



Older male volunteers in social care and community action

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September 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge for help and support of a number of people in carrying out this research: the team at VITA that oversaw the project, all the partner organisations who agreed to be part of this work; staff in the local branches who identified appropriate volunteers and helped arrange interviews: and, most especially, I would like to thank all the volunteers who kindly agreed to take part in the survey.

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have shown differences in the type and level of volunteering carried out by older men and women. Davis Smith (1992) found that older women were slightly more likely to volunteer than older men, in line with higher participation rates by women across all age groups. Whilst Attwood (2001) found a difference in the types of role undertaken with males more likely to get involved in roles associated with transport, giving advice or information, counselling and sport and exercise (up to the age of 75).

More recently, the Home Office Citizenship Survey (2005) showed that a gender divide with women more likely to participate in voluntary activities than men, both in informal and formal volunteering. However, a report carried out for Volunteer Development Scotland (Reilly 2006) found that whilst previous surveys had indicated a similar gender divide the most recent study showed that men and women were equally likely to volunteer (Reilly, C, 2006). Research into volunteering by older people (Forster, 1998) showed a large divide between the numbers of men and women volunteering, with very few men volunteering, especially in traditional industrialised areas.

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

This study looks at the experiences of older male volunteers, in particular focussing on the reasons why they started volunteering, their views on the possible barriers to volunteering and how organisations could develop more effective recruitment strategies for encouraging older men to volunteer within their organisations.

The study focussed on formal volunteering within organisations involved with social care and community activities.

METHODOLOGY

The study was based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 24 male volunteers. The volunteers were drawn from mainstream organisations working in partnership with the VITA project – namely Age Concern, Retired Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP) and WRVS, in the two regions of the North East of England and South Yorkshire.

These organisations provided a range of organisation-type, from those that involved older/retired volunteers as part of their mission/reason for existence to those organisations that involved volunteers in delivering their services to older people.

SAMPLING

Following the agreement of the national partner organisations, a number of their local branches were approached in order to identify male volunteers, who were; aged 65 years (or who had retired), currently involved in volunteering and available/willing to participate in the study. This aspect of the work was carried out by coordinators, and other staff in the local branches of the partner organisations.

A number of the local branches were unable to identify male volunteers who fitted the original specification (this led to the inclusion of one individual who was approaching retirement age but still seeking employment). A sample of 24 male volunteers was subsequently established (predominantly from the North East of England) and contacted, from the following organisations;

- Age Concern Gateshead (5),
- Age Concern Sunderland (3),
- Age Concern Doncaster (3),
- RSVP Middlesbrough (5),
- RSVP Barnard Castle (4),
- WRVS Sunderland (4).

INTERVIEWS AND ANALYSIS

Face to face interviews were carried out with all the male volunteers. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, with the focus being on their own experiences of volunteering, their views on the possible barriers for potential male volunteers and how they thought organisations could encourage more male volunteer involvement in their organisations.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour (the shortest interview was 45 minutes whilst the longest was approximately one hour 45 minutes) with the interviews being tape recorded and later transcribed. The analysis of each individual transcript was undertaken separately by two researchers, before a comparison was made of the interpretation of key findings from each interview.

DETAILS OF SAMPLE GROUP

The average age of the male volunteers was 68.4 years (age range 51 – 78 years). All the volunteers had retired from work with the exception of one individual (aged 57 years) who was still of working age and actively seeking employment.

The majority of men had retired prematurely either due to health problems or because of redundancy. Since retirement one individual had taken up part-time work, although this work was of a significant different nature to that of his earlier career.

Of the sample 21 of the male volunteers had been born and brought up in the local area, with the remaining three individuals having lived in the locality for some considerable time (all three moving to the area well before retirement). As such all the volunteers seemed to have good local social networks.

Employment histories varied considerably with the types of job covering skilled manual, administration, management to professional occupations. The majority of men had, at some stage, worked in heavy industry (eg steelworks) or for the major local employer (eg chemical plant).

The volunteers had been involved with their current voluntary organisation between one and fourteen years, with the average length of service being just under five years.

FINDINGS

How they started volunteering

Of the 24 male volunteers, only three had been involved with formal volunteering before they retired from full time employment (with an additional one individual who was still seeking employment). For the vast majority of men within the sample it had been their retirement from work that provided them with the opportunity to engage with volunteering. For three of the volunteers there had been an additional trigger of a significant life event, namely the death of a spouse or other family member or divorce.

Whilst retirement from work allowed the volunteers time to consider the possibility of volunteering, for over half the sample (13 men) recruitment had occurred after being approached directly by someone they already knew (and active in the organisation either as a trustee, committee member or member of staff) and asked to join as a volunteer (one of the men started volunteering in order to support his wife who wanted to become a volunteer).

The remaining volunteers had been encouraged to contact the organisation after seeing/hearing adverts in the local newspaper/radio (6) or been attracted by specific activities or classes being run by the organisation (4), only at a later stage becoming involved in a volunteer capacity. Only one volunteer approached the organisation directly with a specific enquiry about voluntary work without these encouragements.

Very few of the male volunteers within the sample knew anyone who was already a volunteer (in a formal capacity) and only one individual was recruited by an existing volunteer of the organisation.

The majority of the men within the sample commented that they had only a partial knowledge of their organisation prior to starting as a volunteer (often limited to knowing the location of the main office or charity shop or seeing the organisation's logo on vehicles).

Motivations behind voluntary activity

Older male volunteers showed a range of motives for volunteering. Most gave a combination of reasons, many citing philanthropic reasons as being vital to their initial interest or continued involvement, for example, "helping others", "doing something useful" and "making a difference" were phrases used most often by male volunteers in describing why they volunteered.

"I thought there must be an awful lot of people that have no family. If I can be useful somewhere along the line, then I will try it [volunteering]", volunteer with visiting scheme, Sunderland.

These motivations underpinned a view that many of the men wanted to put something back into the local community. At the same time many commented on the personal benefits gained from working as a volunteer, either in terms of satisfaction of a "job well done" or from meeting/working alongside other people,;

"It's a feeling of well-being ...it gives me something to do and I can see by people's faces that they're enjoying it, so it makes me feel better. It makes me feel as if you're making a difference. It's surprising how much helping others helps you", volunteer with walking group, Middlesbrough.

"it's just a lovely, lovely experience ... the pleasure of doing something for people, it's just great you know, I feel as though I've been dead lucky", volunteer with healthy lifestyle activities, Gateshead.

A number of individuals commented that having retired they still wanted to maintain a structure to their week similar to their working life. This belief had attracted individuals both in becoming a volunteer and also attending classes being run by voluntary organisations where they could continue a hobby or develop a new interest. Both of these activities were seen to help provide this structure, amongst other activities, and supported the view that "keeping active" was an important factor in ensuring an enjoyable retirement.

Many of the male volunteers were involved in other activities during the week, associated with the family or other hobbies/interests etc. Whilst volunteering helped provide some structure to the week the over-riding view from the volunteers was that this commitment had to be flexible, many seeing this aspect of their voluntary work as being particularly positive when compared to their previous working lives.

There were relatively few comments from the male volunteers that indicated that the continued use of their existing skills was a trigger to becoming a volunteer, although some mentioned that a particular interest had encouraged them to take on a particular role.

Some of the volunteers recognised that “organisational” skills that they had acquired during their working life may be helpful within their specific role as a volunteer, but this appeared to offer merely a convenience to complete tasks rather than an initial motivation to get involved in volunteering. Others recognised that volunteering had provided them with new opportunities and experiences;

“I mean in the last 12 years even though I’ve stopped teaching, I have learnt an awful lot ...from [name of organisation], the volunteers, the people I meet, that I deliver books to or talk to on the telephone. It is a very rich process I think”, volunteer, Sunderland.

Whatever the reasons for individuals becoming volunteers, it was their belief in the worthwhile nature of their role and enjoyment of their work that ensured a continued commitment to their role/work. One of two of the volunteers had found that due to recent health problems they had had to reduce their weekly commitment, however all the volunteers expressed the desire to continue volunteering as long as they could.

Roles taken by male volunteers.

The male volunteers carried out a wide variety of roles and tasks as part of their voluntary work. This range of activities (see table 1.) reflected the diversity in the types of organisation – from being service providers and delivering services to older people to offering community based activities for retired people.

Table 1: Current roles¹ of male volunteers.

Volunteer drivers/escorts	Providing transport to older people/people with disabilities to access day centres/hospital appointments
Day centre volunteers	Running activities and providing support to older people within day clubs/day centres
Hospital café volunteers	Volunteering within hospital café for general public
Mobile library service	Delivery of books to people who are housebound
Visiting/befriending services	Visiting isolated people or providing regular telephone contact
IT training courses	Leading classes and providing support to adult learners
Healthy lifestyle activities	Leading walking groups, exercise classes etc
Information and advice	Providing information to older people, eg door stop crime initiatives, insurance services etc
Local history projects	Projects about the local area and linking with local schools (inter-generational projects)
¹ A number of volunteers held positions in other organisations, including serving on boards/committees.	

In many cases the volunteers were currently, or had been, involved in a number of roles within the organisation. Some of these previous roles had either ceased, due to termination of project funding, or had been of a temporary nature to cover for other colleagues but in the majority of cases volunteers had changed roles in response to their experiences, ultimately finding roles with which they were most comfortable.

Many of the male volunteers commented that they preferred the opportunity to get involved in a variety of roles, as this was also felt to be a good way of feeling part of the wider organisation and at the same time provided variety and new challenges;

".. you're touching on all sorts of things and meeting all sorts of people and getting involved in all sorts of things as well.....it gives you a bigger picture of the organisation", volunteer, Middlesbrough.

In addition many volunteers talked positively about being involved in new projects from the beginning or being given the opportunity to give their views as part of service/project review;

"it's the enjoyment of being involved, of getting involved, especially from the word go, if you set off a new project, meeting people, you know you meet all sorts of people in the volunteer role, if you like you know..... you can see an end result and you get satisfaction of helping that person or that organisation, then you've won," volunteer, Middlesbrough.

All the volunteers worked within roles that were carried out by both men and women. For some of the male volunteers, involved in providing services to older people (perhaps in roles that could be considered a "caring" role), they held the view that their roles would probably be more attractive to female volunteers rather than men.

A small number of the male volunteers commented that they preferred roles that allowed them not to become too emotionally involved with individuals (recipients of the services). One individual stated that he had found it difficult to come to terms with the death of someone he had befriended over a period of time, whilst others stated that they felt that others (often women) were better placed to meet these needs, however this did not always prevent them responding when required;

"It's when you're on a one-to-one basis with somebody, especially if they're ill or that. I'm not a good hospital visitor if you like but if somebody asks you to go to their home and that, then yes because they've asked and you're probably the only contact...that they've got, so yeah you've got to go haven't you?", volunteer, Middlesbrough.

Volunteer support

Support from volunteer co-ordinators or other paid staff was seen as vitally important, not just in terms of their regular contact but also with regards their current knowledge. Many of the volunteers who were actively involved in setting up new projects were concerned about having to deal with issues such as health and safety or other "legal" aspects to their work. Having an accessible and knowledgeable member of staff was seen as an essential

support mechanism and gave the volunteers more confidence in taking on these responsibilities;

“...you ‘phone ‘em up, they’ll answer you straightaway ...that is brilliant because I think if that wasn’t there, it would be a bit more worrying you know ...you know where you stand, especially things nowadays ...new rules coming in about what you can do and what you can’t do, it’s always good to have somebody there...” volunteer, Middlesbrough.

However more formal support in terms of regular supervision appeared to have a lesser importance. Whereas volunteers seemed very content to have an “occasional chat” with the member of staff or volunteer co-ordinator there appeared a fine balance between attempting to provide more structured support and asking volunteers to spend time on an activity seen as “unnecessary”.

From the volunteer’s perspective, it appeared far more important that volunteer co-ordinators or paid staff retained a role as “motivator” for both potential volunteers and those current volunteers leading on projects. This was particularly the case for organisations involved in providing activities for retired people as the volunteer co-ordinator was seen as the key individual for converting attendees, at these events or activities, into active volunteers within the organisation. However, there was a general feeling that an increase in “red tape” and more “legislation and rules” meant that volunteer co-ordinator roles were becoming more internally focussed on the organisation rather than on the volunteers perceived priorities of; supporting existing volunteers, developing new recruitment strategies and promoting the local services and projects. (These comments were aimed generally at the environment that the volunteer’s organisation had to function within rather than the volunteer co-ordinators themselves).

All the organisations offered volunteer expenses although a number of volunteers commented that they preferred not to claim them as they felt this was part of their commitment to their work and the organisation.

Volunteers saw the opportunity to meet up with other volunteers (lunches, Christmas parties) as an effective way for organisations to demonstrate their support and recognition of their work. Again, as it allowed the volunteers to feel part of the wider organisation (in particular where a number of branches to the organisation were able to meet together for a function) and a chance to talk to colleagues involved in other projects.

Very few of the volunteers made any comments about training; the main exception to this was the volunteers who had become involved in a local history/inter-generational project who had initially attended IT classes at their organisation before becoming a volunteer. The technical skills associated with this project were highly valued both in terms of the qualifications that had been achieved but also in allowing them to engage with younger members of their own family.

Potential barriers

All the male volunteers were very positive about their volunteering and benefits it brought, both for themselves and the wider community. However many were still unclear about why other retired people, in particular men, did not come forward to volunteer. A number of views were proposed as being responsible for the limited engagement by other men.

Public image of volunteering

Most interviewees felt that the general public had limited knowledge or understanding regarding the work or role of volunteers. As one volunteer commented;

“I don’t think they realise the good work that is done by volunteers ... when I talk to some of my friends who are elderly people, they are very surprised that these services are available and the work that is done.”

Some of male volunteers, in particular from service provider organisations, were still concerned about the enduring nature of the stereotypical image of volunteers, how it lacked the vibrancy to attract new volunteers and failed to reflect the reality and diversity of volunteering. Others were concerned their voluntary role of being a “good neighbour” within their local community could put them at risk of being perceived as being a “do-gooder”. In the longer-term some of the volunteers felt that with an improved standard of living (for many people) those now approaching retirement would have other interests to explore, due to increased disposable income, and therefore the option of volunteering would not appear so attractive.

However on a more positive note for many of the volunteers, certainly those involved in working in organisations focussing on developing roles for retired individuals, there was a view that the image may be slowly changing. One individual commented that he welcomed a more inclusive approach to working with other communities or more young people becoming volunteers as he felt that they would better understand the needs of sections of the local community;

“I think there’s more involvement with people today because there’s issues all round so you’re now tending to get a different type of person coming into volunteering, whether it’s male or female...more people getting involved and I think they’re coming from different backgrounds, different religions...and it’s only for the better” – volunteer, Middlesbrough.

Whatever individuals felt about the image of volunteering there was an overriding view that the message regarding the rewards or benefits of volunteering did not get across to the general public.

Confidence to make the first contact with organisation

Many of the male volunteers involved in leading local projects felt that making that first contact or “first step” was daunting for many individuals interested in becoming a volunteer for the first time. This was summed up by one interviewee who was involved in organising a

Friendship Group in the local community but still remembered when he first joined a similar group;

“The main problem about volunteering I find is actually that first step. It’s very, very difficult to go into something where ...everybody knows each other. Okay people you know we try to make everybody feel welcome but it’s always that first step... because sometimes they [new volunteers] feel very vulnerable and ... if you don’t get that first contact right, you could lose them”.

The impact of any negative experience for potential or new volunteers was viewed as being so significant that it would not just put individuals off that particular group but serious enough to inhibit them making enquiries about volunteering, at anytime in the near future.

Many of the interviewees’ comments regarding the difficulty in making this first step were in the context of the image of volunteering and their own experience of working in traditional industries. Without further information regarding the variety of volunteer roles there was a view that the “opportunities” of volunteering would look far too remote for many men. As one of the volunteers commented;

“...your ex-pitmen, the ex-shipyard worker, probably doesn’t see himself as being able to give when really they certainly have but they just haven’t realised that they are capable of giving a lot,” volunteer, Sunderland.

In addition, when commenting about people’s reticence about coming forward to get involved in volunteering, there were a number of comments made about the issue of retirement (or redundancy) and how this could affect an individual’s confidence and inhibit them in being involved in new activities. This was summed up most effectively from one volunteer involved with a local inner city regeneration project;

“A lot of people have some scattered ideas that once people are retired, that’s it, they’re useless, they’re not but the point is sometimes you get to the stage where ... they’ve left work and they’ve gone “oh what do I do now, oh I’m out of work or I’m on the scrap heap” ... it’s a very quick process to get to that stage where your self-esteem goes that low that you can’t do anything”, volunteer Middlesbrough.

Perceived time commitments and responsibility

Many of the male volunteers felt that there was a view from the general public that volunteering involved giving up a significant and regular amount of their spare time. Interestingly, this view was shared by volunteers involved in leading projects as they felt that other volunteers were put off from taking on similar roles as their perception was that the role of project leader/co-ordinator held too much responsibility or that they felt they didn’t have the necessary skills. Comments suggested that successful recruitment of volunteer project leaders stemmed from taking a proactive approach in fully explaining the role (and the limited nature of the responsibility of leading a project) and following up the requests and encouragement of individuals to become more involved in the project.

Volunteering within an organisational setting

The majority of male volunteers stated that their family and friends were particularly positive about their work. Interestingly, whilst a number of volunteers had approached their male friends to become involved in volunteering this had not appeared particularly successful. As the volunteers recounted; these were the same friends that would quite happily “do them a favour” or “help out” and would similarly be happy to carry out a task for someone on the same street that may need help, eg cut the grass of an older neighbour, but appeared unwilling to take on a volunteer role. The interviewees could only speculate that it was concept of volunteering within an organisational setting that was a barrier for many men, with a perception of the role becoming too structured, within a more formal setting and having, in effect, to rely on the “organisation” to identify those individuals that required help or support.

Whilst the majority of male volunteers had been recruited by word of mouth a number of volunteers had initially been attracted to attend educational classes or activities around their hobbies and interests, eg computer classes, digital photography etc. From this initial contact with the organisation, individuals subsequently became interested in taking up volunteering activities within the same organisation. Many of the volunteers felt that this “softly, softly” approach of engaging men in group activities could provide an effective means of recruiting more male volunteers in the future.

Information about volunteering opportunities

Information about volunteering opportunities, both in terms of marketing the benefits of volunteering and how to access specific opportunities, was seen as particularly limited. There was a general view that organisations needed to be more proactive with their recruitment strategies, both generally, as it was felt that people approaching retirement age may not know where to go to find out more about local volunteering opportunities, and specifically in order to attract more men into volunteering;

“... there’s more men now sort of living longer, finishing work early and looking for something to do but they don’t target them through adverts ... organisations should start looking around to go to like where there’s men’s clubs or places like this you know and talking to them and seeing if you can get volunteers that way. You know you’ve got to change... organisations have got to change their attitudes towards getting male volunteers...” volunteer, Middlesbrough.

Improving the recruitment of older male volunteers

Many of the male volunteers felt that advertising and marketing information could inadvertently reinforce stereotypes of volunteering and instead should reflect greater diversity of both volunteers and possible roles. With regards attracting male volunteers it was felt that it was important to show more male images whilst at the same time trying to focus on the volunteering roles available;

“...you pick a leaflet up right; the first thing you’re going to want to look at is the name [of the organisation] and the picture. If you see the name, they know

what that is, they look at the picture, it's a woman, well it's a woman's thing, they don't even bother opening it..." volunteer, Middlesbrough

"...stress something about the activity rather than the organisation, I think is important. I know that's what I'd be looking to pick out is more what it's about rather than who is promoting it," volunteer, Sunderland.

There was a wide range of suggestions regarding the venues that were viewed as being used by men and therefore where this information could be displayed. These often appeared to reflect the individuals own social networks and included;

- Community centres
- Social clubs
- Gyms
- University of the Third Age
- Probus groups (for retired men from a professional and business background)
- Specific activity groups, eg allotment societies, sports groups etc.

However, very importantly, many of the volunteers doubted whether leaflets and posters would be effective without being combined with other publicity. Whilst some volunteers recounted how local media, newspapers or local radio, had been an effective way of encouraging them to think about volunteering, all were agreed that there was no substitute for direct face-to-face contact with potential volunteers or presentations to target audiences.

A number of the volunteers had commented how attending or running local events, eg cultural or religious festivals, community events etc. had allowed them to the opportunity of discussing volunteering with local residents. One of the volunteers recounted that his organisation had been involved in health awareness road shows, using this as an opportunity to push the benefits of volunteering with regards personal well being. There was a view that these types of events were far more likely to attract individuals rather than those advertised as "volunteer" events. However, whilst wanting to see the effective recruitment of new volunteers and an expansion of existing services, many of the volunteers were aware of the financial constraints of their organisation and were keen to ensure that monies were not diverted from running projects and services.

All volunteers indicated they preferred a more informal and friendly working environment and therefore they suggested that this was similarly important in attracting new volunteers. It was felt that organisations needed to portray informality but at the same time being efficient enough to respond to the needs of volunteers and enquiries from potential volunteers without delay.

Finally, and perhaps more fundamentally, a number of the volunteers felt that organisations could look to develop a wider range of volunteer roles based on, what was deemed to be traditional male trades or interests and then advertise these to potential male volunteers as part of an advertising strategy;

“...I think you should hit male trades ...because you’ve got to put a new slant on it haven’t you? I said put some notices up in social clubs and that like you know, something might come out of it or you will get the type of guy you’re looking for, the joiner, the electrician ... or the gardener”

Whilst this approach may not be appropriate for all own organisations, given their specific mission, it was thought that this could be relevant for organisations with a wider remit.

CONCLUSIONS

Whilst the study findings were drawn from a relatively small sample they do provide an interesting insight into the views of older male volunteers working, particularly in social care and community activities. More importantly it offers the views of men who have worked for the greater part of their lives and, for the vast majority, had limited experience of volunteering prior to retirement.

Male volunteers undertook a variety of activities and were involved in a wide range of roles and projects. Flexibility regarding role and working times was important given that many of the male volunteers had other commitments, including caring and family responsibilities, informal volunteering and other interests/hobbies.

All the volunteers appeared enthusiastic about being engaged in something that they viewed as being worthwhile and at the same time enjoyable, whilst a number found a regular commitment to volunteering as an effective transition into retirement.

Face to face contact with groups of potential volunteers, either through presentations to targeted groups or attending community events, was viewed as the most effective way of delivering information about volunteering, reaching a wider target audience, challenging pre-conceptions and raising awareness of local opportunities. The use of local media was seen as a way to allow wider promotion and marketing, whilst focussing on the benefits and fun side of volunteering. The inclusion of more male images in publicity materials, such as posters and leaflets, was seen as a way to support this message.

Volunteers were generally very positive regarding the support they received from their organisation. There was a preference for a more informal but supportive environment in which they felt welcomed and valued. The ability to develop volunteer roles and projects was seen as an important aspect to volunteer management, whilst the development of a wider range of volunteer roles, based on what were deemed traditional male trades or interests, would encourage greater engagement from male volunteers.

There are a number of barriers that hinder the wider participation of older men in formal volunteering. Access to relevant information still appears to be problematic with many people appearing uncertain where to obtain information about local volunteering opportunities. Whilst, the stereotypical image of volunteering and perception of volunteering as requiring a substantial time commitment appears to provide a significant barrier and an apparent disincentive for men to volunteer within an organisational setting.

The nature of these barriers means that whilst recruitment strategies can be reviewed, and further targeted, it is difficult to see how action taken by individual volunteer involving organisations can be fully effective in removing them. Instead there appears to be a need for developing a comprehensive programme of activities/campaigns that act to challenge the general public's perception of volunteering. Only at this stage will local initiatives, from volunteer infrastructure and volunteering involving organisations, be seen to be effective in ensuring that all individuals at the time of their retirement are able to access information about local opportunities in volunteering and community activities and achieve a more inclusive approach to volunteer recruitment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness raising – There needs to be a significant investment with regards a national programme of awareness raising that acts to challenge the general public's perception of volunteering. Corresponding regional and local programmes should be coordinated through the volunteer infrastructure organisations.

Pre-retirement information – There needs to be greater effort by employers and central Government in ensuring information is provided to individuals at the time of their retirement and/or redundancy, with regards the diversity of volunteering, range of volunteer roles available and the contact details of the relevant volunteer centre.

Volunteer management There are a number of issues that volunteer involving organisations need to recognise as part of their support and management of older male volunteers (however in all cases it will be important for organisations to approach individual volunteers to discuss their preferences);

- **Recruitment** – Organisations need to value of word-of-mouth recruitment, while recognising its limitations in moving outside specific social networks. Recruitment strategies need to be targeted; ensuring publicity materials reflect the diversity of volunteers and variety of roles within the organisation. Organisations should look to use the terms “helper” and “helping” or similar within publicity materials, whilst stressing the flexibility, enjoyment and benefits of volunteering.
- **Development and flexibility of roles** – Organisations should provide challenging and interesting roles, including flexibility within individual roles to allow them to develop in line with the individual's skills and interests. Weekly time commitments need to be similarly flexible to allow volunteers to meet other commitments during the week.
- **Less formal experience** – Organisations need to provide a relaxed but supportive environment, with an efficient response to initial enquiries from potential volunteers.
- **Involvement** – Organisations should encourage volunteer involvement in decision-making, in particular with regards project/service review and development.
- **Confidence** – many male volunteers will have had limited experience of volunteering. It is important that their first contact with the organisation is a positive experience.

What next?

Further research is needed to explore in greater depth the views of male volunteers with regards the benefits and barriers to volunteering in particular;

- Further qualitative research with male volunteers active in other areas, outside social care and community activities, ie volunteers from educational, environmental, heritage, and sports projects, with further investigation into the possibility of developing volunteer roles based on “traditional male skills”,
- A quantitative research study with men who are approaching retirement, and not currently involved in volunteering, with regards their views on volunteering, potential barriers of working within an organisational setting.

The findings from both studies would help provide a clear basis for any national awareness-raising campaign.

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VITA is a project funded by the Cabinet Office and co-ordinated by WRVS.