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New volunteer network launched to encourage more senior volunteers

London, 14 Mar 2005—A new coalition of volunteering organizations was launched today to urge UK's non-profit sector to tap the volunteering potential of a million older people by removing a host of "needless barriers"

The new group, Volunteering in the Third Age (Vita), revealed that UK is missing out on £2.4 billion of free help each year by blocking older people from a host of volunteering opportunities in under-staffed sectors such as emergency services support, support for disabled people and their carers, education and community services.

Vita, which was launched by Home Office Minister Fiona Mactaggart in London, is a two-year, government-funded initiative to promote volunteering among the over-65s and encourage more voluntary groups to recruit from this age group.

Vita has set out recommendations to promote best practice and encourage the voluntary and community sectors to confront issues that hinder older people to volunteer.

The research reveals that more than one in ten (11%) of people over 65 would like to volunteer but are prevented from doing so. Among the reasons cited were inability to access opportunities on the Internet, mobility issues, lack of self-esteem and discrimination.

Sheila Windsor, programme director of Vita, said, "Everyone wishing to volunteer should be able to do so, regardless of age. Older people have skills and abilities acquired over a lifetime, which can make a tremendous difference to their communities. There are barriers to be overcome, but they are far from insurmountable, and voluntary organisations owe it to all communities to tackle these issues now."

Under Vita's new proposals voluntary organizations across the country are being urged to remove upper age limits, ensure information targeted at older volunteers is available in easy to access places and listen to what older volunteers have to offer.

The organization also recommends that transport for older volunteers is provided, expenses are paid promptly, home-based volunteering and to ensure that insurance are available.

There are currently over 2.5 million UK volunteers over the age of 65, working across sectors and projects that include child literacy mentoring, emergency services, disabled care, education, home visits for the elderly, single parent support and refugee mentoring.

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