

Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering:
Review of community contributions in later life



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About the Centre for Ageing Better

The Centre for Ageing Better is a charity, funded by an endowment from the Big Lottery Fund, working to create a society where everyone enjoys a good later life. We want more people to be in fulfilling work, in good health, living in safe, accessible homes and connected communities. By focusing on those approaching later life and at risk of missing out, we will create lasting change in society. We are bold and innovative in our approach to improving later lives. We work in partnership with a diverse range of organisations. As a part of the What Works network, we are grounded in evidence.

By 2040, we want more people in later life to be in good health, to be financially secure, to have good social connections and feel their lives are meaningful and purposeful. We know that people who experience all or some of these have happier later lives.

As one route to achieve this, we want more people to live in communities where social relationships flourish, making it easier to build and maintain close connections as well as wider everyday contact. Voluntary help and support is a fundamental feature of these more connected communities.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to all those who contributed to this review, including in particular Emily Georghiou, Rachel Monaghan, Luke Price and other colleagues at the Centre for Ageing Better; the Minister for Civil Society and her officials in the Office for Civil Society, within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport for their support for the review; all those who chaired roundtables, or served on the Steering Panel for the review; and everyone who shared their thoughts, experiences and expertise with the review team throughout this process.



London Borough of Camden
O'Donnell Court

Ground Floor	Flats	33
1st		70-75
2nd		76-85
3rd		86-97
4th		98-107
5th		108-113
6th		114-119
7th		120-125

“ Almost everyone in later life makes a contribution of some kind. However, some people encounter barriers to getting involved in all the ways they might want to, especially as their circumstances change. — ”

- 93 Wardens Flat
- 33 Toucan Printing Services
- 85 Quad Design Ltd

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Foreword

People in later life make essential contributions to their communities – from volunteering in schools, hospitals and charities, to popping round to visit a neighbour who is ill or alone. They bring a diverse range of skills, talents and life experience to help their communities thrive.

We know that getting involved is good for people in later life, helping to strengthen their social connections and wellbeing. This is why the Government is committed to enabling people to make an active contribution to their communities at all stages of life. Our recently published Civil Society Strategy sets out this vision of a lifetime of contribution.

In this review, the Centre for Ageing Better highlights that helping others also strengthens the friendships and support networks we can fall back on ourselves, particularly during major life transitions such as illness, caring or bereavement. As the Government's recently published strategy: 'A Connected Society: a strategy for tackling loneliness' challenges us all to do more to tackle isolation and loneliness, the value of supporting people to sustain their contributions as they get older is clearer than ever.

However, the review also finds that as people move through life, they can face a number of barriers to taking part, such as health conditions, or work and family commitments. The review's recommendations on how to tackle these practical, structural and emotional barriers will be hugely useful to charities, funders, businesses and public services in supporting a lifetime of contribution.

I would like to thank the Centre for Ageing Better for mobilising and digesting the invaluable input of over 300 stakeholders across sectors and within the community to inform the findings.

We will continue to work in partnership with the Centre for Ageing Better and others to develop new approaches to age-friendly and inclusive volunteering that support lifelong participation by everyone, including those who currently miss out.

Tracey Crouch MP
Minister for Civil Society

Executive Summary

This report sets out the findings of the Review of Community Contributions in Later Life, led by the Centre for Ageing Better in partnership with the Office for Civil Society between October 2017 and June 2018.

As well as helping others, making a contribution to our communities is good for us. It has been shown to improve our social connections, enhance our sense of purpose and self-esteem – and as a result, to increase our life satisfaction, happiness and wellbeing.

By the time people reach later life, the vast majority already have some experience of contributing to their communities. People contribute in many and varied ways – ranging from getting involved in formal civic roles and volunteering with charities or public sector organisations, to engaging in community or mutual support groups, to helping out friends and neighbours.

Very few people in later life make no contribution of any kind. However, some people encounter barriers to getting involved in all the ways they might want to, especially as their circumstances change.

Different forms of contribution currently seem to work better for some people than others. In particular, there are significant inequalities in participation in formal volunteering.

The data suggest that poorer and less healthy people in later life face barriers to contributing within formal organisations – and our findings confirmed this. There are also gaps in the representation of people from some Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities in formal volunteering.

By contrast the barriers to involvement in more informal types of contribution – such as helping out in the local area – seem to be lower. People in later life from all backgrounds contribute in these ways, and this represents an important source of help and support within disadvantaged communities.

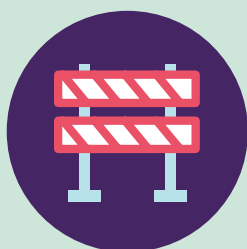
Our individual circumstances, in terms of our health, financial status and other responsibilities also inform what kinds of contribution are most suitable for us – and these change over the course of our lives, particularly as we get older. People in later life can find that changes such as the onset of ill-health or disability cause them to withdraw from making contributions.

These kinds of life changes can also lead people to lose social contact more generally. Where people are supported to continue contributing through life transitions, this can act as an ‘anchor’ –

helping them stay connected to their communities, maintain relationships and keep a sense of meaning and purpose.

The challenge we face is not to engage more people in later life in community contribution, but to make sure people in later life can continue to contribute, as their lives change; and to widen access to all forms of participation for everybody in later life – so that everyone has opportunities to take part across the spectrum of contribution.

Many of the things that get in the way of getting involved in later life also create barriers for younger people – practical issues like the cost of participation, and structural issues like the time and bureaucracy entailed in getting involved. These barriers affect everyone – though some issues, like lack of physical accessibility, can be a particular issue as we get older, and we found that people in later life placed strong emphasis on the importance of flexibility as a means of helping them to contribute through times of transition in later life. In addition, we found that people in later life experience significant emotional barriers to getting involved, which is not something that's been reported for younger people. Fears of ageism, of being rejected, or of ending up overcommitted, lack of confidence, and a sense of not being welcome or valued can all stop people taking part.



Practical barriers

- ⊕ Costs
- ⊕ Transport needs
- ⊕ Physical access
- ⊕ Language



Structural barriers

- ⊕ Inflexible offers
- ⊕ Lack of neutral spaces
- ⊕ Bureaucracy
- ⊕ Lack of resources
- ⊕ Digital divide



Emotional barriers

- ⊕ Lack of confidence
- ⊕ Stigma/stereotype
- ⊕ Lack of welcome
- ⊕ Fear of overcommitment
- ⊕ Not feeling valued

To futureproof the contributions that enrich and sustain our communities, we need to address these barriers to inclusion and widen participation across the spectrum. Our communities currently rely on a 'civic core' of highly engaged individuals, who are mainly middle-aged, wealthier and white. But there is no room for complacency that this group will be able to sustain its contributions in future.

The older population is changing – in future it will be more ethnically diverse, and more people will live for longer with long-term conditions. These are precisely the groups who currently face the greatest barriers to getting involved. In addition, as more people work longer and potentially provide more care for longer, younger counterparts of the relatively wealthy, healthy, white civic core may no longer feel willing or able to take up the same level of contribution. Indeed, some data suggests that today's retired people are already giving less time to volunteering.

Without action to retain people and support them to sustain their engagement over the life course, volunteer-involving organisations may find their capacity is depleted. And without action to engage people in later life in all their diversity, communities will continue to miss out on the talents they bring.

To safeguard the future of our communities, we need to ensure that everyone in later life can benefit from the increased wellbeing and connection that comes from community contribution.

Our review found that separate 'older people's' volunteering programmes can exacerbate emotional barriers related to ageist attitudes. Rather than age-specific initiatives, we need to ensure that all opportunities for community contribution are 'age-friendly' and inclusive.

Age-friendly, inclusive volunteering is:



Flexible and responsive:

- It fits around my life.
- When life changes, I can adjust my commitment without feeling I've let anyone down.
- I know how to get involved, what I'm being asked to do, and how to stop.

For example:

- More opportunities that are flexible in terms of time and location.
- Regular opportunities to review roles and commitments.



Enabled and supported:

- I receive practical help with access, expenses, and any training that I want and need.
- I feel supported – I know who I can turn to with any questions.

For example:

- Clear expenses policies – with upfront payment options.
- Budding/mentoring programmes for new volunteers.
- Adjustments for people with mobility needs / sensory impairments etc.



Sociable and connected:

- I have opportunities to meet and spend time with other people, including people from different backgrounds and age groups.
- It makes me feel a part of something.

For example:

- Regular opportunities to get together with other participants.
- Events, newsletters or other opportunities to 'belong' even when circumstances mean you can't actively participate.



Valued and appreciated:

- The value of my effort is recognised, and people regularly let me know I'm valued – through what they say and do.
- I feel like people appreciate what I do.

For example:

- Saying 'thank you' and offering small tokens of appreciation – such as invitation to an event or meal.
- Valuing and investing in voluntary time and input as a strategic organisational asset.



Meaningful and purposeful:

- The work I do means something to me and feels purposeful.
- I feel that what I do is worthwhile.

For example:

- Giving participants the opportunity to shape the work being done.
- Regular opportunities to give and receive feedback.



Makes good use of my strengths:

- It allows me to use the skills and experiences I've built up during my life, and gives me opportunities to try out and learn new things.
- I feel like my experience is respected and valued.

For example:

- Asking people about their experiences and skills and how they want to use them.
- Creating opportunities to review roles so people can take on new things as confidence builds.

Breaking down barriers and opening up more age-friendly, inclusive opportunities will require conscious action and investment to tackle the barriers and build new approaches into the fabric of all of our communities:

We need to:

- Nurture and support the places, spaces and organisations in which people contribute.
- Ensure more opportunities are age-friendly and inclusive.
- Make it easier for people to start, stop and change their contributions – by smoothing transitions between forms of contribution, organisations and roles.
- Ensure that people with additional support needs are enabled to contribute to their communities.
- Recognise and value the contribution of older citizens, celebrating the benefits it brings to individuals and to wider communities.

There is work to be done across all sectors, and already leaders in the voluntary and community sector, in local government, in the public sector, and in businesses are taking action. But more is needed. In summary, we recommend:

Funders including charitable trusts and foundations should:

- Recognise the intrinsic value of all forms of contribution as a means of promoting individual and community wellbeing and social connection, funding opportunities to contribute in a range of ways, with models tailored to suit smaller and less formal organisations.
- Promote the principles of age-friendly and inclusive contribution by building them into funding criteria and covering the costs of inclusion.

Volunteer-involving organisations across the public, voluntary and private sectors should:

- Adopt the principles of age-friendly and inclusive contribution as a standard for their volunteering practice, reviewing existing offers and processes against these principles.
- Foster more inclusive and representative forms of contribution by building links with organisations and places in the community where people already help out, informally as well as formally, and seeking opportunities to share resource and expertise.

Leadership bodies in the voluntary and community sector should:

- Support action by others across the voluntary, private and public sectors by providing practical guidance and support on age-friendly and inclusive contribution.
- Promote the value of age-friendly and inclusive approaches, celebrating the contributions of all older citizens and emphasising the 'invitation' to everyone to take part.

Local authorities and others involved in placemaking policy and practice should:

- Create and sustain the infrastructure needed to enable age-friendly and inclusive contribution by developing strategies to support volunteering and community involvement, sustaining vital local infrastructure such as transport and meeting spaces and supporting collaboration across the spectrum of contribution at the local level.

Commissioners and public service policy makers should:

- Recognise the intrinsic value of all forms of contribution as a means of promoting individual and community wellbeing and social connection, by ensuring commissioning frameworks and approaches support contribution and promoting participatory delivery.

Businesses and employers should:

- Share their assets to support and enable contribution in the communities they serve, for example by allowing organisations to use their premises for community events and lending staff time and expertise.
- Promote age-friendly and inclusive approaches to contribution among their workforces by applying the principles to their own workplace volunteering programmes and encouraging people to think about their contributions as part of their personal development.

The Office for Civil Society should:

- Support action by others across the voluntary, private and public sectors, by championing the actions set out in this report, and supporting its implementation.
- Champion key enabling actions already set out in the Civil Society Strategy.
- Promote the value of age-friendly and inclusive approaches to community contributions, by promoting the core principles, and emphasising the value of the full spectrum of contributions made by people in later life.

As immediate next steps, we are calling for:

- **Major funders** of community contributions to commit to defining, assessing, funding and evaluating this work in line with the principles of age-friendly and inclusive contribution.
- **Leadership bodies** in the voluntary and community sector to commit to developing practical guidance and support on key issues such as expenses, flexibility and access.
- The **Office for Civil Society** to fund a number of demonstrator projects, led by volunteer-involving organisations and others, to create models of support for age-friendly and inclusive contribution.

About the review of Community Contributions in Later Life

The review of Community Contributions in Later Life was led by the Centre for Ageing Better in partnership with the Office for Civil Society, part of the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport (DCMS). The review ran from October 2017 to June 2018.

Its remit was to consider how to enable more people to contribute their skills, time and knowledge to their communities in later life (defined as aged 50 and over) with a focus on how to increase participation among underrepresented groups, especially poorer people and those in poor health or living with long-term health conditions.

The aim was to deliver practical recommendations to inform the work of government, funders and actors within the voluntary, public and private sectors.

Its remit encompassed:

- All forms of volunteering and community activity – including informal volunteering, neighbourliness and helping out.
- Identifying action to be taken across all sectors.
- Making recommendations for the Office for Civil Society.

The following issues were out of scope:

- Unpaid care provision (as a form of contribution, though not as a potential barrier).
- Wider policy recommendations for national government.

The review process

The review was informed by evidence gathered by Ageing Better and enriched by engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. This included:

- A call for evidence, which elicited 234 responses.
- Seven roundtable meetings (with over 100 participants) focusing on key areas of interest:
 - innovation
 - local government
 - under-represented groups
 - funders
 - voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector
 - public sector
 - long-term health conditions and disabilities.
- A webinar organised by Health and Wellbeing Alliance focused on under-representation.
- Conversations with around 30 older volunteers in focus groups held in Hackney, Stockport and at King's College London.
- A call for practice eliciting over 30 responses, supplemented by proactive approaches to organisations engaged in interesting practice.
- Learning from a programme of community research in four localities (Bristol, Leeds, Settle & Scarborough) focusing on informal volunteering and community contribution by and for people in later life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).

We are grateful to all those who offered their time and expertise to the review process.

The evidence

The review has been informed by five main kinds of evidence.

- Published **quantitative research**, typically using large surveys of older people. While this represents the most generalisable evidence, it's important to note that it is heavily weighted towards formal volunteering. We have used this evidence base to explain who and what is involved in making a contribution, and to make some future projections. By its nature this kind of evidence has less to say about the specific, individual experience of making a contribution. It therefore tells us less about why people do or don't contribute in particular ways, or how barriers could be addressed.
- Published **qualitative research**, which seeks to understand the individual experiences of people who make a contribution in later life. We have used this evidence base to understand the key enablers and barriers to taking part. However, this literature is also weighted towards formal volunteering, and says relatively little either about opportunities for improvement or examples of promising practice.

Where the review refers to specific publications or 'the research', we mean published quantitative or qualitative research. In particular, we have drawn on our earlier evidence briefing on the benefits of making a contribution in later life (Jones et al, 2016), and a non-systematic review of the research evidence on motivations and barriers to taking part.

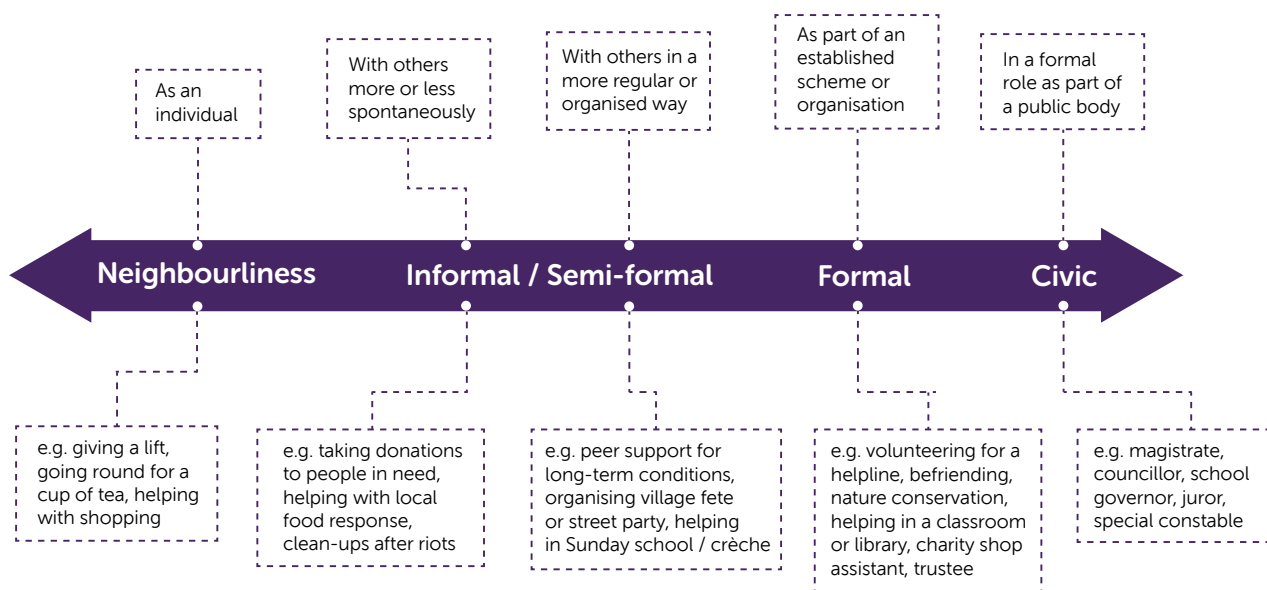
In addition the review has been informed by:

- **Ageing Better community research**. We commissioned additional qualitative research as part of the review, with a specific focus on informal contributions in disadvantaged communities. We refer to this as 'our community research' (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).
- Public **data**, in particular the annual Community Life Survey. We have used this to provide a snapshot of the current status of community contributions in the UK. While this data does cover informal contributions, the relatively small sample of older people means that we cannot rely on it to draw conclusions about sub-groups (for example, older BAME people). The sample size and changes in data collection methodology also mean that we cannot reliably tell whether year-on-year shifts represent real changes in the situation. Where the review refers to 'data', we mean this kind of publicly available survey data.

- **Responses to the review.** There are significant gaps in the published evidence, for example in terms of the experiences and (changing) aspirations of people in later life, the dynamics of more informal ways of making a contribution, and potential practical solutions. The review therefore set out to gather the perspectives of a range of individuals and organisations to shed light on these key questions. Where we say, 'we heard' or 'respondents told us', we are referring to evidence gathered directly through the review processes (calls, roundtables and focus groups). While individual responses are not necessarily generalisable, we have analysed these inputs in the light of the wider evidence base outlined above and tested our conclusions back with a wider range of stakeholders.

What are 'community contributions'?

In this review, the term 'community contribution' is used to encompass the wide range of ways in which people help out, get involved, volunteer and participate in their communities. These contributions exist across a spectrum from very formal, civic roles such as school governors or magistrates, through to volunteering within public sector bodies and charitable organisations, to getting involved with local campaigns and activism – for example protesting about the closure of a local service – to helping out informally with community groups – for example by baking cakes for a local fete – to very informal contributions such as helping a neighbour with the bins.



Adapted from: Nesta – People Helping People: the future of public services (2014)

'Volunteering'

The review uses the term 'volunteering' to refer to more formal roles within or alongside organisations. In our discussions it was clear that this term had particular connotations for some people. While some of these connotations were positive, many were less so, suggesting ideas of exclusivity, or 'othering' and perpetuating the idea that contributing to communities is the preserve of a minority.



I know 'volunteering', as a word, it has clarity, you're right. But it also suggests to some people a degree of do-gooding, and that's, you know, doing good to other people, and I think people are reluctant to be that pompous, you know, sometimes" – Hackney focus group participant



I mean, my neighbour needs something, it's 'helping them out'. 'Volunteering', I suppose, implies some form of commitment" – Hackney focus group participant

In addition, we found that some people defined some types of informal contribution in opposition to volunteering.



These people aren't 'volunteers'. They're participants and they're part of community and they're part of society. And they are also supporting other people through their work" – Roundtable participant

We therefore concluded that 'volunteering' could not be used to describe all forms of activity encompassed by the review, and terms such as 'social action' were not well recognised by participants – hence our decision to use the term 'community contribution' despite its limitations.

Limitations of 'community contributions'

In our community research, participants found the idea of calling spontaneous help for people around them (for example taking food around to a sick neighbour) 'making a contribution' bemusing. Instead they thought it was 'just what people do' (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).

The value of community contribution

In 2016, Ageing Better published a review of the research about the benefits to people aged 50 and over of making a voluntary, altruistic contribution to their community (Jones et al, 2016).

It found there is good evidence of the benefits of making a contribution in later life, whether through formal volunteering or helping out in the community. The research is particularly strong when it comes to formal volunteering.

The evidence shows that making a contribution to your community in later life has the following benefits:

- Increased quantity and quality of social connections
 - Enhanced sense of purpose and self-esteem
 - Improved life satisfaction, happiness and wellbeing
- (Fujiwara et al, 2013; Jenkinson et al, 2013; Jones et al, 2016)

There is strong evidence that making a contribution, whether formally or informally, results in an increase in both the number of social connections that people have in later life, and the depth and quality of those connections (e.g. de Wit et al, 2015; Jones et al, 2016). This matters because all the research shows that the quantity and quality of our social interactions have significant impacts on our physical and mental health and wellbeing, quality of life and life satisfaction (e.g. Rafnsson et al, 2015; Santini et al, 2016). Making a contribution is one important way for people to create and maintain social connections throughout the life course.



For me being a volunteer is the best way for me to stay connected with the community and with people” – Volunteer at King’s College Hospital NHSFT

As well as these social benefits, making a contribution can also be a source of wellbeing in and of itself (e.g. Fujiwara et al, 2013; Tabassum et al, 2016). We know that having a sense of meaning in our lives is an important component of life satisfaction and wellbeing, and the research suggests that feeling a sense of purpose is one of the main personal motivators, and benefits, of making a contribution in later life (e.g. Morrow-Howell et al, 2009).



[My wife and I] just like to help people. Anyone we hear about who needs help, we will try to give it. We feel we are here to help one another. We get pleasure out of doing it” – Community Research participant, Ashley, Bristol

However, research doesn't suggest that volunteering is sufficient on its own to protect people from more profound social isolation (e.g. Nazroo & Matthews, 2012). One reason for this may be that too many people in later life currently find that as they go through transitions such as developing long-term conditions, becoming a carer etc., they are forced to withdraw from contributing as well as other social activities. If we can address the barriers to community contribution and make it easier for people to remain involved through the transitions of later life, this could help them to remain connected more widely. Later in this report, we discuss how volunteer involving organisations and others could better support people through life transitions.

While volunteering is correlated with better physical health and increased longevity, this appears to be primarily because healthier people are much more likely to volunteer in the first place (de Wit et al, 2015; Jenkinson et al, 2013). Long-term studies show that people who have volunteered are no more or less likely than non-volunteers to develop frailty later in life (Jenkinson et al, 2013; Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; von Bonsdorff & Rantanen, 2011).

However, participants in our discussions pointed to individual stories of the significant impact of volunteering. Participants highlighted, for example, the role that getting involved can play in recovery from both physical and mental health conditions, and in supporting self-management of long-term conditions. Participants argued that this was true not just of involvement in peer support groups and explicitly recovery-focussed activities, but also of wider participation.



I've had some good response back from the clinic to say that my health is improving since I started doing the voluntary work here. I've got more energy" – Volunteer at King's College Hospital NHSFT

Similarly, we heard that for some people getting involved in the community was a significant route out of loneliness, and that, where volunteering could be sustained through times of transition that create risk of loneliness and isolation, it could provide an anchor of connection to the community.

The wider research base suggests that precisely how people make a contribution, the quality of support they receive and the individual experience of taking part may make all the difference when it comes to these kinds of benefits.

In our community research, we also found evidence that poor experience of volunteering, or of trying to get involved and feeling rejected, could be deeply damaging to people's self-esteem and wellbeing (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).

Across the spectrum of contribution

While any form of community contribution can benefit people in later life, different forms of contribution have different features.

Formal volunteering roles can offer benefits which are highly valued by some people in later life, such as formal accreditation, official status, and the sense of identity afforded by 'work-like' activity.

However, the research shows that people in later life from disadvantaged groups are much less likely to volunteer in these more formal ways. During the review we also heard that some people in later life who would be interested in formal volunteering encounter barriers that prevent them from taking part.

For others, contributing informally in later life is more attractive, due to the greater sense of control and ownership, the lack of formality and rigidity and the sense of direct connection to impact. Yet these kinds of activities, by dint of being less formal, are often also less structured and protected – with little or no provision for expenses and training, for example, and no systems or support for inclusion or safeguarding. This can leave some individuals excluded or vulnerable. These groups also often struggle for sustainable funding and lack infrastructure.

There is a distinct kind of contribution that takes place in mutual support groups and in settings where people are enabled to make contributions as part of a wider service. We heard from a number of organisations who told us that, in their work, the boundaries between 'helper' and 'helped' are increasingly blurred – and reciprocity and mutuality, rather than contribution, are the driving forces behind people's participation. In these models the emphasis is often on the wellbeing benefits of taking part, and not on the direct outputs of the volunteer's labour. Again, attracting funding can be a challenge, particularly where the funder's understanding of contribution is grounded in more formal volunteering models.

About informal contributions

Our understanding of 'informal contributions' encompasses a very wide range of activities, from checking in on a neighbour, to helping serve food at the local mosque, organising a village fete, or participating in local activism (for example protesting the closure of a local service).

These activities are a vital part of the spectrum of community contributions – they can have similar benefits for individual wellbeing as more formal volunteering, but importantly they do not seem to be as socially segregated (South, 2018).

In our community research among people living in disadvantaged communities, we found high levels of involvement in informal community contribution, and we saw that people derived significant benefits from this involvement.

However, it is important to note that most informal contribution takes place within communities, and among people who share similar backgrounds, experiences and characteristics. This is almost an inevitable consequence of the more informal, spontaneous and relational nature of this kind of activity.

As such, while they can play a strong role in building relationships within groups, informal contributions are unlikely to lead to new connections between different groups, unless this is consciously built in (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004).

This is not necessarily negative: in our community research it was clear that this in-group activity gave people a sense of purpose, achievement and connection, and this activity can be important in filling gaps in formal provision for some groups. However, as there are typically fewer assets and opportunities available in more disadvantaged communities, the lack of 'bridges' to other groups may limit the scope of their activities. The lack of wider opportunities may also disproportionately affect people who are marginalised within these communities.

Who contributes?

The data consistently shows that the majority of people make some form of contribution to their community, with around two-thirds of people aged 50 and over making some form of contribution to their communities (Community Life Survey, 2018).

Across the life course most people get involved in community contribution of some kind at some point – only around 10% of people never make a contribution (Kamerade, 2011). Almost everyone in later life will have some prior experience of contribution, even if they are not currently taking part.

Yet there are still stark inequalities in participation – particularly in formal volunteering. Some people face barriers to getting involved, or are forced to withdraw from making contributions due to changes in their circumstances such as the onset of ill-health or disability.

Rather than engaging more people in community contribution, we need to focus on making sure people in later life can continue to make contributions as their lives change, and on making activities across the spectrum more inclusive so that people in later life who are excluded have wider opportunities to contribute.

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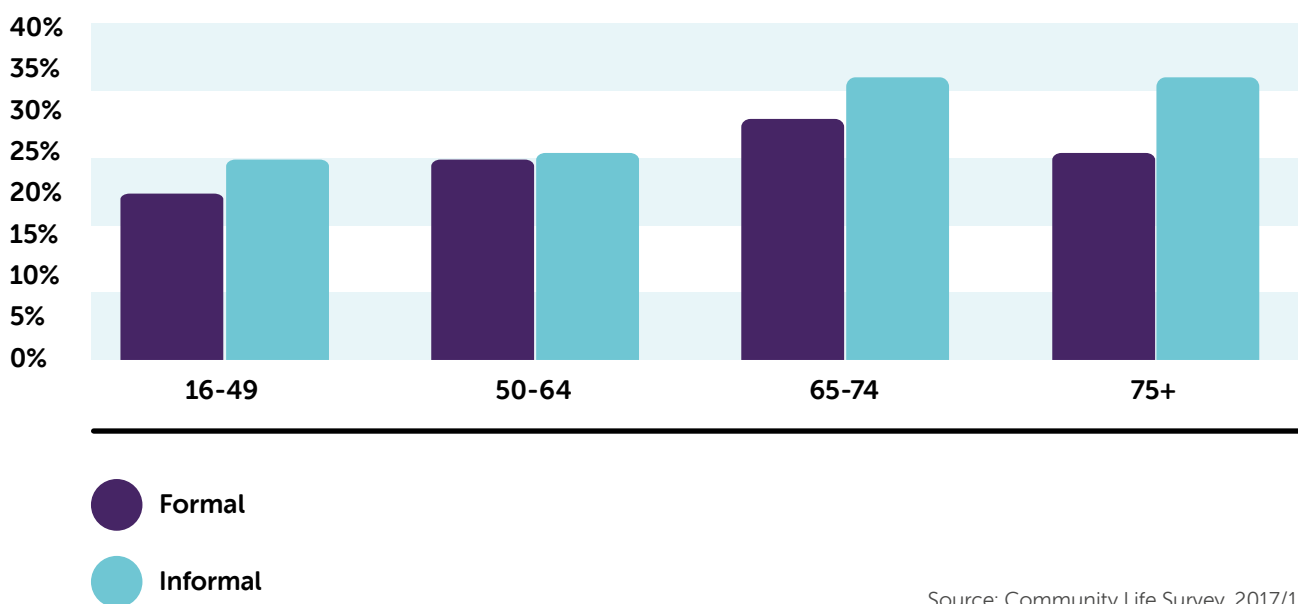
Age and contribution



"I have been volunteering since I know I exist, as a child, non-stop. And I wouldn't know any better" – Hackney focus group participant

Age itself is not a key determinant of whether or not people make a contribution, with only relatively small variations in the proportions of people volunteering and taking part informally between the ages of 50 and 75 (e.g. Komp et al, 2011). The research suggests that making a contribution is not generally something that people pick up for the first time later in life. One study tracking large numbers of people aged 50 and over found that only one in six people who had never volunteered before took up volunteering in the five years after they retired (Nazroo, 2015).

Volunteering at least once a month by age



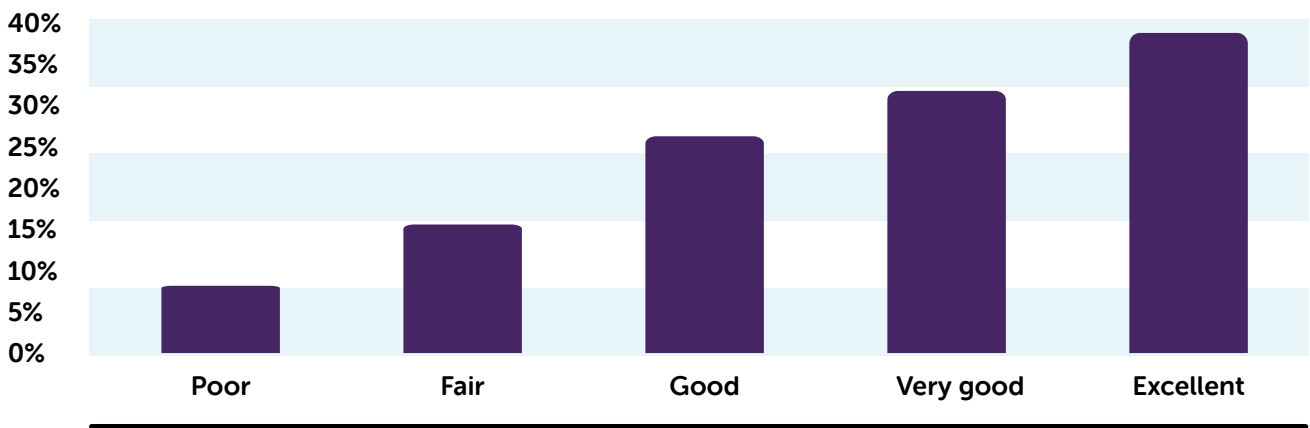
Instead, the evidence from large scale longitudinal studies such as the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing and the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe shows that health and socio-economic status, and to a lesser extent ethnicity, are more significant in determining whether or not people engage in formal volunteering in later life, and health in particular also limits informal contribution.

Health status and contribution



But, at the moment, ill health is stopping me from expanding my repertoire, so to speak” – Hackney focus group participant

Proportion of people aged 50 and over volunteering by health status



Source: Nazroo, J. and Matthews, K. (2012). The impact of volunteering on well-being in later life, London: (WRVS) Royal Voluntary Service.

The evidence demonstrates clearly that those in poorer health are less likely to volunteer, and what evidence there is suggests that this correlation also holds for informal forms of contribution. This gap matters because there is some evidence to suggest that volunteering and helping out can be beneficial for recovery and wellbeing (Jones et al, 2016).

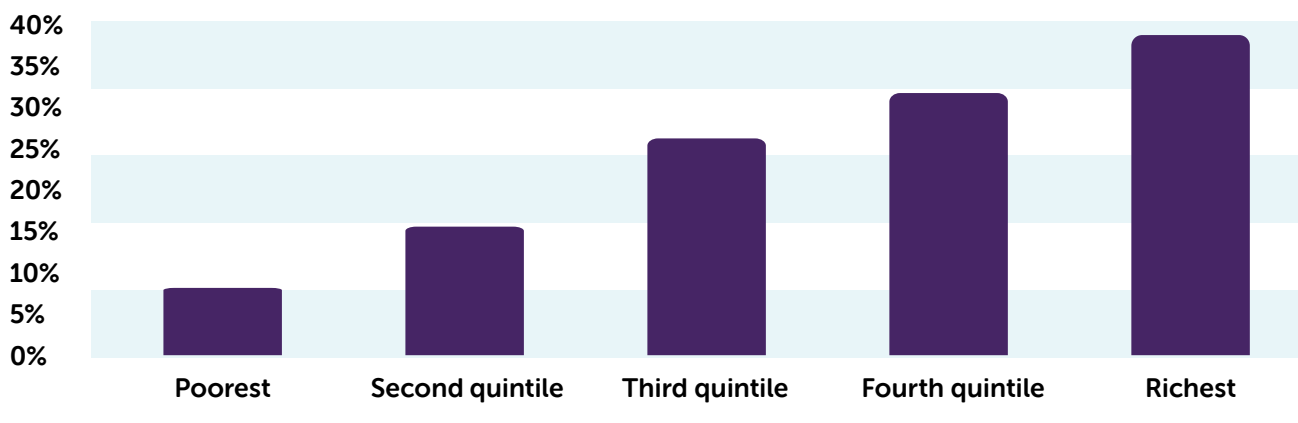
Participants in our focus groups and community research described how ill-health made it harder to continue making a contribution, and in some cases led to them stopping altogether.



I don't feel able to offer others more help as I am not in good health myself” – Community Research participant, Ashley, Bristol

Socio-economic status and contribution

Proportion of people aged 50 and over involved in formal volunteering by wealth 2006-10



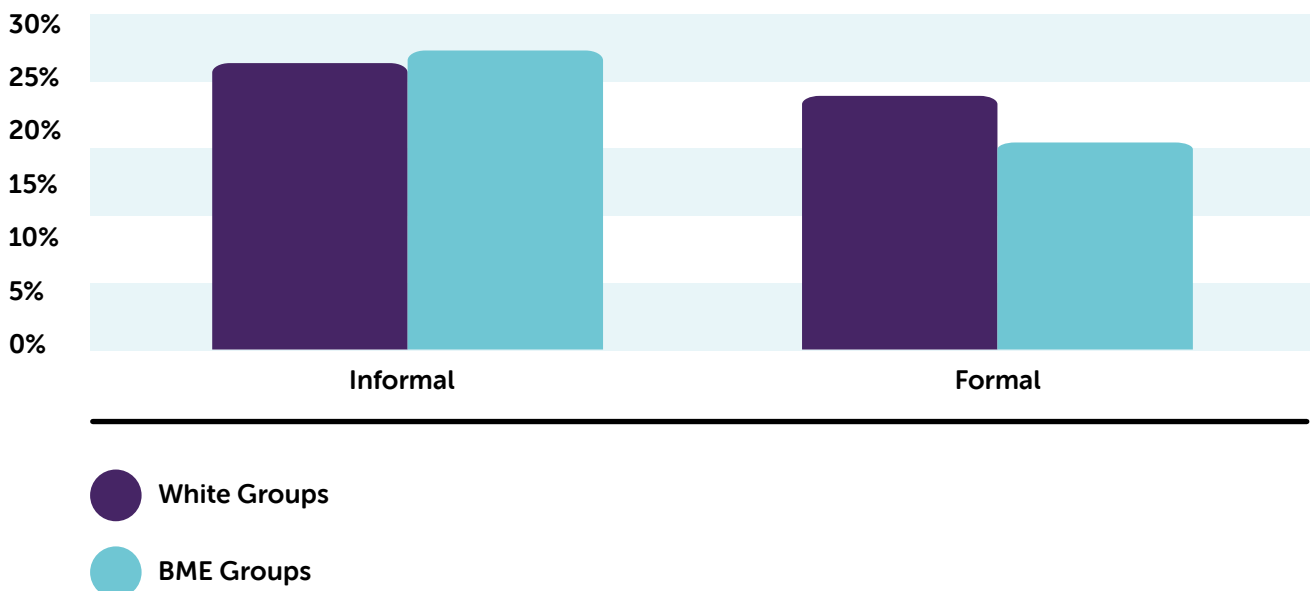
Source: Nazroo, J. and Matthews, K. (2012). The impact of volunteering on well-being in later life, London: (WRVS) Royal Voluntary Service.

There is a clear correlation between socio-economic status and formal volunteering. However, the (limited) research suggests that levels of informal contribution are broadly similar across the socio-economic gradient. Indeed, Ageing Better's research in deprived communities demonstrated high levels of informal contribution by people in later life (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).

Ethnicity and contribution

There is limited evidence from the UK on the participation of BAME groups in volunteering and community contribution. Data from the Community Life Survey suggests a small but consistent gap in formal volunteering rates among BAME communities as compared to non-BAME communities, although there is little difference in overall rates of contribution (Community Life Survey Data, 2012-2017; see also Hornung et al, 2017). These figures are echoed by the lower levels of BAME participation reported by mainstream volunteer-involving organisations.

Volunteering at least once a month ethnic group (2017/18)



Ageing Better's research in deprived communities suggests that these statistics may mask contributions among minority ethnic groups within faith or identity-based organisations, echoing findings of previous research (Low et al, 2007). It is possible that these 'in community' contributions are so culturally ingrained as to go unrecognised – and so may be under-reported in surveys that rely on self-reporting (Esmond et al, 2001).

Our community research also uncovered evidence of significant barriers to participation outside the immediate community among BAME people in later life – offering some explanation of the gaps currently observed, particularly in formal 'mainstream' volunteering (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).

Why do people make community contributions?

People get involved with their communities and make a contribution because they want to, because they can and because there is something for them to do (Baines et al, 2006).

Individual motivation is affected by a range of factors, but prior experience of community contribution and having friends and family (in particular a spouse) who are already involved are particularly significant (Butrica et al, 2009; Tang, 2015).

Research clearly identifies the kinds of opportunities for contribution that are most attractive – important factors include the fit with individuals’ skills and values; the provision of proper training and support; and the flexibility of the opportunity (Tang et al, 2010). A range of more intangible factors – such as having opportunities that fit with an individual’s sense of what ‘people like me’ do – are also important (Tang et al, 2010; Martinez et al, 2011).

All these factors were highlighted by respondents to our review.



I don’t think of myself as a volunteer. Somebody else said they wanted to be useful, and I think that’s what motivates me, so if I was talking to somebody who didn’t know, I’d say I’m part of a group that’s doing this, and tell them about the activity, because it’s involving other people in doing things and enjoying things which helps build volunteer groups” – Hackney focus group participant

People with wider social networks are more likely to encounter opportunities to contribute, and may also be more likely to feel that the activities are for them (Dury et al, 2014; Morrow-Howell, 2010). As contributing also helps to build and sustain social connections (de Wit et al, 2015; Jenkinson, 2013) this creates a double bind: the people who could gain most from making a contribution, by developing new friendships and connections, are less likely to come across opportunities to contribute in the first place.

The local environment also matters. Physical venues and community spaces, welcoming and inclusive social activities, or simply regular contact with neighbours, all shape people's opportunities to engage, especially when it comes to making more informal, spontaneous contributions. A sense of belonging to the local community, or of shared identity or social norms, can be important sources of motivation. Making a contribution on your doorstep can be easier for people who would otherwise face significant practical barriers to getting involved.



In a way I feel that if I don't go out there and do a little bit, and contribute, I'm not part of that community" – Hackney focus group participant

Emerging findings from Local Trust's work on Empowered Communities shows that people are highly motivated to improve the places in which they live and to make the lives of people like them better (Local Trust, 2017). In our community research, we found that the challenges communities faced could act as a catalyst to community involvement (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).



Public transport we have not got – so we have to depend on others" – Community Research participant, Settle

Faith and contribution

A recurring theme in our community research was the connection between faith and community contributions (e.g. Broese et al, 2012; Dury et al, 2015; Okun et al, 2015). Religious faith informed the moral framework of many of the people in later life to whom we spoke, and created community norms in which helping others was expected. Particularly in communities where other community spaces had been closed down, we also saw that faith institutions' buildings were playing an important role as physical spaces for community activity and contribution.

Beyond this we observed that religious participation supported informal community contribution by creating regular, frequent and consistent social contact among members of faith institutions. This enabled people to get to know each other, identify needs and offer support and crucially fostered familiarity and a sense of community, increasing people's sense of confidence and 'permission' to help (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).

Contribution across the life course

Throughout the life course our motivations and capabilities to contribute shift and change in response to changes in our own physical and mental health, our family and other responsibilities, our work situations, our financial position and a whole range of other factors. Yet these realities are seldom reflected in the way in which opportunities for community contribution are constructed, particularly within formal volunteering organisations.

All the research points to the importance of cementing habits of community contribution as early as possible in the life course and sustaining these habits as we go through life (e.g. Butrica et al, 2009; Choi & Chou, 2010; Lancee & Radl, 2014).

In our discussions with people in later life we heard that life transitions, such as the onset of a new long-term condition, becoming a carer, bereavement or moving house can be a spur to getting involved in community contribution, or a trigger for withdrawal (e.g. Choi et al, 2007). Life changes can motivate people to become involved in their communities, but they can also lead people to feel unable to continue their contribution, and can break the habit of volunteering. These transitions can equally be crisis points or 'triggers' that lead people to withdraw from their existing social networks (Jopling and Sserwanja, 2016).

CASE STUDY



Mary is over 85, she has mobility issues due to arthritis. She has lived in Settle for 58 years and has always been very involved with her church, which she feels helps her to be involved in the local community. She used to be much more active, but with age has had to reduce this as she feels quite tired. She continues to do what she can: "I can't do much because of lack of mobility. I have a friend in a nursing home who I ring up regularly, and stay in touch with old friends by phone." (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).

In our discussions with people in later life we heard that people sometimes felt awkward in asking for the adjustments to volunteer roles that they would need to manage changes in mobility, sensory loss etc. Others told us that once they stepped away from volunteering (for example due to a health crisis) they struggled to return. With proper support, such as keeping-in-touch with volunteers who are away, and regular opportunities to discuss roles and responsibilities, people can continue contributing through times of transition, preventing a slide away from this important source of connection and meaning.

Where people are supported to continue contributing through life transitions, we heard about how it can act as an 'anchor' – helping people to stay connected to their communities, maintain relationships and keep a sense of meaning and purpose (see also Brodie et al, 2014).

However, we found little evidence that volunteer-involving organisations systematically consider how to enable volunteers to manage and respond to life transitions while still contributing. This is a missed opportunity to support people in later life who may be at risk of losing social connections more generally.

Later life is a time of multiple transitions and so it is particularly important that people in later life have access to volunteer roles and opportunities to contribute that are responsive to transition. This could be through the provision of regular or 'on-demand' opportunities to review voluntary commitments and adjust roles, or through an approach that recognises and creates space for people to step into and out of roles and move between different types of contribution with different groups and organisations as life changes.

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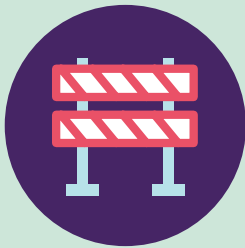
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What are the barriers to contribution?

The insight we gathered from people in later life – through our discussions, our call for evidence, and our community research – brought out three broad categories of barrier to volunteering and community contribution:



Practical barriers

- ⊕ Costs
- ⊕ Transport needs
- ⊕ Physical access
- ⊕ Language



Structural barriers

- ⊕ Inflexible offers
- ⊕ Lack of neutral spaces
- ⊕ Bureaucracy
- ⊕ Lack of resources
- ⊕ Digital divide



Emotional barriers

- ⊕ Lack of confidence
- ⊕ Stigma/stereotype
- ⊕ Lack of welcome
- ⊕ Fear of overcommitment
- ⊕ Not feeling valued

While these barriers are not uniquely faced by people in later life, and most would be equally relevant to other kinds of inclusion, we found that the emotional barriers to taking part weighed particularly heavily for people in later life. Some practical barriers related to accessibility may also be more likely to affect people in later life, and the importance of flexibility came through strongly in relation to life transitions.



Practical barriers

The **cost** of participation was one of the key practical barriers identified through the review, across both formal and informal forms of contribution.

Across all settings people reported having to cover the costs of travel and food, and in some cases clothing and equipment. We also heard about a range of 'hidden' costs – such as the cost of attending team events, Christmas parties, or meetings in coffee shops, where people felt pressure to buy drinks.

Even where organisations did reimburse expenses, these barriers could remain – for example because of a lack of available funds to pay in cash and claim back, or where people felt uncomfortable claiming money from a charity. For more informal activities and groups expenses were rarely covered, excluding those who lacked the money to take part.

Travel issues, including the lack of available transport to take people to places where they could get involved, the time taken to travel and the high costs of travel, were another key set of barriers.



I used to [attend a social group] in the past, but now I can't get up the hill" – Community Research participant, Settle



Sometimes the distance that one has to travel to carry out whatever it is you have to do, can put one off. It definitely put me off if I have to travel an hour or two to get to where I have to go to. And then spend another two or three hours there, and then another two hours to get back home. The whole day's gone. So that can put one off. It will definitely put me off" – Hackney focus group participant

The **physical inaccessibility** of some buildings to people with mobility issues also created barriers and these would be particularly likely to impact people in later life. Access barriers were not always as obvious as steps at entrances, or lack of accessible toilets. For example, in a recent survey by Age UK of charity shop volunteers aged 75 and over, the most important aspects of the charity shop environment for volunteers were that it was uncluttered, that there were comfortable places to sit and take a break, and that there was non-slip flooring (Age UK, 2017).



The ones I really see a big challenge for is people with physical disabilities. And obviously this has a huge overlap with older people as mobility changes. Because there is still so much of an issue with physical access to some of the spaces, the buildings, the transport that we have. You add into that the barriers for people with learning disabilities and those are the people who are very much pushed into the recipient, beneficiary end of the sector whether it's formal or informal sector" – Roundtable participant

Language and literacy issues also created barriers, especially for people in later life from BAME groups, sometimes limiting people's contributions to the narrow sphere of the immediate community and reducing opportunities to develop wider networks.



I do not socialise with anyone locally as I cannot speak English and cannot communicate with people locally. I am not physically able to get out and about" – Community Research participant, Leeds



I don't know much English so ladies in our community need more activities like chit chat groups, trips to places, more sessions for health issues and to do more for speaking English so we get more confident and more independent" – Community Research participant, Leeds

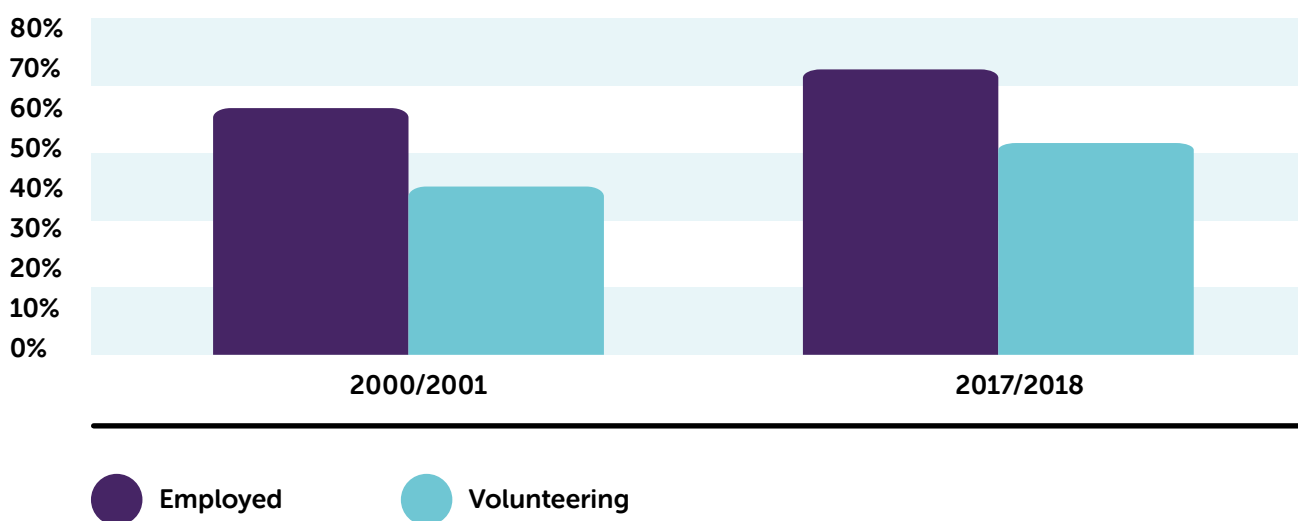
Time

Lack of time is one of the most common barriers cited by non-volunteers to explain why they do not take part (e.g. Low et al, 2007). Respondents to our call for evidence cited work and caring responsibilities – both for adult family members and for grandchildren – as significant demands on the time that people in later life might otherwise spend on volunteering. While this is intuitively convincing, the picture from the data and research is less clear.

It is not obvious that working stops people from making a contribution. In recent years we have seen little change in the rates of volunteering among people aged 50-64, for example, despite a significant increase in employment rates in that age group.

Although discussions of older volunteers often centre around encouraging people to take up volunteering on retirement, rates of volunteering are actually fairly similar before and after retirement (Komp et al, 2011; Lancee & Radl, 2014; Nazroo, 2015).

Rates of Employment and Volunteering among 50-64 year olds, 2000-2018



Sources: Labour Force Survey, Citizenship Survey (2000/01), Community Life Survey (2017/18)

Similarly, the research suggests that older adults who provide some care are no more or less likely to be engaged in volunteering than those who don't (Dury et al, 2015; Hank and Stuck, 2008; van der Horst et al, 2017). Indeed, one US study found that grandparents who provide regular care for non-resident grandchildren are more likely to undertake formal volunteering than grandparents who provide no regular care for their grandchildren (Bulanda and Jendrek, 2016).

Data from the Harmonised European Time Use Survey (among people who were not retired) reveals interesting insights into how those who do and do not volunteer really spend their time. In short, the analysis suggests that the time that non-retired volunteers give to volunteering is often used by non-volunteers in watching television (or other mass media), resting, or other leisure activities (Payne, 2017). This lends weight to the idea that volunteering 'competes' with leisure pursuits rather than work (Stebbins, 1992).

What this suggests is that when people say they lack time to volunteer, this may be more of a reflection of the choices they make about how to spend their time, than an objective measure of time available. This underlines the importance of structural barriers, such as lack of flexible opportunities to contribute, and emotional barriers, such as the fear of becoming overcommitted, especially when people in later life are considering forms of contribution that are new to them.



A lot of my friends are either working or they've come to a point in their lives that they've just, you know, they're winding down and they're busy with family and travel and social life and they're sort of enjoying that" – Volunteer at King's College Hospital NHSFT



Structural barriers

Structural barriers are put up by the systems and processes of volunteer-involving organisations themselves, and by the infrastructure available to support community contribution. They can create or exacerbate barriers to participation, and impact people's experience of community contribution.

Lack of flexibility in volunteering opportunities was a key structural barrier identified by the review. Examples included demands for excessive time commitments either on a week-by-week basis or in terms of the duration of commitment over months or years and rigid role profiles and training requirements which failed to make optimal use of people's skills and experience.



I have friends who've been put off volunteering because they have to do a particular day every week, and they're either worried that they might let people down, because it's such a formal commitment, or that you know it would tie them down and they couldn't do things" – Hackney focus group participant



I think we still paint too much of the picture for people, try to tell them that this is how you have to do volunteering. This is how you to have to relate to older people. And not surprisingly, people turn off because they don't want to be told what to do, and they want to be empowered to develop their own solution" – Roundtable participant

Placing undue emphasis on commitment and long service can act as a barrier in itself – for example the National Trust have found that seeing volunteers wearing long service badges can put off potential volunteers, who feel that this commitment is expected.

Bureaucracy was another important structural barrier. In relation to formal volunteer roles, DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) and other checks were often mentioned, as were lengthy application processes and training requirements. A particular concern was the frequency of changes in requirements on volunteers – which meant people repeatedly going through bureaucratic processes that they perceived to be unnecessary and even found insulting.



At its absolutely rudimentary core, it's one human being giving the gift of their time to another human being, and actually, I think we lose the essence of that, every single time we do an exercise like this, where it comes back to proving stuff" – Roundtable participant



They think they can just turn up and register and be a volunteer and, you know, it's so much more. We know why it has to be like that, but that's what puts a lot of people off" – Volunteer at King's College Hospital NHSFT

Bureaucracy could also be a barrier in informal settings. While these activities placed fewer requirements on individuals, associations and groups found bureaucratic requirements a challenge. For example, we heard that where small community groups wanted to become charities, they struggled with appointing treasurers and preparing budgets, and other groups had struggled to get licences for activities.

Digital processes were also perceived to create increasing barriers to the involvement of those people in later life who are not online – with more volunteering opportunities only 'discoverable' online, many organisations using online application processes, and some requiring volunteers to undertake online training.

Lack of resources – and particularly long-term funding for core activity – is a key structural barrier for more informal contribution. Particular challenges were the complexity of applying for funds, and attracting funding for community involvement in the context of the increasing use of commercial tendering and contracting arrangements in local authorities.

We also heard from several volunteer-involving organisations that had struggled to retain volunteers through the process of tendering and retendering for services – as small changes in service specifications or management structures have big impacts on the key factors that motivate volunteers to get involved.



100% the commercial model is not suitable for supporting voluntary agencies and it will kill them" – Roundtable participant

Lack of physical infrastructure was also a critical barrier to participation. In our community research the importance of places to meet and the challenges presented by poor transport came through very strongly as barriers for informal as well as formal contributions.

In many communities we saw that contribution centred around available spaces and was often bounded by the limitations of those spaces. For example, in communities where the only meeting spaces were based in faith institutions, there were reduced opportunities for cross-cultural activity and some people felt excluded because they did not see the space as being 'for them' (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).



There was a community centre next door to the mosque, which the Council has closed so we have nowhere to go for social activities. It will benefit me and others if a community centre was open for public. There are no activities specifically for Bengali people” – Community Research participant, Leeds

It was clear, from our research, that to facilitate contribution people needed access to spaces that were friendly, functional and that enabled people both to make new connections and to strengthen existing relationships.



Emotional barriers

A striking feature of the response to our call for evidence was the high occurrence of ‘emotional’ terms in describing barriers. Participants placed a heavy emphasis on how their experiences felt and this often overrode more practical issues. The significance of emotional issues was such that we conclude that these barriers need to be separately recognised and addressed.

Fear of encountering ageist attitudes presented significant barriers, including the fear of being written off as an older person or experiencing patronising attitudes because of age or being seen as having nothing to offer. This was one of the few age-specific barriers identified by the review.



A lot of younger people don’t tolerate older people” – Community Research participant, Settle

Lack of confidence was also a significant barrier for many people in later life and some felt these barriers were particularly high in certain communities.



I never volunteered in my life before and never thought of. I thought one needs something special, knowledge or experience and I didn’t feel I had it” – Volunteer at King’s College Hospital NHSFT



I don’t have that confidence as such [...] I don’t like people to know what I’m doing, because especially we Africans, when you do things, ‘Oh, look at her. She’s just being goody.’ [...] So, most of the time that is where I lack the confidence. I do things on the quiet” – Hackney focus group participant



I do think there's a question of social confidence with people who have no money. It's nothing to do with what group they come from, or whether they've lived all their lives in this country or not, but they might feel that it's people posher or more authoritative than them who will make them feel unwelcome, or they underestimate what they have to give. And I think that's perhaps a barrier that needs to be overcome if you want to get more people. They've got lots to give but might be shy of taking part" – Hackney focus group participant

Lack of confidence was also a barrier to informal contributions, with some people finding social environments intimidating and others worrying about offers of help being taken the wrong way.



It took a lot of courage to walk into the hall" – Community Research participant, Scarborough



I feel [like I] can't knock on doors [as it is] intruding" – Community Research participant, Scarborough

The fear of being overcommitted, and letting people down was also highly significant. This was a particular barrier for people in later life, who lived in expectation of things changing for them in future – such as needing to care for grandchildren or a partner, changes in health status and wanting time for travel and leisure.

This emotional barrier is exacerbated by the structural problem of lack of flexibility. Where organisations lack clear processes for people to change their commitment over time and to move smoothly into and out of volunteering commitments, this creates barriers for people in later life. In some cases, concerns about how hard it would be to withdraw were so significant that they led people to avoid getting involved in volunteering in the first place.



Sometimes it worries me if I have a day off I think who's in there to cover me. There's no one there and it makes me feel guilty in a way that I'm not there to do my job, but I've got to obviously think of my own health and everything" – Volunteer at King's College Hospital NHSFT



I really had to push myself to come back again because I'd had that time off and it was a confidence thing to think, you know, I've got to go back, and I've got to meet people again and how am I going to cope and how are they going to cope with me" – Volunteer at King's College Hospital NHSFT

Failure to value people's contribution – demonstrated by a **lack of welcome, thanks or recognition** – was also an important emotional barrier.

In our community research among people in later life who were living in deprived communities, we saw that emotional barriers were long-lasting – one negative experience could create emotional barriers to taking up all further opportunities. Participants told of instances where they wanted to make a contribution, but either feared being rebuffed or had been rebuffed in the past. For example, one individual offered to teach courses which had no take up; another attempted to arrange a street party which was unsuccessful. This deterred them from seeking out other ways to contribute (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).



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Where organisations lack clear processes for people to change their commitment over time and to move smoothly into and out of volunteering commitments, this creates barriers for people in later life.

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Future proofing community contributions

Action to bring down the barriers to community contribution and to address inequalities is vital if we are to safeguard the fabric of our communities in the face of demographic and social change.

Civil society in the UK is currently heavily reliant on a 'core' of highly engaged individuals, who are mainly older, wealthier and white. According to the most recent statistics, this group – which has been dubbed the 'civic core' – constitutes less than 10% of the population and contributes between 24% and 51% of total civic engagement (Mohan and Bullock, 2012). And their image – middle class, female, older – pervades perceptions of what it means to be a 'volunteer'.

However, looking to the future, there is no room for complacency around the participation of people in later life. The older population is changing – in future it will be more ethnically diverse, and more people will be living with long term conditions, often for longer. Yet these are the groups currently more likely to be excluded from many formal volunteering opportunities.

In addition, more people will be working longer and may be caring for longer – meaning that the younger counterparts of the relatively wealthy, white, civic core may feel unable or unwilling to shoulder a similar burden of contribution as they age. We may already be seeing this trend emerge – time use data suggests that between 2001 and 2015, the total amount of time retired people spent volunteering fell by a quarter (Payne, 2017).

The review encountered worrying complacency among many volunteer-involving organisations about the involvement of people in later life in volunteering, perhaps informed by the current profile of the civic core. This stood in contrast to the widely recognised need to support young people to get involved.



There is a real tendency amongst a lot of people who recruit volunteers to see older people as being a workhorse” – Roundtable participant

Relying on a narrow civic core to sustain our communities is highly risky. Without action to attract and retain a more diverse pool of volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations may find their capacity is depleted. Without action to engage people in later life in all their diversity, in contributing and taking part, communities will continue to miss out on the talents and capacity they bring.

Changing demands on time

While responses to the review suggested that lack of time is a significant barrier to making a contribution in later life, the research to date does not entirely bear this out.

However, we know that in future people will be working longer and more people are also likely to be involved in providing care in later life for longer. It is likely that this will have an impact on people’s patterns of contribution to their communities, even if it is less clear precisely how.

For example, as more people combine work and care in later life, it is likely that demand for flexible volunteering opportunities – already observed in most surveys – will increase (Gill, 2016).



I don’t mind giving one hour, but three hours on a clock is a bit too much” – Hackney focus group participant

Work

It is not just overall rates of employment that are changing, but also the nature of people’s working lives. Research suggests that while older part-time workers are more likely to volunteer, full-time work can be a barrier to taking part (Carr and Lennox Kail, 2013; Mutchler et al, 2003; Okun and Michel, 2006; van der Horst et al, 2016). As rates of full-time working increase among older adults, we are therefore likely to see less volunteering.

And we do not yet understand how growing trends of self-employment and insecure work experienced by people in later life will impact levels of contribution, especially among poorer people who are already less likely to volunteer in formal roles. It seems safe to assume that current trends in working in later life will increasingly limit people’s ability to undertake formal volunteering, and may have wider impacts.

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Looking to the future, there is no room for complacency around the participation of people in later life.

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Caring

Similarly, we know that carers in later life are spending an increasing number of hours providing care, leaving little time for other activities (Nazroo, 2015). Again, we may expect to see caring crowding out other activities, including making a contribution.



Unfortunately, what's happening is, we've got that dynamic of people now becoming... you know, need to support their sons and daughters with their childcare, so we're losing this cohort of people. Their own health is starting to play a role, so we've got some turnover there" – Roundtable participant

Preparing for the future

As demands on people's time in later life change we should expect to see further changes in how people contribute to their community – but at present there is little sign that we are prepared for this.

Each new cohort of people in later life brings with them greater diversity, different experiences and expectations, and faces different demands on their time, and our approach to community contribution needs to evolve in response.

Widening participation and improving access to opportunities to get involved in a range of ways, across the full spectrum of contribution, can help to futureproof and stabilise the fabric of our communities. Enabling more people in later life to develop and sustain their own contribution will also support individual wellbeing among those otherwise at risk of missing out.

This will require action to ensure that opportunities to contribute both formally and informally are open to, and accessed by, people in all their diversity. This will maximise the chances of people in later life finding something that matches their interests, motivations and capabilities – and give them more opportunities to move between different roles and activities as their lives change.

Enabling people in later life to contribute across the spectrum has the potential to improve wellbeing and social connection and help to foster more connected and resilient communities.

A particular challenge will be to address inequalities in participation – so that groups of people in later life who currently tend to contribute only informally have opportunities, where they wish to, to participate in ways that provide them with more structured support and help them forge wider connections. Ensuring this activity is fully inclusive to people in later life in all their diversity will be vital in forging links across social, ethnic and generational boundaries.



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Widening participation and improving access to opportunities to get involved in a range of ways, across the full spectrum of contribution, can help to futureproof and stabilise the fabric of our communities.

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Framework for age-friendly, inclusive volunteering

Age-friendly not age-specific

Few of the barriers and enablers of community contribution identified through this review are specific to people in later life. Chronological age is far less relevant to people's experience than other characteristics such as socio-economic status and health.

One of the few explicitly age-related barriers we identified was that of ageist attitudes, which are potentially exacerbated by age-based approaches.

Rather than age-specific initiatives, we need to ensure that opportunities for community contribution are 'age-friendly'. This means opportunities open to all ages, supporting intergenerational connection and participation, but with the right approaches, processes and resources in place to tackle the barriers experienced by people in later life. It also means a focus on the inclusion of people experiencing the challenges most prevalent in later life (for example mobility issues, digital exclusion, sensory impairment etc.).

Alongside this we need to address broader issues of inclusion in volunteering (particularly formal volunteering) – especially around race and ethnicity, disability and socio-economic status – and to promote cohesion within and between groups.

By developing more age-friendly and inclusive approaches to community contribution, we can sustain people's contributions during transitions, ensuring that everyone is able to contribute throughout their life course.

To support organisations to enable a more diverse range of people in later life to make a contribution, we have developed a framework setting out the key characteristics of a volunteering offer that is age-friendly and inclusive.

The framework was built upon our conversations with people in later life through the review process and draws on insights we heard about what kind of opportunities would be inclusive to everyone in later life and would overcome the barriers that people currently experience.

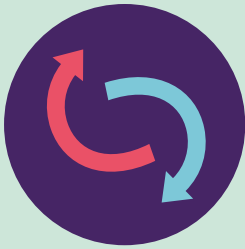
We have sought to identify examples of these principles being put into practice. Most of the examples we have included are from larger volunteer-involving organisations. However, it is important to note that many people told us that these behaviours are often embodied, almost by instinct, in informal settings.

Few of the principles here are uniquely relevant to people in later life, and there is some crossover between these principles and the features of good quality youth volunteering identified by the #Iwill campaign (Generation Change, 2013).

However, we believe these principles reflect something unique about the experience of community contribution in later life in two key ways:

- They reflect the particular priorities of people in later life that came through in the review. For example, placing greater emphasis on using existing skills as opposed to developing new ones, on ensuring volunteering is social and on flexibility to manage change. All of these speak to the realities of later life as a time of life characterised by multiple significant life transitions, which often occur unpredictably.
- They reflect the emphasis on the emotional impact of the experience, and not just the practical offer.

Age-friendly, inclusive volunteering is:



Flexible and responsive:

- It fits around my life.
- When life changes, I can adjust my commitment without feeling I've let anyone down.
- I know how to get involved, what I'm being asked to do, and how to stop.



Enabled and supported:

- I receive practical help with access, expenses, and any training that I want and need.
- I feel supported – I know who I can turn to with any questions.



Sociable and connected:

- I have opportunities to meet and spend time with other people, including people from different backgrounds and age groups.
- It makes me feel a part of something.



Valued and appreciated:

- The value of my effort is recognised, and people regularly let me know I'm valued – through what they say and do.
- I feel like people appreciate what I do.



Meaningful and purposeful:

- The work I do means something to me and feels purposeful.
- I feel that what I do is worthwhile.



Makes good use of my strengths:

- It allows me to use the skills and experiences I've built up during my life, and gives me opportunities to try out and learn new things.
- I feel like my experience is respected and valued.



Flexible and responsive

People in later life want ways of contributing that are flexible by design, so that they can fit them around the other demands on their time.

This includes flexibility around timing and location, allowing people to choose the number of hours and the timing of their contribution and to contribute in different ways, for example from home or remotely. Providing a list of activities to be completed or a 'to do' list for a group of volunteers to complete between them allows people to pick and choose how to engage and offers them more flexibility than a fixed role description.

People also want greater flexibility in the processes associated with volunteering, particularly the recruitment and 'onboarding' processes through which people start their volunteering. We found it was easier to offer these flexibilities in informal environments, where the emphasis is on helping out, rather than fulfilling a formal role, but we also found examples of flexible entry routes in formal settings. Several organisations had experimented successfully with giving people opportunities to try out volunteering before making a commitment, or to move from one role to another.

Responsiveness was also vital, especially around life transitions. Not everyone needs flexible hours, and some people are happy taking on 'work-like' roles with regular hours and high levels of commitment. However, people need to know that when things change in their lives, the organisation with which they volunteer will be responsive – and crucially that it will be possible to alter their commitments or to step away entirely, without fear of recriminations or feeling like you have let someone down.



A volunteer changes over the time they're with us and their motivations, skills change over that time so by just talking to them we have come across skills and ideas that we've then taken forward" – Roundtable participant

Creating clear routes out of making a contribution is just as important as the route in to volunteer roles.



But I had six months off last year because I had a bad illness and it took me all that while to get over it, but my [volunteering] job was there when I came back" – Volunteer at King's College Hospital NHSFT

CASE STUDY

The Scouts



The Scouts have adapted their approach to volunteer retention and recruitment to address known issues in filling vacancies. Rather than attempting to fill pre-determined roles, Scout groups are encouraged to think about the tasks they want done and the skills someone will need to achieve them. Working through internal networks and reaching out to community groups, including contacting local charities, businesses and community organisations, groups identify named individuals who might have the right mix of skills and invite them personally to get involved. The Scouts have also developed a 'volunteer journey' model – which includes ensuring all new volunteers are linked with a Mentor and Training Adviser, and have regular reviews to discuss their volunteering role, development and commitments.

For more information visit: adult.support@scouts.org.uk

CASE STUDY

The Trussell Trust



The Trussell Trust's foodbanks are run on a franchise basis, with a central team providing support and guidance to food banks around key issues including volunteer management. There are a wide range of volunteer roles available in foodbanks, many of which require minimal checks or formal qualifications – and include immediate opportunities for 'on the spot' and low risk volunteering – such as helping out with in-store collections, or sorting out stock with no contact with service users. Close links with churches are a key route for recruitment of volunteers but foodbanks also recruit from the wider community through advertising and word of mouth.

For more information visit: www.trusselltrust.org.uk

CASE STUDY

The T.E.D. programme



The T.E.D. programme is part of the Big Lottery Fund's Ageing Better programme. It is focused on reducing loneliness and social isolation among older people living in East Lindsey, Lincolnshire, with particular focus on the coastline.

The Programme started out offering a range of volunteer roles including befrienders, Age-friendly Business Assessors, Mystery Shoppers, Community Champions, Programme Management Group members and Scrutiny and Commissioning Panel members. However, they quickly found that after training and inducting individuals into particular roles there weren't always immediate opportunities for them to volunteer.

The wide geographic dispersal of the area's population and very poor public transport provision has made it particularly challenging to match volunteers to opportunities. The Programme therefore decided to change tack and introduced a new Community Volunteer role into which all new volunteers are recruited. Volunteers are given a formal induction as a Community Volunteer and can then engage in further 'specialist inductions' for different roles – and can take on whatever work becomes available in their area.

The T.E.D. team have found this a better way to engage people at the time they have the impulse to volunteer. It also gives volunteers both flexibility and variety in their roles, keeping them interested, active and motivated. Early indications are that the change is improving retention because volunteers are benefiting from and taking part in a wider variety of opportunities. T.E.D. is also finding that other organisations are starting to approach them about tapping into this volunteer resource and the Programme is currently exploring how to further develop partnerships.

For more information visit: www.tedineastlindsey.co.uk



Creating clear routes out of making a contribution is just as important as the route in to volunteer roles.





Enabled and supported

People in later life told us they wanted to be supported to make a contribution – with assistance with travel and other expenses, and support for those with additional needs, such as adjustments for people with disabilities.

Volunteers wanted appropriate training – proportionate to the role – and help with navigating systems and processes linked to volunteering (for example, we heard from volunteers who appreciated being able to fill forms in on paper).

Several people talked about the importance of having someone to turn to when issues arose with their volunteering. Some organisations provided buddies or mentors to new volunteers to help them find their feet, other organisations focused on ensuring volunteers knew who to call when things went wrong. Having the sense of being backed up gave people the confidence to do more.

Importantly, people wanted enough support to get on with their roles, so that they could perform to the best of their abilities. Some people needed structured and substantial support to enable them to participate.



I think what's special about King's is there's a dedicated volunteering office, so I mean it's very important, especially when we come into hospital in our early time we know there's always someone in the office. When we are stuck we can go in and get the answers" – Volunteer at King's College Hospital NHSFT

However, support mechanisms did not always need to be formal. People told us that informal support from other volunteers was often just as important as formal management structures and flexibility and creativity was seen as vital if people's individual needs were to be met.



Somehow, we still manage to have these huge conversations about how do we talk to people. At that stage, well, when they come in, talk to them. They're the experts in their state of life or their own condition or however it might be, and then be prepared to offer that flexibility" – Roundtable participant

CASE STUDY

Step Together



Step Together supports people facing social exclusion to access volunteering opportunities. Many of the services' clients are aged 50+ and experience multiple barriers and challenges, such as people with convictions and wounded, injured and sick service personnel or veterans. The scheme offers one-to-one support to uncover clients' skills and interests, and works with charities and other organisations in the community to identify opportunities for people to get involved – sometimes initially in one-off activities, as this gives them the opportunity to build up confidence and the application process can be easier.

As well as working on practical barriers created by criminal records, and mental and physical health conditions, Step Together also work to overcome psychological barriers, such as shame associated with previous criminal activity, drug addiction etc, and to encourage people to see themselves as the kind of people that can contribute meaningfully to the community. As well as working alongside clients to manage and support them in their involvement, Step Together also work with charities to advocate for their clients on an ongoing basis and to help them understand how best to support their volunteers.

For more information visit: <https://www.step-together.org.uk>

CASE STUDY

Alzheimer's Society



Alzheimer's Society's Side-by-Side programme matches volunteers with people with dementia to work alongside one another to enable the person with dementia to continue to engage in activity which is meaningful to them – in some cases this activity is volunteering. Linda was diagnosed with dementia when she was 56 years old. Although she gets support from her family, she was becoming increasingly socially isolated and was losing her confidence, so Alzheimer's Society introduced her to Side by Side volunteer Cathy, who shares Linda's love of animals.

Linda and Cathy now go to a local animal charity where Linda has got involved with caring for the animals. This activity gives Linda the chance to do something that makes her feel valued again.

For more information visit:
<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/your-support-services/side-by-side>



Sociable and connected

The importance of providing opportunities to build friendships and enjoy social connection as part of volunteering came through strongly in our call for evidence and in our discussions with volunteer-involving organisations.



I'm a Magistrate and I have been for 25 years. Out of that, the way it used to be organised we got a social circle, support, a feeling of being appreciated and valued. The system has now changed, and we don't get any of that and people are leaving in droves frankly" – Roundtable participant

For many older volunteers, opportunities to socialise were more highly valued than other ostensibly more significant incentives. For example, one ambulance trust told us that in their efforts to sustain and encourage volunteer community first responders they had tried a range of things, including offering volunteers detailed information about the impact their work had on patient mortality and outcomes, but the most impactful had been organising a regular coffee morning at which volunteers could come together and talk over their experiences and get to know one another.

Also critical was the extent to which volunteering opportunities gave people a sense of connection to the organisations in which they were participating, to the causes to which they were contributing and to the wider community. People were able to get to know others in their community (including across generations and among different social groups) and this deepened their sense of their stake in the local area.

CASE STUDY

Compassionate Neighbours



The Compassionate Neighbours scheme was developed by St Joseph's Hospice, and now operates in eight hospices throughout London, with further rollout ongoing. The programme enables and supports volunteers to support community members who are living with long-term conditions, including but not limited to those with a terminal diagnosis. The programme is not a traditional befriending programme, as few boundaries are placed around the relationships between volunteers and community members – instead people are encouraged to engage with one another as much or as little as feels comfortable.

Compassionate Neighbours are recruited through a very light touch process and trained in groups, over a number of weeks, so that the Neighbours develop meaningful relationships between themselves. Once training is completed Neighbours are matched with community members who are interested in being involved. Project managers assess volunteers' suitability for matching with community members through the process of training.

Inevitably some volunteers are deemed not suitable for matching, but they remain part of the programme and are invited along to events such as coffee mornings and practice development meetings. These events are a vital part of the scheme and enable Compassionate Neighbours to come together, discuss issues they are facing and share ideas. Compassionate Neighbours are also empowered to become more active in their community, for instance by stimulating conversations about end of life, death, dying and loss.

For more information visit: <http://compassionateneighbours.org>

CASE STUDY

Connect Hackney



In recruiting older people for the Connect Hackney project – part of the Big Lottery Fund's Ageing Better programme – Age UK East London reached out to a wide range of pre-existing older people's groups across the borough. These included a group in Hackney Wick who were working together to challenge the London Legacy Development Corporation over a failure to include plans for older people's housing in a new development and a group of women on the Woodberry Down estate who had taken on management and maintenance complaints – often on behalf of neighbours – and who are now going to share learning with other estates. These groups did not see themselves as volunteers, but rather people working to improve their local communities.

For more information visit: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/eastlondon/>

CASE STUDY

Muslim Welfare House



The Muslim Welfare House based in Finsbury Park, north London, acts as a hub for people from the whole community to come together to socialise and feel a sense of belonging. It provides activities such as support with accessing council services, English language teaching and summer trips but the social and wellbeing benefits of the centre are often most valued by its users. To combat the isolation that many of them feel, the Muslim Welfare House actively supports users to get involved in the wider community working alongside local churches, Stand Up to Racism and Citizens UK. Initiatives such as cooking and serving free food for homeless people in the local area throughout the month of Ramadan ensure older users who usually receive help from the centre can also act as helpers in their local community.

For more information visit: www.mwht.org.uk



Valued and appreciated

People in later life told us they want their contribution to be valued and appreciated. While there are many ways this can be done, the nature of the recognition was far less important than the feeling of being appreciated.



I think at [organisation], pretty much we're well supported, very good manager. And the Chief Executive will always say 'hello' if he passes by, things like that. Small things. We're also offered courses and things like that. They have every year the volunteers' party, which is a modest affair. It's also sponsored by someone else or locals. But they do mark it, so it's nice, you know, just to say a basic thank you. And they are giving a certificate at the end, saying thank you. 'Thank you for volunteering'. And also, I find it easy to put forward ideas or discussion and they will listen" – Hackney focus group participant

Some volunteers wanted perks and small rewards – such as awards ceremonies, parties etc. However, others simply emphasised the importance of a word of thanks, a card or similar recognition.



I think that volunteers need some incentives to commit themselves. I don't mean monetary rewards, but as appreciation you could offer them, say, you'd have a free meal every week they do volunteer work. Or have a free ticket to go and visit a site or have a free ticket to a social organised by the organisation. Things like that, where you attract more people" – Hackney focus group participant

For other people in later life the mutual exchange of support was important, with models such as peer support highlighted as particularly empowering and attractive to those put off by the 'do-gooding' image of more formal volunteering.

These models, by placing an emphasis on both giving and receiving simultaneously, allowed people to seamlessly transition between modes depending on their needs at any given time.

CASE STUDY

Spice Time Credits



Spice Time Credits are a community currency developed initially in South Wales and rolled out across Wales and England. People can 'earn' Time Credits for contributing time to their community. They then 'spend' Time Credits on events, training and leisure services, or to repay others for making a contribution in turn.

Time Credits encourage more people to get actively involved in local community organisations and services and to give more time, increasing community action and strengthening local networks. Through spending Time Credits, individuals are able to access new opportunities in the local community, such as swimming, exercise classes, training or educational courses, cinema, theatre and exhibitions.

Time Credits appeal to a wider demographic than traditional formal volunteering roles, helping people to build their sense of contribution and make new friends and social connections by taking part in more community activities. Spice Time Credits create an incentive for people who have not volunteered before to get involved – not just by providing Credits, but also by offering flexible options for volunteering in terms of both time and place.

Spice Time Credits provide the infrastructure to support the collection and use of Time Credits and develop relationships with organisations that accept Time Credits in payment, but the local opportunities are tailored to the needs of the communities. In some areas Time Credits programmes are commissioned by local CCGs.

For more information visit: <http://www.wearetempo.org/>

CASE STUDY

Breathe Easy



The British Lung Foundation's Breathe Easy groups are self-managed peer support groups for people with chronic lung conditions and their carers. The ethos of the groups is on mutual support with all participants benefiting from and offering support to one another. The boundary between volunteer and beneficiary is entirely blurred, with all participants both helping and being helped.

Chronic lung conditions disproportionately affect people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, so the groups tend to attract those less likely to participate in formal volunteering. Groups sometimes struggle to find volunteers to take on more formal roles, such as managing money. To reduce the formality associated with involvement, the British Lung Foundation is developing a virtual learning environment to encourage and support volunteers and is moving to a model of offering full support from the central team to groups that would struggle to exist otherwise. Participants report that they gain enormous value not just from the direct practical support they gain from their involvement, but also from the social contact and sense of purpose they feel from being part of these groups.

For more information visit: <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/breathe-easy>





Meaningful and purposeful

The people in later life from whom we heard told us that what was most significant for them was less the objective impact of their contributions and more their perception that they were meaningful and of purpose.

People wanted to feel they were making a contribution to something that had personal meaning to them – whether by dint of addressing issues about which they felt strongly, linking to personal values, or supporting groups with whom they felt particular empathy.



I'm a cancer patient happily in remission and I was treated here at King's St Thomas' and Guy's and after I stopped being poorly I decided I wanted to give something back to the community" – Volunteer at King's College Hospital NHSFT

In our community research the desire to 'give back' to the community was a powerful motivator, although people's understanding of the community and how to contribute differed from one site the next. In our community research in Settle, Leeds and Ashley (in Bristol) people often talked about faith as a motivator to do things to help those around them (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication).



I do it voluntarily. God will give me rewards for helping other people. It's part and parcel of my culture" – Community Research participant, Leeds

A sense of making a difference was important and people were frustrated by opportunities in which they felt like they were not able to get things done. However, most were content to measure this impact instinctively, rather than requiring objective measures. Doing something for which others were grateful was often a particular motivator.



I think people are more likely to stay if they feel they are actually being useful. I mean you give four hours and you want to be busy doing those four hours" – Volunteer at King's College Hospital NHSFT

CASE STUDY

Kilburn Older Voices Exchange (KOVE)



Kilburn Older Voices Exchange (KOVE) is an independent charity currently funded by the Big Lottery Fund's Ageing Better programme in Camden. It is led by older people from the local area who have come together to improve the quality of life and overcome social isolation for older people in Kilburn, West Hampstead & Swiss Cottage. The group decide together on their campaigning and other activities. KOVE has two bench-to-bench walks each month, a film club and other events and supports various local forums of older people. They issue a quarterly newsletter, with other recent publications including a guide to public toilets in their area. KOVE campaigns for more public toilet facilities, safer road crossings and more funding for benches and is working with Transport for London to improve bus stops and access to buses and other forms of public transport.

For more information visit: <http://www.kove.org.uk/>

CASE STUDY

Jewish Volunteering Network (JVN)



The Jewish Volunteering Network (JVN) provides information and advice on volunteering opportunities to people in the Jewish community and beyond. They have a large online database with which individuals can register interest free of charge, and organisations can register opportunities, with JVN acting as a connector. JVN also provide face-to-face support to help people overcome barriers to volunteering including lack of familiarity with volunteering, lack of confidence, and concerns around making formal commitments. JVN find the majority of older volunteers are looking to meet people and socialise through their volunteering.

Following retirement from full-time work in further education, Doreen was looking to utilise her time and skills constructively and to give back to the community. Through JVN Doreen identified an opportunity to lead a project supporting people with mental health conditions to volunteer, which she saw as a good match for her skills and interests. Doreen is challenged each day by those she meets and is continuously learning and enjoying every moment. She feels she is part of a team at JVN and the Barnet Well Being Hub, and feels valued and of value.

Doreen says: "Retirement and being over 70, is not the end of an era but the beginning of a new and exciting stage in life".

For more information visit: <https://www.jvn.org.uk/>



Makes good use of my strengths

Finally, it was clear from our conversation with people in later life that while volunteering is often couched in terms of the opportunity it offers to develop new skills, what was more important was making good use of pre-existing skills.



It's part and parcel of volunteering, according to your abilities. I've done quite a lot of troubleshooting for some smaller charities, because that is my business background" – Hackney focus group participant

By the time people enter later life they bring a wealth of experience and skills. Not every older person has a clear understanding of their skills or complete confidence in them, but all have personal assets and experience, and most find it patronising to have these overlooked in volunteer recruitment processes.

While some people valued the opportunities that volunteering offered to develop new skills or explore new interests in later life, they still wanted this to happen in the context of a recognition of their wider capacities and experiences.

Rigid recruitment processes and lengthy training programmes were often cited as off-putting to people in later life, with many feeling they did not take account of prior experience. Others reported struggling to find volunteering opportunities that made effective use of their skills.

In our discussions with volunteer-involving organisations we talked about what has been described as a more 'social' approach to recruitment. This described a move away from offering formal volunteering roles for which people apply stating how their skills and experience match the opportunity, toward fitting opportunities around the skills people want to bring and the things they want to do.



Say 'Hey, that would be really useful to us'" – Hackney focus group participant

While such approaches will not be appropriate for every role, it was clear that strengths-based approaches were attractive to people in later life and could support people in feeling confident to offer their skills.

Participants in the review also made clear that it was important to be heard and to have the opportunity to share ideas and to see these put into practice. While increasingly organisations espouse the principles of co-production, it was clear that volunteers did not always feel they had a stake in the work they were undertaking. Indeed, several people in later life told us they had withdrawn from volunteering due to changes they felt were imposed from above.

CASE STUDY

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust



Volunteering within a hospital environment is necessarily relatively formalised, with comprehensive checks undertaken on volunteers and full training offered. However, at King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust volunteer managers try to ensure that volunteers' experiences are personalised, where possible, and that volunteers are able to shape the way they spend their time to make use of their skills. By getting to know their volunteers, they are able to find new ways for them to make use of their skills. For example, through their regular catch ups with Anne-Marie, the volunteering team became aware of her years of experience in publishing and marketing, so when the team wanted to relaunch their volunteering newsletter, they were able to offer Anne-Marie the opportunity to get involved in its production. Anne-Marie now produces the newsletters alongside her regular weekly commitment.

For more information visit: <https://www.kch.nhs.uk/about/get-involved/volunteering>

CASE STUDY



During our roundtables we heard about a community organisation in London that needed support with its IT. Staff already knew of a local person who had the requisite skills to help, but knew that she would struggle to get involved as she was a full-time carer. The organisation offered her a reciprocal arrangement – free attendance at their day centre for her child, while she offered her IT skills as a volunteer. This arrangement allowed the organisation the opportunity to benefit from the carer's skills while giving her the opportunity to gain sense of purpose beyond her caring role.

Towards lifelong contribution for all

Breaking down the barriers to community contribution and creating more opportunities that are age-friendly and inclusive will be vital if we are to enable more people in later life to sustain their contributions through their life course and to widen participation across the spectrum of contribution. In the recently published Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office, 2018), the government set out its vision for people from varying backgrounds and of all ages to thrive, connect with each other and give back to their communities. The action required to enable this will differ from one form of contribution to another.

The practical, structural and emotional barriers to contribution that we have identified operate differently in formal and informal settings. For example, bureaucratic barriers to getting involved may be high in formal settings and low in community groups, but bureaucracy can present real barriers to forms of community activity – for example street parties and fetes – which formal organisations overcome more easily. Equally some barriers – such as lack of confidence – may be more easily overcome in informal settings, and others – such as the need for training and support – in formal organisations.

Different forms of contribution may be more or less suitable for people at different stages of their life. For example, formal organisations may be better resourced to support people with long-term conditions. However, at the moment, people find it difficult to move between different forms of contribution and there are limited connections and collaborations between groups and organisations across the spectrum.

There is potential to make improvements across and between formal and informal forms of contribution, to ensure that more people can have positive experiences of making a contribution.

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I think there's all sorts of reasons why people volunteer but it might be they're looking for a social circle for group membership, as you said for a sense of purpose, for being useful, learning new things, being valued and appreciated, an enhanced sense of identity. All of that is why people volunteer and if they don't get that, they don't do it. Now they're not doing it for money but what they are doing it for costs money and I think that isn't recognised" – Roundtable participant

To enable all people in later life to access a wider range of opportunities to contribute to their communities and sustain their contributions through the life course we need conscious action and investment to tackle the barriers and build new approaches into the fabric of all of our communities:

We need to:

- Nurture and support the places, spaces and organisations in which people contribute.
- Ensure more opportunities are age-friendly and inclusive.
- Make it easier for people to start, stop and change their contributions – by smoothing transitions between forms of contribution, organisations and roles.
- Ensure that people with additional support needs are enabled to contribute to their communities.
- Recognise and value the contribution of older citizens, celebrating the benefits it brings to individuals and to wider communities.

There is a need for action across sectors. Below we explore the role of some of the key players in this area and highlight examples of where organisations are already taking action.

Voluntary and community sector organisations

Although many volunteer-involving organisations recognise the need to diversify their volunteering base, few have yet changed the way opportunities are framed, or thought about how to enable a more diverse range of people in later life to get involved – for example through building links with organisations and places in the community where people already help out.

The voluntary and community sector has a critical role to play not only in ensuring that formal voluntary roles are age-friendly and inclusive, but also in supporting more informal forms of contribution both within and beyond their boundaries. This is essential not just to future proof their own volunteer base but as part of their wider responsibilities to people and communities.

Many volunteering professionals understand the need to make volunteering more age-friendly and inclusive, but this is not always reflected at a strategic level where volunteering continues to be understood instrumentally, as a source of cheap labour to achieve other aims, rather than as a good in itself.



Volunteers are not staff you don't pay" – Roundtable participant

However, some organisations are starting to map out pathways through which people can engage with and support them in different ways through the life course, and are thinking about how to ensure they can engage with a wider range of people in later life, by enabling more informal and community-led forms of activity.

CASE STUDY

Royal Voluntary Service



Royal Voluntary Service have recently launched a new programme in partnership with Prudential, called Bring People Together, which aims to broaden the range of ways in which the charity supports people to get involved in their communities, moving away from only traditional formal volunteering roles.

The programme aims to inspire a commitment to voluntary service by mobilising the public to step forward and volunteer in their community, by inviting them to start activity clubs or groups. From social activities and hobby classes to running a lunch club or providing companionship to people in later life in their homes, the programme wants to put the talents and life experience of people aged 50 and over to valuable use by encouraging them to come forward with their ideas.

The programme operates in ten areas across the country: Manchester, London, Glasgow, Stirling, Reading, North Wales, Kent (Tonbridge), Leicester, Northumberland (Newcastle), Gloucestershire and Norfolk (Norwich).

In a recent survey on the programme volunteers said "Volunteering with Royal Voluntary Service has given me the opportunity to help others in my community" and "It gives me a platform to share my skills and knowledge with society. Every day we are learning new things here which is exciting. I will definitely recommend this to others".

For more information visit: <https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/volunteer/take-the-lead>

CASE STUDY

Dementia Friends



Alzheimer's Society Dementia Friends has seen a very wide range of individuals join the programme and make personal commitments to support people living with dementia in their communities.

While the programme for Dementia Friends is owned and managed by Alzheimer's Society, it has its own unique identity – individuals are trained act as Dementia Friends Champions and supported to identify for themselves how best to connect with their wider community to recruit new Dementia Friends.

As a result, the Society has seen many communities empowered to use Dementia Friends for themselves, delivering Dementia Friends sessions in line with their needs, and taking forward a wide range of actions. They have also seen a very wide range of organisations engaging in the programme including businesses, sports groups and faith groups, from mosques to churches.

The option for lower level commitment after joining the programme and a 'choose your own action' approach has meant that the barriers to getting involved are significantly fewer than for traditional volunteering roles.

The Dementia Friends website includes mechanisms through which people can record the pledges they make as part of being a Dementia Friend. As well as taking action for their communities, people who are Dementia Friends often go on to further involvement with Alzheimer's Society including getting involved in fundraising, campaigning and other activities, building on their initial involvement and commitment to action over time.

For more information visit: <https://www.dementiafriends.org.uk/>



We recommend that volunteer-involving organisations should:

Adopt the principles of age-friendly and inclusive contribution as a standard for their volunteering practice:

- Sign up to the principles, and review existing volunteering roles, processes and practice against the framework.
- Provide a range of flexible options for contributing, and make sure volunteers and potential volunteers know how they can review their commitments as life changes.
- Reduce emotional barriers to participation, by ensuring volunteers feel invited, welcomed, connected and valued.
- Reduce practical barriers to access, including upfront costs of participation, travel requirements, language issues and digital exclusion.
- Keep processes proportionate, and recognise the strengths that older volunteers already bring.
- Ensure volunteer policies and practice promote inclusion, and address gaps in representation among older volunteers, including providing specific funding to support inclusion and proactive outreach to people at risk of missing out.

Foster more inclusive and representative forms of contribution, by making connections with the wider spectrum of contribution, including the more informal end:

- Build links with other bodies where people make contributions, including community groups and faith institutions – to support more diverse recruitment and smoother pathways for people to move between roles and organisations as life changes.
- Consider sharing infrastructure and expertise with smaller, more informal community groups and activities – to create positive links for more diverse recruitment, and to support the wider fabric of community contribution.

Leadership bodies in the voluntary and community sector, should:

Support action by others across the voluntary, private and public sectors:

- Develop and disseminate more detailed, practical guidance, benchmarks and training for volunteer-involving organisations on issues such as costs/expenses, flexibility and access.

Promote the value of age-friendly and inclusive approaches to community contributions:

- Celebrate the contributions of all older citizens – including those contributing within faith organisations, sporting associations and community groups.
- Emphasise the 'invitation' to people from all walks of life to participate.

Local government

Local authorities have a remit to promote wellbeing and a responsibility to create and sustain the social infrastructure and wider conditions in which people in later life can contribute to their communities.

As demographic and financial pressures on local authorities force them to think differently about how they meet the needs of their communities, the space for community-led solutions is growing. Increasingly, local authorities recognise the need to develop sustainable solutions to the challenges their communities face by working with and alongside communities rather than for them. However, supporting contribution across the spectrum means relinquishing control and giving permission to people to help each other. This can be challenging to traditional structures.



None of that's formalised and I think if through the Council we tried to harness that, tried to formalise that, we would shut it down because of the bureaucracy and everything that comes with the Council. The way they do it, they just go with it and respond to things as they crop up, and it's lovely to see. But it's certainly not something the Council could ever do really" – Roundtable participant

Some local authorities are rethinking their approach to service provision, and moving to address challenges alongside the community, creating space for volunteering, mutual support and community-led solutions. In practice this means supporting and enabling people to identify and respond to challenges – for example through Local Area Coordination and Community Organising – and commissioning in ways that support and enable more people to get involved as volunteers.



Giving people permission to crack on is quite a big deal, I think, in lots of voluntary action because people are frightened of knocking on their neighbour's door. [...] I think there's an enormously powerful card actually for local government in giving permission to people and I don't think that card is played at all as often as it could be" – Roundtable participant

This implies a shift not just in authorities' attitudes to issues such as risk and control but also more practical changes – such as moving away from contract making to grant provision.

The government's recent Civil Society Strategy (Cabinet Office, 2018) supports this move towards greater local citizen voice and engagement. In particular, the strategy set out the government's goal to build on existing programmes, such as the Place Based Social Action programme, to promote the wider uptake of collaborative working between people and organisations to identify local priorities, and to develop and deliver solutions together.

While community-led solutions can ultimately be more sustainable, they are not free. To harness the capacity of people in later life to contribute to their communities, local authorities will need to invest in the social infrastructure to support volunteering and community contribution.

In many areas local authority funding for Councils for Voluntary Service or other infrastructure bodies has been reduced.¹ In our discussions with stakeholders we heard about some areas now developing digital solutions, or supporting networking and collaboration across the voluntary and community sector, as means of meeting needs once fulfilled by volunteer bureaux.

A key challenge in the current economic environment will be ensuring that support for community led activity is sustained. We heard repeatedly about the negative impact of changes in structure, leadership and management, which can result from shocks in funding, upon volunteer retention.



There's a huge amount of waste of time on trying to get 200 quid to run a really effective group. And there's loads of evidence of that in the system, yet we don't recognise that or value it enough to take the risk to go into those partnerships" – Roundtable participant

Some authorities have returned to small scale grant funding to catalyse community activity. In other areas commissioners are rethinking their approaches to move to working alongside communities to foster more mutual support and volunteer effort. Leeds City Council, with its programme of Neighbourhood Networks, is a front runner in this territory, as are the areas participating in the Cities of Service programme, but through the Enabling Social Action programme other authorities are also starting to think about this agenda.

Our community research has shown how even the most informal help relies on repeated contact over time, to build up the trusting relationships within which support can be asked for and offered (Ageing Better Community Research, results in publication). There is, therefore, a need for creative solutions to sustain 'places and spaces' of contribution, and make sure these are as welcoming and inclusive as possible. In this regard it is positive that the Civil Society Strategy commits the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop a programme to address the barriers to and opportunities for more sustainable community hubs and spaces where they are most needed (Cabinet Office, 2018).

¹NCVO's Civil Society Almanac – <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/> – uses Charity Commission data to estimate annual funding for VCS infrastructure and umbrella bodies. This data shows a fall in total income from ~£700m pa in 2010/11 to ~£300m in 2015/16.

Local authorities can also play a role in encouraging and enabling collaboration between organisations in which people contribute – to encourage smoother transitions for individuals between different forms of contribution, and to encourage the sharing of resources and learning.

CASE STUDY

People Helping People



York's strategy 'People Helping People' was launched in November 2017 and sets out a city-wide approach to working with people and communities to address key shared priorities. It was developed in response to a growing recognition in the city that there needed to be a shift in the way in which statutory services responded to local challenges, away from commissioning services to address problems and toward working with people to develop solutions where they live, which they can implement in partnership.

Based on best practice from the international Cities of Service impact volunteering model, the strategy was developed by a partnership including York CVS, International Service, City of York Council, NHS Foundation Trust, York Cares and the University of York and York St John University. The strategy aims to grow 'impact volunteering', which mobilises citizens as volunteers to tackle specific local challenges, and aims to make a measurable difference to people's lives. The strategy particularly focuses on reducing loneliness and social isolation, health and wellbeing and developing the potential of children and young people.

There is also an emphasis on encouraging those who might not normally volunteer to do so, including older people, disabled people and people with learning disabilities and poor mental health. Starting from the point of what a 'good life' might look like and strengths-based conversation, citizens' skills, passions and gifts are explored and they are encouraged to identify how these might be shared through taking community action. The approach has been successfully modelled through the local area coordination programme now operating in seven different parts the city.

For more information visit: <https://www.yorkcvs.org.uk/people-helping-people-effective-city-led-volunteering-in-york/>

CASE STUDY

Leeds Neighbourhood Network schemes



Leeds Neighbourhood Network schemes (NNs) was launched in 1985 in response to the growing numbers of older people in Leeds and the need to focus on preventing illness and promoting health, wellbeing and independence. There are 37 networks covering all areas of the city. The networks are run by local older people, and operate on an asset-based community development model. Since 2010 the NNs have been funded as a commissioned service by the local authority's adult social care department, at a total cost of £3 million per annum. Networks hold outcome-based contracts, with a focus on reducing social isolation and improving health and wellbeing. The services provided by the NNs are wide ranging and include befriending, luncheon clubs, trips and outings, exercise sessions, crafts and transport. They also offer home based and one-to-one support and act as a gateway to other services. The specific services and approaches each Network provides are agreed with the people who use the services. Each scheme is based in a different area of Leeds, and between them, the Networks cover a wide and varied demographic. The NNs are in contact with over 23,000 older people; around one in five of the older population in Leeds. Nearly 200 staff work for the NNs and over 2,000 people act as volunteers, with many more older people involved more informally in groups and activities.

"There is a view that it is the 'middle-class areas' where you find volunteers, and the places that you need it you don't find them in the same way. We've determined there needs to be investment to generate those seed corns which hopefully become acorns and things will grow from there. Using an Asset-based Community Development approach allows us to move from a narrow view of volunteering to one about neighbourliness and community contributions across Leeds" – Mick Ward, Leeds City Council

For more information contact: Michelle.L.Atkinson@leeds.gov.uk



CASE STUDY

Sheffield Community Libraries



When local authority cuts meant 16 libraries in Sheffield were slated for closure, local communities were invited to bid to take them over. Sixteen individual charities now run the libraries independently. Some are entirely volunteer-run and receive a grant from the local authority which can be spent flexibly to support their work. Five are co-delivered with the council; this means they receive no grant, but all their core buildings costs are covered by the library services core budget, giving them flexibility to focus on running the library. Services are mostly delivered by voluntary community forums, working with paid staff. Support is provided across all libraries by a member of staff based in Sheffield Libraries. Around 70% of volunteers are post-retirement. Sheffield Libraries have encountered more challenges encouraging community involvement in areas of high deprivation, low employment, and high immigration, and some libraries have more volunteers than others. Most volunteers prefer to give time in their local communities, though some do work across the city.

All the library volunteer groups meet bi-monthly and this has helped to forge a sense of community across the city and increase the groups' lobbying power with the local authority. Since being taken over by their communities many libraries have become community hubs – hosting farmers' markets, or community cinemas, or supporting activities in the wider community such as open garden events.

For more information visit: www.volunteerlibrariesinsheffield.org





CASE STUDY

Bracknell Forest



In Bracknell Forest the local authority is working with the local voluntary sector organisation Involve to provide a volunteer passport to support activity across the community. The passport was established in 2016 and involves a partnership including Bracknell Forest Council, Silva Homes, Thames Valley Police, Berkshire Fire and Rescue and various groups and charities. Volunteers who are enrolled in the passport scheme can log their latest training on a secure database and carry it with them when they move between different volunteering opportunities as well as gaining access to more training provided by the different partners of the scheme. There are currently over 170 passport holders. Passport holders receive monthly newsletters with local training, events and one-off volunteering roles they may be interested in applying for. Involve have found the passport helps smooth moves between volunteering opportunities and gives people an awareness of the options available to them. Regular events are held to celebrate the work of the passport holders and this helps to create a sense of community. Partner organisations benefit from involvement in the passport by having access to a pool of volunteers to tap into. Organisations find this particularly helpful when they need additional volunteers for one off events such as a fun run or a school fete.

For more information visit: www.involve.community

We recommend that local authorities should:

Create and sustain the infrastructure needed to enable age-friendly and inclusive contribution in place:

- Develop strategies for inclusive, lifelong contribution to enable and support people to get involved in their communities.
- Develop and sustain the local infrastructure that enables contribution – including meeting spaces, transport, communications and ‘permission’ to contribute.
- Develop structures and systems for pooling and sharing resources (financial and physical), knowledge and information at a local level.
- Support and enable local collaboration across the spectrum of contributions – between formal volunteer-involving organisations, faith communities, associations, activists and residents – to maximise people’s opportunities to contribute in ways that work for them.
- Develop asset-based models such as local area coordination or community organisers to support the development of more sustainable infrastructure for contribution.

Commissioners should:

Recognise the intrinsic value of all forms of contribution as a means of promoting individual and community wellbeing and social connection. In addition to the recommendations to other funders:

- Ensure commissioning frameworks and approaches support people to contribute to their communities, drawing on the approaches taken as part of the Enabling Social Action programme.
- Consider supporting more participatory forms of delivery, and moving away from an instrumental view of volunteering as cheap labour to deliver other outputs.
- Develop new models of delivery that build on the strengths of people and communities and promote inclusion and connection as integral components.

Funders

Funders have a critical role both in providing sustainable funding to organisations that support community contribution and in influencing the kinds of opportunities available in our communities.

Community-led activity is heavily reliant on attracting funding from voluntary sources, particularly trusts and foundations, to cover the costs of basic infrastructure. Many funders already recognise the huge value of engagement and participation and are creating funds that support people to come together to engage in mutual and peer support, local activism, or participation.

Trusts and foundations can also influence the nature of activities on offer, by building the principles of age-friendly and inclusive contribution into their funding criteria.

Effectively supporting community contribution means ensuring that programmes are built upon a clear understanding of the wide range of ways in which people contribute, the motivations and enablers of contribution (as set out in our framework) and the evidence base around contribution.

In our discussions with stakeholders we heard that there can be a tension between funders' desire to monitor and evaluate the impact of their work and the need for flexible approaches, with minimal barriers to involvement. In particular we heard that requirements to count volunteer numbers and/or hours can create additional bureaucracy which can be off-putting to some potential participants, and create disincentives to the inclusion of those with additional support needs or who may require flexibility, which may involve extra cost or reduced hours.

In addition, organisations told us that the emphasis many funders place on funding programmes that directly impact individuals makes it hard to find funding for infrastructure costs.

CASE STUDY

The Big Lottery Fund's Ageing Better Programme



Ageing Better is a six year £78 million National Lottery-funded programme set up by the Big Lottery Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK. Ageing Better is delivered by 14 partnerships across England, made up of voluntary, community, private and public sector organisations. It aims to develop creative ways for older people to be actively involved in their local communities, helping to combat social isolation and loneliness.

It has already generated significant learning about how best to engage currently under-represented groups of older people in community activity. Over 60,000 people have been involved in the programme to date and over 12,700 volunteering opportunities have been created, with positive spin-off effects on awareness, understanding and skills. The programme is proud of its partnerships' success in involving people from diverse backgrounds (one-third of participants are from BAME backgrounds, one in twenty participants are LGBT and one in ten are carers) and there is already key learning from projects about the importance of putting people aged over 50 at the heart of decision-making.

For more information visit: <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/global-content/programmes/england/fulfilling-lives-ageing-better>

We recommend that funders including charitable trusts and foundations should:

Recognise the intrinsic value of all forms of contribution as a means of promoting individual and community wellbeing and social connection:

- Provide funding across the spectrum of contribution to ensure that people have access to opportunities that are appropriate for them and match their motivations and interests.
- Fund models where 'helper' and 'helped' are not distinct to ensure that people access the support they need to sustain engagement and move in and out of contribution over the life course.
- Tailor funding models, channels (including onward grant making) and criteria appropriately to smaller and less formal groups and activities – with light touch application processes, grant funding as opposed to contracting and provision for operating costs.
- Rely on the existing evidence base on the benefits of making a contribution in later life, and allow funded organisations to 'take these as read' rather than requiring them to put time and money into demonstrating them again.

Promote the principles of age-friendly and inclusive contribution:

- Assess funded organisations against the age-friendly and inclusive contribution framework and build these principles into their funding criteria.
- Provide sufficient funding for organisations to put the principles into practice – including funding to support people with additional access needs and proactively involve people from excluded groups.
- Ensure requirements around measurement and reporting are proportionate and minimise bureaucracy, especially in terms of accountability demands on volunteers.

Businesses

Businesses have a critical role both as employers and as holders of resources and assets in communities.

Most people who volunteer in retirement have prior experience of contribution and have built this habit throughout their working lives. Combining work and contributing to the community will continue to be critical to the future of volunteering in later life, particularly as people work for longer.

While some employers already offer their staff time off to take part in volunteering, this practice is not universal and, without legislation, is unlikely to become widespread. Even where employers do not offer volunteering leave they can support contribution by celebrating and recognising contributions made both formally and informally outside of working hours and by offering flexible working arrangements to support volunteering.

At present, however, employer policies sometimes specify volunteering narrowly, which may have the unintended consequence of signalling to employees involved in more informal forms of contribution that they are not part of the community of 'volunteers' or that these activities are not valued in the same way.



CASE STUDY

Marks and Spencer



Marks and Spencer (M&S) support their colleagues to engage in their communities through a range of programmes. M&S's volunteering programme gives all colleagues the chance to take one paid volunteering day each year to undertake voluntary work in the community. Colleagues can use this time to volunteer in line with their own interests and passions, or can get involved in special community days organised for each of the 650 M&S stores in the UK. These days are designed to give colleagues a positive and engaging experience of volunteering, and anecdotal evidence suggests that following events many colleagues are inspired to continue working with the community organisations they encounter. While M&S chooses national charity partners for fundraising, local stores are also encouraged to build their own relationships with local organisations and often organise community activities working with local charities, undertaking a wide range of activities from fundraising events, to donating surplus food. M&S also supports its colleagues to get involved in voluntary activity within the workplace through its employability programme 'Marks & Start' which supports disadvantaged people into work through work placements. Existing colleagues are offered the opportunity to become buddies to participants in the employability programme, and M&S find that this role is often attractive to the companies' older workforce. M&S believe that getting their colleagues involved in the community brings benefits to the business by deepening the stores' links to the communities where their customers live and giving colleagues an increased sense of wellbeing in their work.

For more information visit: <https://corporate.marksandspencer.com/plan-a>

CASE STUDY

Deloitte - One Million Futures



As part of their social impact strategy 'One Million Futures', Deloitte offers all staff the opportunity to take 3.5 hours a month out of work to participate in voluntary activity related to the programme.

As part of One Million Futures, every Deloitte office has partnerships with a range of local charities, schools and social enterprises which focus on supporting people to overcome barriers to education and employment. Deloitte staff are encouraged to develop opportunities to support their partner organisations. In a voluntary capacity, staff manage these partnerships and promote any opportunities to colleagues.

Staff are also offered the opportunity to spend one day per year taking part in team-based Impact Days, which are organised through a partnership with Volunteering Matters. The Responsible Business team at Deloitte aim to ensure that staff are offered a range of volunteering opportunities and that the wide range of benefits of volunteering are communicated, including the potential to develop new skills and utilise professional skills to benefit people in the local community.

Nearly a third of Deloitte's staff took part in some form of volunteering through the programme last year, and interest in volunteering is growing. One of the biggest challenges teams face is identifying volunteering opportunities that are suitable for staff members to fit around their work. Feedback from staff suggests that they gain a strong sense of satisfaction from volunteering and find it provides them with useful insight into the work that goes on in schools and charities in their neighbourhood. There is anecdotal evidence of staff volunteers going on to take on more long term volunteering roles with the organisations they were introduced to through the programme, including charity trusteeship and school governor roles.

For more information visit: <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/about-deloitte-uk/articles/one-million-futures.html>



We recommend that private sector employers should:

Promote age-friendly and inclusive approaches to contribution among their workforces:

- Ensure that volunteering policies and practice recognise a broad range of forms of contribution.
- Use employer supported volunteering schemes to introduce people to a wide range of volunteering opportunities, suitable for people at different stages of the life course.
- Apply the principles of age-friendly, inclusive volunteering to any volunteering activities they offer to staff – for example by ensuring that opportunities make good use of people’s skills and offer them opportunities for social connection.
- Support employees to recognise how they already contribute their time and to consider how they might want to build on this as they move through the life course – for example in appraisal, career development or retirement planning discussions.

As well as being employers, businesses hold considerable assets and can play a vital role in supporting the infrastructure that exists in communities to support contribution. Some businesses already offer community groups use of their buildings for community events, or make in kind contributions – for example of food, or staff time – to support community activities.

We recommend that businesses should:

Share their assets to support and enable contribution in the communities they serve, for example:

- Allow community groups to use their buildings for community events.
- Contribute staff time, goods or other resources to support community activities.

Public sector

While volunteering within the public sector is not a new phenomenon, interest in the potential of volunteering to bring new assets and capacity to public services is growing. For example, NHS England have committed over £2 million to encouraging volunteering within English hospitals.

However, without action to improve inclusivity and attract more diverse volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations in the public sector will simply add to the demand on an already stretched civic core. Furthermore, they will be unlikely to attract volunteers who reflect and can most effectively engage with users of public services who are increasingly ethnically diverse, and generally more disadvantaged.

A clearer focus on the individual and community benefits of volunteering is also needed if we are to ensure that new opportunities can be opened up more widely.

Some public sector organisations – for example those involved in the Nesta and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) programmes Give More, Get More and the Second Half Fund – are actively considering how to attract and retain older volunteers and have practice to share, including around the need to tailor programmes to individual strengths.

CASE STUDY

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust



King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is one of the largest teaching hospitals in the country, and has volunteers working across its hospitals. Roles are diverse and include befriending people on wards and in outpatient clinics and supporting patients through day surgery and at the end of life. Building on several years of innovative volunteer management work, the Trust recently trialled a new pilot scheme to recruit people aged 50 and over to work in both of its A&E departments. Funding was through the joint Nesta and DCMS programme Give More, Get More fund with one of the funding requirements being that volunteers needed to be over the age of 50 and volunteer for around 10 hours a week, which is more than the usual commitment of 3-4 hours.

The pilot generated lots of learning. It has been successful in recruiting a diverse range of participants, including many who have experience of using hospital services and have been motivated to give back. One of the key findings was the impact on volunteers themselves; 86% reported that the experience had an impact on their quality of life and wellbeing, with volunteers reporting particular improvements in physical health. Volunteers also reported increased feelings of confidence and connection to the community. As with other programmes in the Give More, Get More fund, King's found that recruiting 'older' volunteers for such intensive hours was challenging at times due to the fact that people have other commitments and aspirations in life. However, the additional life experience and maturity of volunteers was beneficial to their ability to conduct their role.

For more information visit: <https://www.kch.nhs.uk/about/get-involved/volunteering>

We recommend that volunteer-involving organisations in the public sector should:

Adopt the principles of age-friendly and inclusive contribution as a standard for their volunteering practice:

- Sign up to the principles, and review existing volunteering roles, processes and practice against the framework.
- Provide a range of flexible options for contributing and make sure volunteers and potential volunteers know how they can review their commitments as life changes.
- Reduce emotional barriers to participation by ensuring volunteers feel invited, welcomed, connected and valued.
- Reduce practical barriers to access, including upfront costs of participation, travel requirements, language issues and digital exclusion.
- Keep processes proportionate, and recognise the strengths that older volunteers already bring.
- Ensure volunteer policies and practice promote inclusion and address gaps in representation among older volunteers, including specific funding to support inclusion and proactive outreach to people at risk of missing out.

Foster more inclusive and representative forms of contribution by making connections with the wider spectrum of contribution, including the more informal end:

- Build links with other bodies where people make contributions, including community groups and faith institutions – to support more diverse recruitment and to develop smoother pathways for people to move between roles and organisations as life changes.
- Consider sharing infrastructure and expertise with smaller, more informal community groups and activities – to create positive links for more diverse recruitment, and to support the wider fabric of community contribution.

Public sector bodies also have a critical role to play as employers in supporting their staff to engage in community activity through volunteering leave and flexible working arrangements that support contribution.

We recommend that public sector employers should:

Promote age-friendly and inclusive approaches to contribution among their workforces:

- Ensure that volunteering policies and practice recognise a broad range of forms of contribution.
- Use employer supported volunteering schemes to introduce people to a wide range of volunteering opportunities, suitable for people at different stages of the life course.
- Apply the principles of age-friendly, inclusive volunteering to any volunteering activities they offer to staff – for example by ensuring that opportunities make good use of people's skills and offer them opportunities for social connection.
- Support employees to recognise how they already contribute their time, and to consider how they might want to build on this as they move through the life course – for example in appraisal, career development or retirement planning discussions.

Office for Civil Society

The Government's new Civil Society Strategy: Building a future that works for everyone, sets out how the Government will support people, places and the social, private and public sectors to build thriving communities (Cabinet Office, 2018). The strategy sets out a vision of people engaging in a lifetime of contribution and recognises the role of government in enabling and supporting people to engage.

The strategy sets out how the Government can support the development of the infrastructure needed to enable, permit and support people to engage in, shape and lead their communities. This includes initiatives such as training more community organisers from all age groups to inform, support and motivate people in their local areas and promoting and improving the use of both the Social Value Act and participatory democracy (for example Citizen Commissioners) to ensure services better meet the needs of local communities. National government has a critical role to play both in setting the framework

for action at the community level and in setting the tone for the national conversation around community contribution and later life. Government should ensure that the very significant contribution of older adults – not just in formal voluntary roles, but also informally within communities – is explicitly recognised and celebrated and that all older adults feel a sense of invitation to participate.

National Government also has a key role in shaping and influencing how public bodies approach service delivery. The Civil Society Strategy sets out a framework for a more asset-based and participatory approach. As this rolls out it will be helpful in creating more opportunities for people to be involved.

The Office for Civil Society should:

Champion key enabling actions in line with the Civil Society Strategy:

- Enable inclusive, lifelong contribution and support people to get involved in their communities.
- Develop programmes to address the barriers to and opportunities for more sustainable community hubs and spaces.
- Promote asset-based models such as local area coordination or community organisers to support the development of more sustainable infrastructure for contribution.

Support action by others across the voluntary, private and public sectors:

- Direct funding and policy attention to developing, testing and disseminating age-friendly and inclusive approaches, to enable more people in later life to contribute in ways that work for them.

Promote the value of age-friendly and inclusive approaches to community contributions:

- Celebrate the contributions of all older citizens, including those contributing within faith organisations, sporting associations and community groups.
- Emphasise the 'invitation' to people from all walks of life to participate.

Conclusion

While the vast majority of people already have experience of contributing to their communities by the time they reach later life, there is work to be done to ensure that everyone has access to the full range of opportunities to get involved, and that life transitions as we get older do not cause people to withdraw.

While different forms of contribution may always work better for some people than others, the current inequalities in participation, particularly in more formal types of contribution, are unacceptable. If we do not address the barriers faced by people in later life, then as the older population changes – becoming more diverse, with more people living with long-term conditions and working and possibly also caring for longer – the fabric of our communities faces a significant threat.

We need to ensure that there are more opportunities for people to get involved in their communities in later life. For this to happen we need opportunities to contribute that are age-friendly and inclusive. Older people don't need different things to everyone else, but the things that are important – our practical and emotional needs – do shift over the course of our lives. The principles we have set out in this report should act as a guide to organisations thinking about how to involve people in later life.

We also need action across sectors to create the infrastructure that can support the inclusion of all people in later life, whatever their circumstances or background.

The recommendations we have set out suggest how each sector can take action to start to broaden opportunities and improve support.

In the coming months, in line with our strategic priority goal on Connected Communities, Ageing Better will continue to play its part in delivering this agenda, working with partners across sectors to progress the recommendations set out in this review.

We are also calling on:

- Major funders of community contributions to commit to defining, assessing, funding and evaluating this work in line with the principles of age-friendly and inclusive contribution.
- Leadership bodies in the voluntary and community sector to commit to developing practical guidance and support on key issues such as expenses, flexibility and access.
- The Office of Civil Society to fund a number of demonstrator projects, led by volunteer-involving organisations and others, to create models of support for age-friendly and inclusive contribution.

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