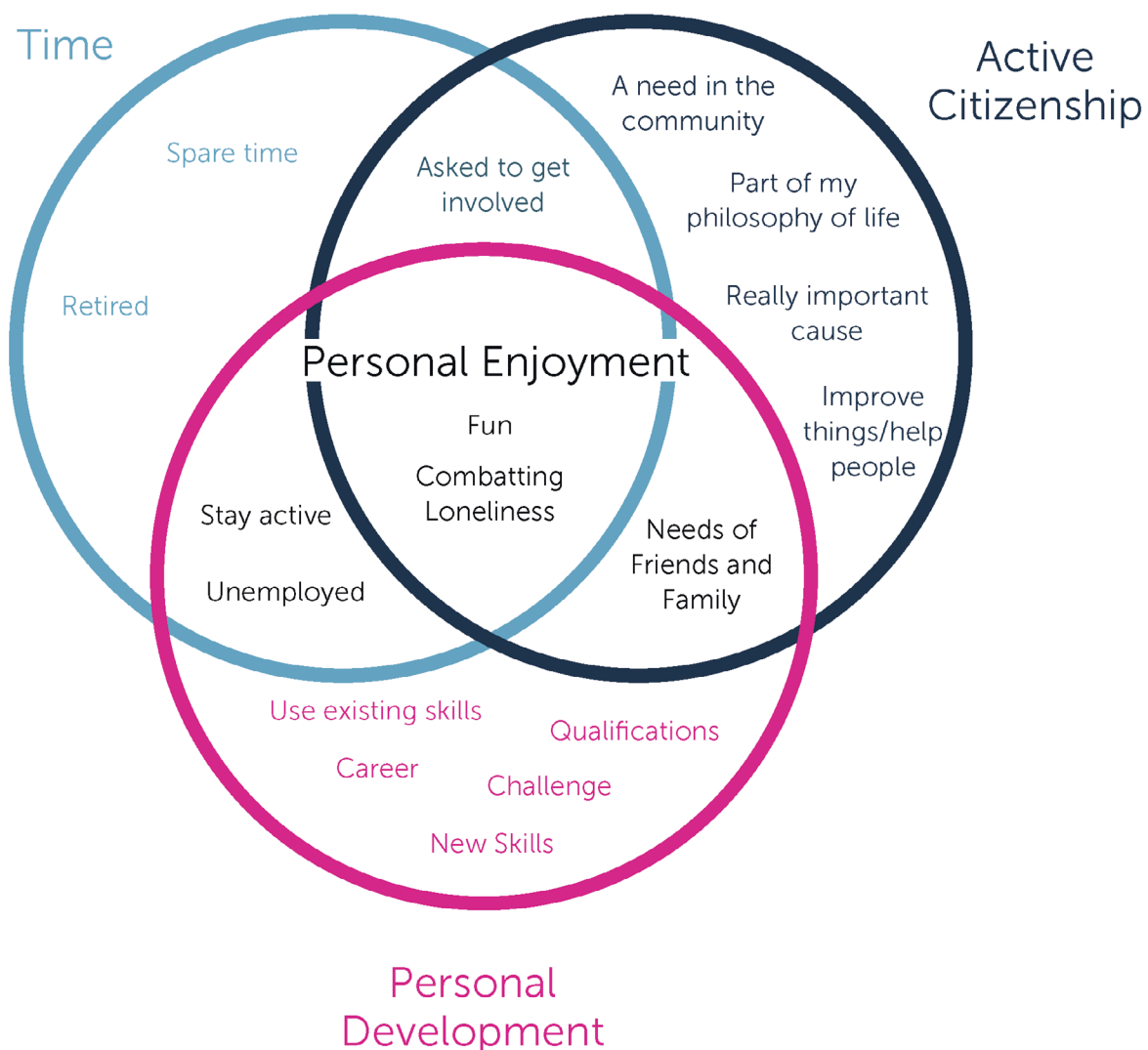
Chart 7: Which of the following would make you consider volunteering through an organisation?



Levers and barriers to volunteering are by their nature very closely interlinked. The levers to volunteer are also addressed in the 'barriers' section where further recommendations are put forward. This research shows that a high number of respondents were encouraged to volunteer by flexibility, or the opportunity to choose from a range of volunteering positions/a chance to try out volunteering before committing, and a personal recruitment process (informal chat or a face to face meeting with an existing member of the organisation). People were discouraged by application forms and online registering. The levers from the consultation findings have been categorised into four main groups:

- Active Citizenship
- Enjoyment
- Personal Development
- Time

LEVERS



4.1.1 Active Citizenship

The first of the four National Goals contained within the 'National Positive Ageing Strategy' (2013) is of particular relevance to this lever as it aspires to provide more opportunities for the continued involvement of people as they age in all aspects of cultural, economic and social life in their communities according to their needs, preferences and capacities. One of the main objectives of this goal directly refers to the promotion of active citizenship, the value of volunteering, and encouraging people of all ages to become more involved in and to contribute to their own communities.

The 'Second EU Quality of Life Survey' describes a person's decision to volunteer as being "the result of a wish to add to their capital, which may in turn result in higher returns to the individual over their lifetime. In this way, volunteering acts like an additional educational qualification or form of work experience, boosting a person's curriculum vitae and adding to their monetary rewards over time", or, "as a function of people's basic desire to help others, which may indirectly result in people extending their social networks and/or acquiring new skills and talents. Compared with the first approach, the second approach considers the decision to volunteer as less strategic from a career point of view".

It is clear that the latter reason for deciding to volunteer is generally reflective of our research carried out to date which has shown that the desire to 'improve things / help people' was the most influential reason for getting involved in volunteering. This was also found to be the primary reason for involvement according to the research carried out by the 'Volunteer Development Agency' (2009) *Making the Connection: Volunteering by the over 50's in Northern Ireland*.

It is interesting that the fact that '*friends or family*' were involved in volunteering or that the activity might be '*connected with the needs of family / friends*' were not a significant influencing factor in deciding to volunteer. Neither did respondents feel 'compelled' to volunteer due to the feeling that there was no-one else to do it. At the same time, the research showed that there is a feeling of not wanting to let the service down/ that service would fall apart without the volunteers which contributed to the decision to continue volunteering. The most influential factors in volunteering appear to be those associated with a desire to contribute to the community and to share skills and experiences. The only influencing factor that could be considered as rewarding the volunteer alone was to 'stay active / get active'.

A person's philosophy of life, and particularly where helping people is part of that philosophy, was also put forward as a factor that would prompt involvement in formal volunteering. Many of the participants appeared to be driven by a desire to contribute to positive causes and in many cases 'to give something back' to Irish society and to their local communities. For some of the participants this was the single most influential factor.

"I am extremely lucky in this life and so I wanted to do something for other people...that maybe aren't so lucky...I wanted to give something back."

"My time is valuable to me. I don't want to be giving it away freely for nothing (something that isn't valuable or worthwhile). These activities (that I am involved in a volunteering capacity) must have meaning...and they do...to me in particular. I think it's a really positive cause (that the volunteering organisation contributes to)."

"I don't know (why I got involved in volunteering) is the simple answer. I had an office in town and saw a sign for the Samaritans in the train station...a big sign...and for two or three months no matter how often I passed by it and no matter how hard I tried not to look at it...I kept looking at it. So I said 'fine someone is trying to tell me something'...I guess it was inside me anyway (the need to get involved)...so I joined and twenty years later I'm still there."

"Once you get involved in one thing you are more likely to get involved in something else but it does mean the same people are likely to be asked and involved in so many things...The worry would be that these people could become stretched...I know I have found myself saying 'Yes' when I really should have said 'No'."

Recommendations:

- **Advocacy**

Volunteer Centres should liaise with the Department of Health and / or members of the NGO Liaison Group³ who were involved in drafting the National Positive Ageing Strategy, to assist in the implementation of their goals.

- **Feedback**

People are driven to volunteer based on their desire to help. Regular reviews could help to provide more information to the volunteer regarding the importance of their role and a detailed analysis of how and whom they helped.

³ Age and Opportunity, The Carer's Association, Age Action Ireland, The Disability Federation of Ireland, Society of Vincent de Paul, Third Age Foundation, Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Irish Hospice Foundation, Irish Senior Citizen's Parliament, Active Retirement Ireland, Older and Bolder, The Older Women's Network

- Recognition

'We need you...'

When advertising for positions emphasis should be placed on the end goals and missions. Detailed accounts of why the volunteer is needed, and the value that they will add to the organisation should be provided.

- 'Your community needs you...'

Active Citizenship and a need in the community proved to be a strong lever to volunteer. A localised recruitment process within a community would help to attract more volunteers. Advertise using local newspapers, social groups and newsletters.

4.1.2 Enjoyment

While the focus groups revealed concerns regarding social isolation and loneliness in terms of the types of volunteering activity individuals were involved in, and the apparent demand for same (i.e. befriending, keeping in touch with someone who has difficulty getting out and about), the possibility of making new friends or meeting people was not a very influential factor in people participating in volunteering activities. Conversely, studies by 'Prouteau and Wolff' (2005, 2008) suggest that participation in voluntary activities across all ages is actually driven largely by the desire to build friendships.

An ambition to stay active and engaged in one's surroundings, a sense that the person would enjoy the volunteer involvement and a view that the cause was really important were also identified as influential factors.

"I thought, wouldn't it be better to help somebody...help myself and make some new friends rather than be stuck sitting at home, watching TV all the time?"

"I found myself doing nothing:...walking...going to the pub drinking...just to meet people...I was empty so to get involved in something like this was amazing for me."

"You do get a sense that you are helping someone who needs help and if that is putting a security lock on someone's door or speaking to somebody who is afraid or lonely and helping them with that...You just get a sense of safety or comfort that that is giving to the person...or the sense that they are talking to someone that they can trust...That is hugely important and worthwhile."

"It gives some structure to my week. Otherwise every day would be

the same. You have a reason to get out of the bed. There is no way you want to let anyone down by not turning up and that means you stay engaged and switched on...Otherwise you would just retreat into yourself."

'Helper's High' is a phrase coined by Dr. Allan Luks. It is based on national research carried out in the United States which has proven that helping others is good for both physical and mental health. His research concluded that regular helpers are ten times more likely to be in good health than people who do not volunteer.

Interestingly, some of the research participants indicated that initially they had been motivated by a desire to contribute and stay active and were subsequently surprised by how much they enjoyed and engaged with their new volunteering role.

Many of those currently involved in formal volunteering roles spoke of the positive influence of family in encouraging volunteer involvement and the way in which volunteering can, over time, become a regular, ongoing and often expected component of their daily lives.

"I have been volunteering since I was ten...from helping my mum clean the church to painting houses for the Vincent de Paul, from ball room dancing and teaching computers for older people to meals on wheels...You just get asked to do it or fall into it naturally. It's always been a big part of my life."

"its (volunteer involvement) something that you are trained into in a way...If your family were involved I think you would be much more likely to be involved. It just would seem much more natural and something that would even be expected of you."

"You have a sense of personal responsibility to help others that are in some kind of need...My family taught me that...not by saying 'you should volunteer'...but by watching them getting involved in so many different things...It (volunteering) was just very natural and even expected of you..."

Recommendations:

Creating a Community

People are often driven to volunteer based on their desire to help, however, the more enjoyable the process is the more likely they are to continue staying involved and recommend volunteering to friends or family. Creating a more formally recognised volunteering community could allow volunteers to understand they are part of something and build relationships with other people of similar interests.

- **Volunteer Ireland Awards**

A category could be included in the Volunteer Awards which recognises the contribution made by volunteers towards 'Active and Healthy Ageing'.

- **The Volunteer Newsletter**

Newsletters informing community groups of the various events/news that are happening in the volunteer community could advertise positions and networking events and publish volunteer testimonials.

- **Volunteer discount card**

A similar concept to student discount cards where volunteers apply for a discount card, which rewards them with discounts in participating shops, theatres, restaurants etc. Cards could be upgraded to a Gold card once the volunteer has completed of a certain number of hours.

- **Monthly Mingles**

Monthly meetings and consultations could allow volunteers to discuss and give feedback about the process.

- **Helper's High**

The physical and mental health benefits of volunteering could be promoted in conjunction with NGOs, community and older peoples' interest groups.

4.1.3 Personal Development

The opportunity a prospective volunteering role provided to get a recognised qualification did not appear as influential for most of the survey respondents. Focus group participants appeared to strongly validate this view with some interesting comments.

"At this stage in my life I have no interest in qualifications or my CV...I want to do things that genuinely interest me...that really matter. If I wanted another qualification I would go back to college."

"At this stage in your life, you tend to be a little more sure about yourself...what you like, what you don't like...what drives you and alternatively what leaves you cold...You can have a bit of a selfish streak as well...Now is the time to do something for yourself...Up to now a lot of the choices have been made for you...Now is the time to choose something that you are passionate about...Not to have it chosen for you."

"When you are rearing a family, their needs come first and rightly so... When your family are raised you can start to pursue your own interests a little more and that is probably reflected in fairly selfless things as well...like the charity or cause you might link in with."

However, a chance to develop new, and use existing skills was identified by survey respondents as being very influential. The importance or relative influence of these same dimensions was also emphasised repeatedly throughout the series of focus groups.

"I could be watching television or reading on the internet but you want something that would occupy you...something really meaningful that you can engage with and [volunteer involvement] is exciting for somebody like me."

"It gives me the opportunity to learn a lot of new things...things that could help me when I go back to my own country where I could set up a similar service to help older people."

"I have learned a lot...because I am working with so many people and with different kinds of people...It (this interaction) is quite exciting for me."

"I have learned new things and I have kept my hand in on skills that would have gone to waste after I lost my job...but I never really thought how much I would learn about myself...what I think, what I like....That has been fascinating."

Recommendations:

- Skill swapping workshops

Findings indicate that the development of skills is favoured over gaining a more formal recognised qualification. Utilising existing skills was also deemed as a lever to volunteer. Organised workshops could be held to encourage volunteers to 'swap' skills, by teaching/training other volunteers in something they know how to do. This will help strengthen the volunteers' skill sets, confidence and working relationships, providing tangible rewards for being part of the volunteering community.

- Skills School

A skills school could be organised prior to volunteering to allow potential volunteers the opportunity to identify their relevant skills and suitable volunteering roles that would utilise these skills. A skills school will provide the volunteers with confidence in their own ability and identify routes for skill

progression. Volunteers should be granted more responsibilities in the organisation after completing skills school days.

4.1.4 Time

It is unsurprising and clear from the findings of the research that the availability of time was very influential in a persons' decision to volunteer.

'I always said that if I retired early I would do something...I was going to give someone or something my time...and when I saw where it was (the location for the nursing home) I thought 'sure that would be a grand walk through the park to get there'...at the very least I will enjoy that (the walk)...but I have fallen in love with the bloody thing (volunteering role) since and I would now go in three and four times a week now to help out.'

'When I became unemployed and I got bored...I was doing nothing and then when I complained about this one of my friends suggested volunteering...that it could keep me occupied...It has...It has changed my life. I thought it would be a good thing to do but I am surprised by how important it has become to me and how much I enjoy it.'

'Now that I am retired and my family has grown up my life revolves around it (volunteering). I wake up in the morning and I think 'where am I today?'...'It's Wednesday so it's the club. It's Thursday so it's meals on wheels and that's the way it goes. It's part of my routine...I want to help...It gives me a purpose.'

The giving of time benefits the volunteer and the service that they are volunteering with. Since the principle of 'helping others' was identified as being a lever to volunteer, it could be an added benefit if the volunteer could equate time they give as resulting in a benefit to others.

The research shows that a high number of respondents were also encouraged to volunteer by a flexible recruitment process with a chance to try out volunteering before committing.

Recommendations:

- **The multiplier effect**

Highlight the multiplier effect of giving time. For example, one hour of a volunteer's time not only benefits the volunteer but can help 'X' number of people.

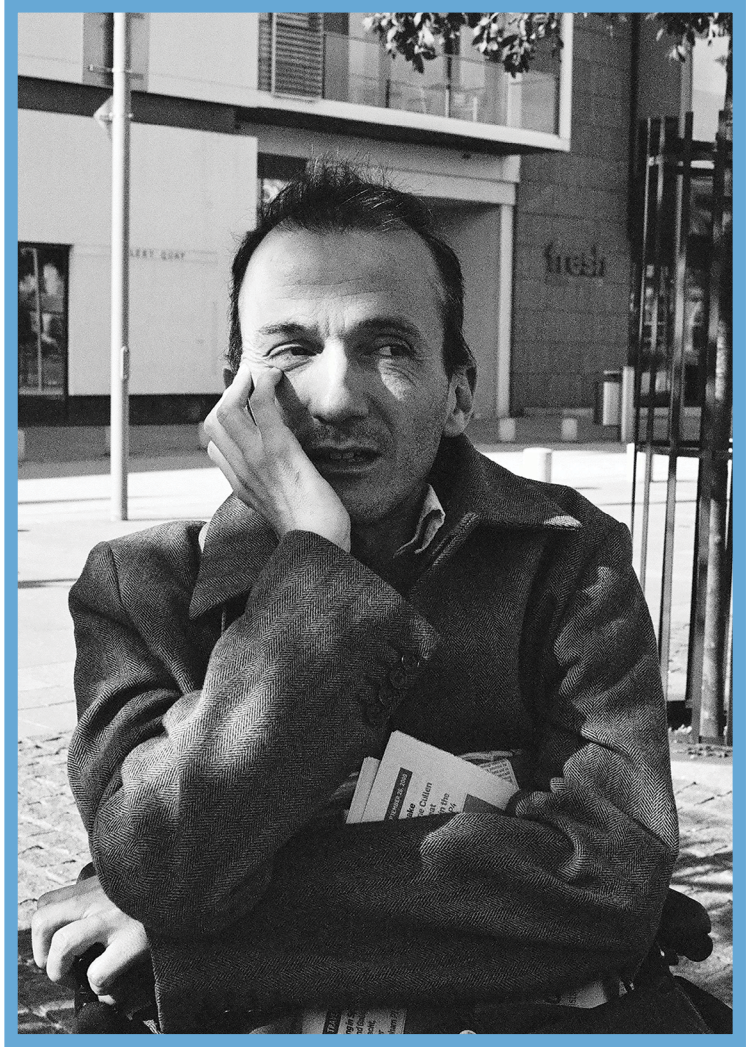
- **Trial Period**

Encourage volunteers to try out activities on a short term trial basis to allow them to establish suitability for the role without the perceived pressure of having to commit.

- **Active and Healthy Ageing Ambassadors**

Volunteer Centres could establish links with universities and relevant bodies who are either encouraging older people to participate in further education, or are carrying out research and studies on issues related to active and healthy ageing (for example the DCU Intergenerational Programme and the RelAte project in Trinity College Dublin). This would offer the opportunity for older volunteers to both contribute and benefit from the programmes at the same time.







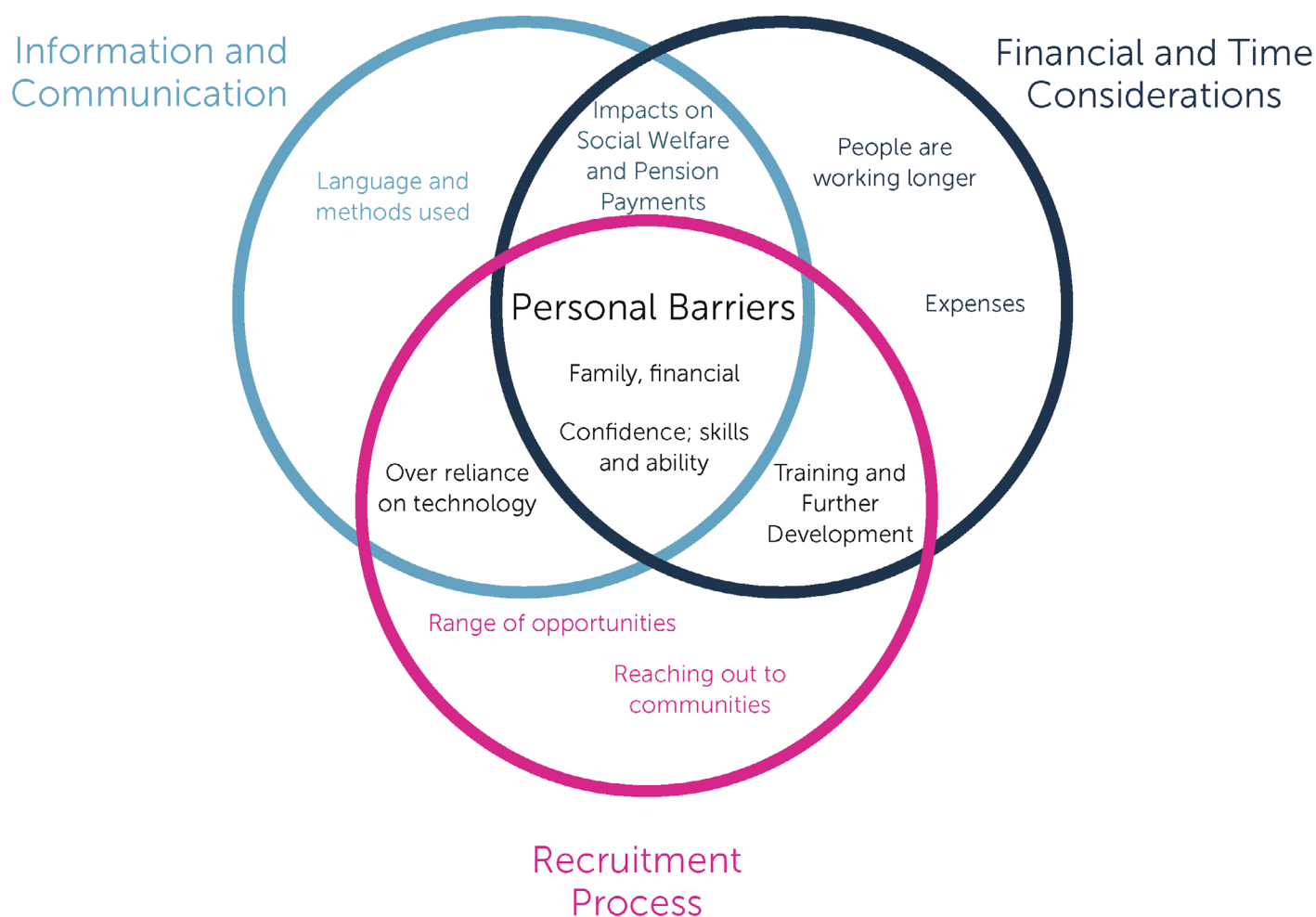
4.2 Barriers to Engaging Older Adult Volunteers

Prime research surveys, focus groups and literature reviews have identified key barriers to attracting and retaining volunteers. The key barriers identified (placed in no particular order) were divided into four categories. The categories are namely:

- Financial and Time Considerations
- The Recruitment Process
- Information and Communication
- Personal Barriers

Each barrier is followed by recommendations to attract and retain more volunteers aged 55 and over in the Dublin City area.

BARRIERS



4.2.1 Financial & Time Considerations

Results from the focus groups carried out indicate that current economic circumstances i.e. a lack of pension provision and high levels of personal debt are factors that may often act as a barrier to involvement in volunteering.

"People just don't have the time...they are up to their necks in debt. They are stressed out so it can be difficult to make that connection with them. Volunteering would be just one other chore for them."

'So many of us in the private sector don't have any kind of pension... We can't afford to give up work or to get involved in an unpaid role.'

A report published by TILDA, 'Profile of the Sandwich Generation and Intergenerational Transfers in Ireland' (2013) describes the 'sandwich generation' as those who are supporting both their older parents and their dependent children. While this report focuses on the impacts of the sandwich generation on the health of women, the report may give us some interesting insights into the lifestyle realities of both males and females aged 50-69.

'Intergenerational transfers' are defined as the transfer of time or money from the sandwich generation to their older parents or their children. The TILDA report outlines that 58% of sandwich generation women give help to their parents, and 83% give help to their children (both time and money). However, it is more likely that the sandwich generation give their time to their parents and money to their children. The sandwich generation have greater pressures on them both in terms of their financial resources and their time.

Furthermore, under the provisions of the 'Social Welfare and Pensions Act 2011', the age for receiving the state pension will increase to 66 in 2014, and 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028.

According to research undertaken by the Northern Irish body, the 'Volunteer Development Agency' (currently Volunteer Now), 'Older People Volunteering – Literature Review' (2009), the rising costs of food and fuel act as a barrier to volunteering, indicating that volunteer organisations are both losing volunteer drivers and failing to retain them due to mileage rates and increasing fuel costs. If organisations do not reimburse volunteer expenses then volunteers have to bear the cost themselves. For older people with little money this is a particular challenge and might prevent them from becoming or remaining active volunteers (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011).

Unfortunately, volunteers who do not have a lot of money are often prevented from volunteering due to transport costs. Older people are much more likely to give lack of transportation as a reason for not volunteering than any other age group (Fischer and Shaffer 1993). Our research results indicate that 21% of respondents would be encouraged and an additional 23% strongly encouraged to volunteer if their expenses were reimbursed; whilst 16% were discouraged and seven percent would be strongly discouraged from volunteering by the prospect of not getting expenses reimbursed.

'Just pay a very small amount in travelling expenses, especially to those who get public transport.'

Misunderstandings about volunteer involvement and the ability to receive social welfare supports discouraged a small number of participants from taking on or continuing with formal volunteering roles.

"I didn't think I could (take on a volunteering role) if I was drawing the Social. I thought it (my payment) would be stopped or at least compromised."

"The woman in Social Welfare asked me 'why aren't you working?' And I said 'well I am involved in loads of volunteering roles'...She said 'No, no...You can't do that while you're drawing welfare' so I had to give it all up."

Recommendations:

- **Local and convenient volunteering opportunities**

Older people are often already participating in informal volunteering. This participation in informal volunteering should be recognised and nurtured within the community in order to encourage more formal volunteerism. It should also be recognised that nowadays older people are living with the same financial and time restrictions as everyone else. Local volunteering opportunities for older people will keep travel time and costs down and reimbursement of expenses or the provision of community transport can be a strong lever to volunteer participation.

- **Volunteer entitlement information**

Older people should have more information with regard to the impact of volunteering on their social welfare and pension payments. Guidance is provided on www.volunteer.ie and many of the volunteer centre websites with regard to 'Volunteering when unemployed'. A section could be included here to provide details for those receiving carers and pension payments. Those receiving Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit, can do a maximum of 15 hours per week of voluntary work and before they start working as a volunteer, they must get permission from the Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit section in the Department of Social Protection. This information is particularly relevant with regard to the increase in the age for state pensions. In the interim periods, people will be required to claim jobseekers allowance which has different implications for volunteering.

- Promote and facilitate carpooling for older volunteers

Volunteer organisations that cannot afford to reimburse travel costs for volunteering could promote and facilitate carpooling as a viable alternative. Carpooling will increase the affordability and accessibility for older volunteers.

4.2.2 The Recruitment Process

Several of the research participants at the focus group were currently looking to volunteer and discussed their difficulty in connecting with some volunteer organisations. For many of these participants, it led them to conclude that there was an over-supply of candidates or a lack of real interest on the part of the volunteer involving organisations.

"Some of the organisations...particularly the more interesting ones are swamped with volunteers...while I accept others aren't...But it does make it difficult to link in with something that really speaks to your interests. After a thirty year career operating at a reasonably high level I have been either turned down by some organisations or simply not contacted by others when I have expressed an interest in a role."

"There are lots and lots of offers for fundraisers...That's not what I want to do at all."

"Fundraising seems to dominate the list of roles that are populated on the volunteer search sites...Often there isn't much else on offer...so you do wonder have they reached their capacity in other areas?"

Some of the research participants that were actively searching for volunteer roles highlighted what they perceived to be somewhat generic and overly structured approaches to volunteer recruitment. It was suggested, by these participants, that the inflexible and somewhat impersonal recruitment methods left little opportunity for getting to know and understand the candidate, their interests, skills and strengths, and how they might contribute to the volunteer involving organisation.

"If nobody bothers to read your profile or application and find out what you are interested in you might just get passed by. The selection process is really important. They should try to make it as personal as possible so that both the candidate and the organisation get a better understanding of each other and how they might work together."

"You have to know somebody in the organisation...someone who will take the time to explore your skills and how they would assist the"

organisation...Otherwise it's (the selection process) far too structured and narrowly focussed...I would think they are missing out on a lot of good candidates as a result."

"The calls for volunteers do tend to concentrate around the functional, task oriented roles. If you were looking to engage in a more specialist capacity there does seem to be very little interest...or even opportunities for you and the organisation to jointly explore your own skill and experience base...and how that could be tapped into by the organisation."

The survey indicated that 83% of the people that partook in the survey would be encouraged to volunteer if they had an opportunity to choose from a range of volunteering activities. It is vital that organisations match older people's specific and individual interests, abilities and lifestyles during the recruitment process otherwise organisations will struggle to attract and retain older volunteers. (ResPublica, 2011) Older people can bring time, knowledge and expertise to voluntary work but it may not be easy for them to discover what opportunities are available in their local community, to identify which are best suited to the qualities they can bring, or to let organisations know of their interest in volunteering.

Feeling unwelcome - Oh no not you again!

The results from the survey showed that the feeling that one was or would not be welcomed by the organisation was put forward as the single most significant factor that would prevent someone from volunteering through an organisation. In analysing the focus group transcripts this appeared to be more of an anticipated fear rather than an instance which had actually been experienced by many of those who are actively engaged in volunteering. What appeared to be disinterest or a lack of responsiveness was certainly felt by some, but only one instance was recorded, amongst focus group participants, of a less than warm welcome by a volunteer involving organisation.

"I have wondered would it be all cliquish...them in their cosy groups...It might be hard to break in...That might put you off."

"I've no evidence to say it would happen but unless you are super confident it is daunting joining a new group cold...not knowing anyone...It feels like you are back in school all over again...wanting to be liked and included."

"I would find that (joining a new group) very difficult...I would be very apprehensive wondering whether you would feel welcomed."

Focus group participants highlighted the selection and recruitment process as being a critical stage in successfully promoting formal volunteering and the ongoing management and retention of volunteers.

“Volunteering isn’t for everyone. We have to recognise that. Our organisation has three training sessions a year for new volunteers and after that we are full. So if you get someone new into the organisation you have to really do your homework...Selection is really important...For both parties sake you need to make sure the fit is right. Organisations need to tread carefully and recruit carefully because you invest so much in the volunteer. Just as important the organisations need to be a bit clearer in setting out their expectations of volunteers, giving them a good sense for what’s really involved and how the recruitment process works...They need to be more up front.”

“Retention is really important. You won’t keep everyone but you need to work hard to make sure that they are engaged...that the experience is fulfilling for the volunteers...The selection process gives you an opportunity to find out what their interests and ambitions are...the organisation should make some effort to see that those ambitions are being fulfilled...or at least to set some sort of realistic expectation as to what the experience is typically like and what volunteers could reasonably expect to get out of it.”

Developing informal volunteering

As outlined in Section 3.3 it is easier to quantify the amount of formal volunteering activity in comparison to informal activity. We also referred to a paper by Colin C. Williams which describes a ‘ladder’ of voluntary activity, with the formal organisations at the top of the ladder, and the more informal voluntary activities making up the rungs of the ladder. The paper suggests that if people are to be encouraged to have greater engagement with their communities then the informal voluntary activity should be nurtured and recognised in the same way as formal volunteering.

The research has shown that while many of the focus group participants found it difficult to estimate the number of hours that they would normally spend on volunteering per month, 40% indicated that they would normally spend more than 11 hours each month in informal volunteering activities and a considerable seven percent revealed that they would undertake more than 40 hours of informal volunteering activity each month.

In order to attract more volunteers onto the ladder of volunteering it is important to look at bridging the gap between informal and formal volunteering activities.

Cut through the Red Tape

The bureaucracy attached to being a volunteer was identified as a particular barrier, anxiety or annoyance for older people. Form-filling and police checking systems can be a particular barrier for older people (Volunteer Development Agency, 2009) The ‘Volunteer and Development Agency Organisational Survey Report’ (2009) states that the two most common barriers to involvement of older adults aged 60

and over are: worries about the risk of liability and fear of bureaucracy. While this might be a bigger issue in Northern Ireland, bureaucracy was still mentioned by respondents as a barrier during the consultations.

Whilst the necessity for Garda Vetting appeared to be recognised and accepted by most (though not all), particularly if the volunteering role involved any kind of engagement with vulnerable groups, the length of time that it may take to secure Garda Vetting was frequently described as a barrier to engagement for those prospective volunteers who may be less determined or more easily put off. It is very difficult to keep volunteers' interest whilst the Garda Vetting process is taking place.

"Of course [Garda vetting is] required, but it can take months and months to come through...For someone that maybe isn't so sure about getting involved it could easily put them off."

"Garda clearance for some roles is crazy...to visit the elderly?...Ridiculous that it's required...I could see if you were not tenacious you would give up. The bureaucracy is crazy. You need separate clearance for each role which is insane. References from an employer that you have worked with for 20 or 30 years should be sufficient..and much more insightful than any Garda form...which of course is going to say 'Yes' there are no convictions."

"Eventually I was accepted after the Garda clearance came through...but that took ages...maybe three or four months...If someone wasn't so keen they could easily say 'ah forget it.'"

"If you have been through it before and you have been involved as a volunteer before...It's fine...but for someone who is completely new to it all...It (the requirement for vetting) could be really daunting."

Recommendations:

- Create a friendly and welcoming environment

A 'Buddy System', whereby a volunteer is matched up with another volunteer or mentor.

'Bring a Friend' day: volunteers could be encouraged to bring a friend as the first day is often the hardest.

A Volunteer Fair for those over the age of 55 where information is presented in a non-digital format and representatives are available for discussion and recruitment from the volunteer organisation.

- **Keeping momentum during Garda Vetting**

Support during the recruitment process is also recommended. Help with the application for Garda Vetting should be provided and, in order to avoid frustration, it is recommended that the organisations provide a clear explanation of the time frame expected and continue to keep contact with the volunteer during the process. Training and development programmes could be developed whilst the Garda vetting is taking place, this will help to retain volunteers interest and engagement with the organisation.

- **Building on Informal Volunteering**

Informal volunteering should be recognised and nurtured during the recruitment process. Recognition and encouragement of informal volunteering activity could lead to people becoming more engaged with their communities, and more likely to progress to more formal volunteering.

In order to do this, the volunteer centres could reach out to those already partaking in informal volunteering activities. The recruitment process should acknowledge any previous informal volunteering activities carried out by the applicant (the current online registration form on I-VOL does not currently make provisions for this).

- **Reaching out!**

Reaching out to existing community groups on the ground will help to identify those people who are already volunteering on an informal basis within their communities. Organisations like the Dublin City Community Forum run by Dublin City Council and the Partnerships could facilitate this interaction.

4.2.3 Information & Communication

According to the 2011 Census, 73% of households in Ireland had a computer with 64% having a broadband connection (Central Statistics Office, 2012). Ireland has a broad range of computer training programmes such as the Silver Surfers awards aimed directly at teaching older adult's computer skills and confidence with technology. According to the CARDI 2012 report entitled 'Internet use and older people' 21% of the 60-74 age group now use the internet every day or almost every day, which is a massive increase compared to nine percent five years ago. Over the same time period, the percentage of older people who had not used the internet in the past three months dropped from 81% to 62%. Despite the increase in the provision of classes aimed at driving digital inclusion it is evident that a large group of older adults do not feel comfortable or confident online. Over 300,000 older people are not using the internet. (CARDI, 2012)

The 'Consumers and the Communications Market' consumer panel survey conducted in the UK indicated that age remains a major factor in a person's engagement with

technology. The report suggests that it is not simply down to a lack of knowledge but a person's ability to use technology actually begins to considerably decline after the age of 55 (Ofcom 2006). The survey and focus groups conducted reflected a similar discomfort with technology. It is important that all promotional and recruitment efforts are not solely across web formats. Participants emphasised that such an approach would rule out large segments of the targeted population who simply do not have access to or an interest in researching opportunities online.

"It's very unlikely that you will get lots and lots of people 55 plus coming to you through a website...You will get younger people...A lot of the older demographic won't be attracted through a website campaign."

"It's very difficult to create a message that will speak to all of the volunteering organisations and what they have to offer...I wonder could an ad campaign work?...The internet is great but it will only go so far. Volunteer organisations need to look at other media and channels."

It is important to recognise that a significant minority of "older" old age groups will never have used the internet and volunteer organisations must ensure that alternative ways are in place to access services and information. At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge that a large majority of older adults are currently using the internet and are interested in developing these skills.

Of course, not everyone over the age of 55 is the same and it is important to remember this when communicating with this group of people.

Recommendations:

- **Myth-Busting Campaign**

A myth-busting campaign is recommended. There are no restrictions on the number of hours or type of unpaid work those in receipt of pension payments can do. In addition, you do not need prior permission to do voluntary work.

- **It's Personal!**

Despite the increase in the provision of classes aimed at driving digital inclusion across the older age categories, and the increasing numbers of older people using the internet, it is evident that a large group of older adults still do not feel comfortable or confident online. Recruitment of older volunteers cannot be reliant upon the internet. Older people prefer a flexible and personal approach to the recruitment process, which would allow for face-to-face discussions between the agencies and the potential volunteer in order to match the volunteers' skills to activities. A 'Buddy system' whereby friends can be paired as volunteers could also be beneficial in terms of getting people involved initially.

- Language used and methods of communication

Future research into the language for marketing towards older people in Ireland is recommended.

The 'Guidelines for effective communication with older adults' published by the International Council of Active Ageing set out some guiding principles:

There are no "bad" words, but there are words that will be successful in attracting and representing older adults i.e. older persons, prime-time, independent, experienced, mentor, coach.

There are no "bad" images, but there are images that stereotype and inappropriately portray the incredible range of individuals in the "older" age cohorts.

The more language and imagery reflects the needs or wants of people being targeted, the more successful the communication i.e. show older people across the full range of voluntary activities and functional abilities, reflect the wide range of interests of older adults and include older adults who may use assistive devices.

4.2.4 Personal Barriers

The research shows that addressing the barriers to volunteering among those over the age of 55 requires a more personal approach. Despite the wide range of benefits that older volunteers bring to an organisation - maturity, experience, skills, availability and loyalty - the older people themselves expressed a distinct lack of confidence that they had the relevant skills needed to volunteer:

'I would be afraid I wouldn't be able to do the job'

'Lack of confidence about having any skills to offer'

'Lack of self confidence'

'Lack of relevant skills'

'It is important to recognise that often specific expertises are required and realistically only people with these skills can be recruited'

Interestingly the UK Study 'It's All About Time' revealed that 21% of non-volunteers stated that they felt 'too old' to volunteer, this was compared to seven percent of formal volunteers and 11% of informal volunteers. 61% of those who said they were 'too' old were over the age of 65. (Volunteer Development Agency 2007).

It is commonly accepted that the post war 'baby boom' generations are fitter, healthier

and better educated than any previous generation. There is some evidence, for example, that, on average, work-related health problems do not necessarily increase with age. The EC report 'Demography, active ageing and pensions' outlines that in 2007, 15.9% of people at work or having previously worked aged 45 to 54 reported at least one work-related health problem. Among those aged 55 to 64 the proportion fell to 15.0 %. A report by The Volunteer Development Agency, 2009 'Volunteering by the over 50s in Northern Ireland: Making the Connection' has indicated that older volunteers can be the befrienders of choice for many older people.

5.0 Summary

- We are living healthier and active lives for longer. Life expectancy in Ireland is currently at 78.3 years for males and 82.9 years for females in Ireland.
- The regional population projections 2016-2031 published by the CSO in December 2013 show that the number of people over the age of 65 will almost double in every region.
- The National Positive Ageing Strategy outlines that over a quarter of those over the age of 50 volunteer at least once a month.
- The middle age of 65-74 are more likely to volunteer than those aged 50-64, and 75+.
- Research to date has shown that formal volunteers spend on average 15 hours per month volunteering.
- Informal volunteers find it more difficult to quantify but the majority have indicated they spend more than 11 hours per month, with some spending more than 40 hours per month volunteering. Informal volunteering may be seen as an opportunity to further encourage people to participate in more formal volunteering roles.
- Older people can bring maturity of judgement, experience and knowledge to the table in terms of volunteering.
- Older volunteers are more likely to be motivated by community and a sense of wanting to 'improve things or help people'. Our research also shows that the respondents were not necessarily motivated by their peers involvement, or building friendships despite EU studies which suggest the contrary.
- People over the age of 55 are not immune to the current economic climate. Some are supporting older parents and younger children and are facing a longer working life with the increasing retirement age.
- While there has been an increase in the number of older people using technology, there are still a significant number of older people who do not use or do not have regular access to the internet.
- The research also suggests that older people perceive a lack confidence in their potential to contribute as a volunteer, or that they are not welcome by the volunteering organisations.
- Older people require a flexible and personal recruitment approach whereby their interests, skills and strengths can be identified and matched with volunteering activities.

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About Dublin City Volunteer Centre

Dublin City Volunteer Centre was established in January 2014 from a merger between Dublin City North and Dublin City South Volunteer Centres. Dublin City Volunteer Centre is a member of Volunteer Ireland, the national volunteer development agency and support body for volunteer centres in Ireland.

The mission of Dublin City Volunteer Centre is to help individuals find meaningful opportunities to volunteer and to build the capacity of not-for-profit organisations to involve volunteers in their work.

We share the vision of Volunteer Ireland to have a society in which: Everyone has access to volunteering opportunities that are fulfilling and engaging, and which contribute to the development of community and the betterment of society. Volunteers are respected for the time and effort they contribute.

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