

Cross-Party Group on Volunteering – Held in Committee Room 2, Scottish Parliament

Thursday 5th June 2025, 1.00 – 2.00 pm

Minute

Apologies

Foyso! Choudhury MSP
Abi Clarke, TSI Moray
Bev Read, First-Hand Lothian
Kelsa McDonald, VoiceAbility
Heather Robertson, Maidsafe Foundation
Lorraine Moir, EDVA
Emma Hanlon, Chas
Sarah Cleary, Volunteer Edinburgh

Present

MSPs

Jeremy Balfour MSP - Co Convenor and Meeting Chair
Miles Briggs MSP

Invited guests

Fiona Zamarin, Scottish Government
Gemma Campbell, Scottish Government
Ruth Hutton, Scottish Government

Non-MSP Group Members

Alan Stevenson, Volunteer Scotland
Bethany Sikes, Volunteer Scotland
Margaret Starkie, Volunteer Scotland
Julie Lonsdale, Volunteer Scotland
Rosie Abernethy, Volunteer Scotland
Nicola Henderson, Volunteer Scotland
Jiehang Deng, Volunteer Scotland
Fiona Harvey, CHAS
Georgia Artus, Vintage Vibes with Volunteer Natalja Zukova & Maja Jackson

Sue Bowen, Dyslexia Scotland with Volunteer Autumn Gibson
Rachel Farmer, RNLI, with Volunteer Sophie Cheyney
Louise Henderson, Girlguiding Scotland
Martha Rodger, Machan Trust with Volunteer Jim Rodger
Liz Green, YouthLink Scotland
Fraser Clark, YouthLink Scotland with Volunteers Allana Williams & Gemma Hickey
Rebecca McDonald, ECH Charity with Volunteer Leonor Soares
Sarah Murray, Royal Voluntary Service
Rob Murray, Royal Voluntary Service
Susan Hunter, Befriending Networks
Margarita Sweeney-Baird, Inclusive Skating with Volunteer Juliana Sweeney-Baird
Ruth Zorkas, CHSS with Volunteer Georgie Crane
Tony Lockey, CVS Inverclyde with Volunteer Kara Brain and Audrey and Paul Brain
Beth Cowen & Ashleigh Gillespie, CVS Falkirk
Ruth Hall, Scottish Cycling
Bryony Hudson, Community Leisure UK
Dayna MacLellan & Cate Nelson Shaw, Impact Funding Partners
Sarah MacNeil, Girl Guiding Scotland
David Kelly, CTA UK
Gemma Mudie, Borders Pet Rescue with Volunteer Ann Southwood
Judith Woodward, SLCo with Volunteer Jaque Nalwanga
Gregor Muir, SSA
Mhairi Bowe, Heriot Watt University
James Whyte, Victim Support Scotland
Kirstin Worsley, Breastfeeding Network

Agenda item 1: Welcome and Introduction

Jeremy Balfour MSP (JB), Co-convenor, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the Cross-Party Group on Volunteering. JB continued that it was in particular a privilege to chair the meeting, the first in person for a while, during Volunteers' Week which was a UK wide recognition and celebration of volunteer contributions.

JB advised that the meeting today was an opportunity to focus on the benefits of volunteering and to hear from volunteers themselves in the room.

Agenda item 2: Minutes of previous Meeting

JB asked attendees if there were any issues or matters arising from the draft minute of the CPG meeting on the 20th March 2025. There were no comments.

The minutes were therefore taken as approved and it was noted that there were no actions arising.

Agenda item 3: The Social Value of Volunteering in Scotland

- Bethany Sikes (BS) Research & Policy Manager at Volunteer Scotland

JB introduced Bethany to present to those present research undertaken on the social value of volunteering in Scotland. (Presentation slides are attached to minutes)

Bethany gave a brief overview of recent research which Volunteer Scotland had commissioned with State of Life. The research utilised data from the 2023 Scottish Household Survey which demonstrated a drop in the formal volunteering rate to 18% in 2023 translating to over 138,000 fewer Scottish adults formally volunteering between 2022 and 2023 – the lowest rate ever recorded – and at a time when 2/3 of Scottish third sector organisations stated that they faced a demand for their services.

This new evidence aimed to demonstrate the social value of weekly formal volunteering – ie to quantify the effect that volunteering has on mental health (its effect on wellbeing) and also to put a value on it. BS continued that this value equated to £1000 per person per year in terms of increased wellbeing - £530 million of social value across Scotland, and £2.3 billion when economic and social value were combined.

BS provided a link to the research and findings and invited all present to read the full technical report.

JB thanked Bethany.

Agenda item 4: The Wellbeing Benefits of Volunteering

- Staff and volunteers from 2 organisations explore volunteering in their contexts and the wellbeing benefits of volunteering

JB was pleased to now welcome speakers from two very different charities who would talk about their organisations and their volunteering experiences.

First JB welcomed Georgia Artus Director of Vintage Vibes and Natalja Zukova one of their volunteers.

Georgia told those present a little bit about the history and aims of Vintage Vibes and noted in particular their findings that volunteering had a positive wellbeing effect on their volunteers as well as their older people who were beneficiaries of their service. Georgia then introduced Natalja who was a befriender to Maja who was also present today.

Natalja spoke about the trips which she and Maja, who had come with her today, would take each week. Natalja also spoke passionately about their strong connection and relationship which stemmed from the very similar backgrounds of coming to live in the city from abroad and how much they enjoyed their time together.

JB thanked Georgia, Natalja and Maja and next introduced Rachel Farmer, Volunteering Adviser and Sophie Cheney, Arbroath Crew Member, both from the RNLI.

Rachel thanked everyone for welcoming them to the meeting and spoke about the RNLI and the importance of their tagline "One Crew", which emphasises the idea that all members, including volunteers and staff, are united in their mission to save lives at sea. Rachel then invited Sophie Cheney, Crew Member at Arbroath lifeboat station to speak to those present about her experiences volunteering with RNLI.

Sophie explained that her husband's job meant that they often moved and that volunteering with the RNLI had given her a sense of belonging, in addition to giving her wider skills which she used in her work such as understanding the human factors in decision making, leadership and the importance of undertaking the basics well as a solid foundation.

BS thanked all of the speakers for their superb presentations which demonstrated that volunteering provided wellbeing opportunities for both the beneficiaries and the volunteers themselves.

BS invited other volunteers present to talk about their volunteering journeys, or to ask any questions.

Margarita Sweeney-Baird (Inclusive Skating) wished to note the wonderful work done by the CPG, and noted in particular the importance of the Volunteer Support Fund, which her own organisation had benefitted from. This financial support had allowed the organisation to develop volunteer skills thus benefiting both recipients of their services and the volunteers themselves.

Allana Williams (YouthLink Scotland) advised that she volunteered with Strathclyde University Law Connect, a student-led organisation which provides free representation to members of the public who cannot afford a lawyer or qualify for legal aid. Allana said that he was honoured to help people at what could often be the worst time of their lives.

Gemma Hickey (YouthLink Scotland) explained that she experienced terrible shyness as a youngster, however, volunteering had given her immeasurable confidence for which she was incredibly grateful. Gemma said 'Volunteering has changed my life' and that she could never have imagined speaking to a room full of people such as this. Gemma recommended that anyone should get involved in volunteering to appreciate the personal benefits.

Georgia Artus (Vintage Vibes) noted that she had not expected when the charity was conceived that so many people who were initially beneficiaries of the service through loneliness and isolation were now sufficiently confident to be volunteers themselves.

BS asked if anyone else had experienced this.

Juliana Sweeney-Baird (Volunteer with Inclusive Skating) told those present that she was a visually impaired figure skater herself who wished to give back following the dedicated coaching which she had received. Juliana continued that as a result of training received she was able now to support members and her proudest moment was watching some of her students compete. She also noted that she felt she could now better connect and feel more involved in the skating community.

Dr Marie Bowe (Social Psychologist Heriot Watt University) stated that it was amazing to hear stories in the room about the transformative effects of volunteering. Marie asked how it was possible to balance and communicate the benefits of volunteering but also support inclusion.

Georgia Artus (Vintage Vibes) felt that this was an important point and that they had recently started to ask volunteers about barriers to access and 20% had said 'yes' for such reasons for example as technology, difficulties in filling out expenses claim forms, etc. Georgia advised that they had now put a small budget aside to try to alleviate such barriers.

Maja who was supported by Natalja who spoke previously, then added that she was 95, in a wheelchair, and the absolute highlight of her week was seeing her befriender, Natalja, who would take her out and they would chat.

BS and JB thanked everyone for their important contributions which everyone had enjoyed hearing.

Agenda item 5: Volunteers' Week Thank You

- Alan Stevenson (AS), Volunteer Scotland CEO

AS thanked all who spoke for their valuable contributions and said he was sure, that like most people in the room, he was deeply touched by the stories shared today by volunteers and the organisations who supported them.

AS wished to thank all volunteers most sincerely for committing their time, skills, dedication and selflessness to make our communities better. AS was particularly pleased to hear how much the volunteers present said that they got back from volunteering, from confidence to being part of a team to learning new skills.

AS continued that Volunteers' Week is always a special moment in the year and that he wanted to reinforce to all that volunteers make a huge difference with their impact being felt far and wide.

The Cross-Party Group, seeks to ensure that volunteering is recognised and is not only celebrated but also valued and supported and that Volunteering remains vital for a fairer, more connected Scotland.

AS concluded by thanking volunteers, on behalf of Volunteer Scotland and the Cross-Party Group, for everything that they do - not just during Volunteers' Week, but every week.

AS then invited all volunteers present to come forward to receive a certificate of recognition.

Agenda item 6: Thanks and Close

JB shared that the next meeting would be the AGM in October or November with all members being advised when the date was confirmed.

JB thanked all speakers and contributors to the meeting and advised that all presentations would be sent out with the minutes.

JB thanked attendees and closed the meeting at 2.00 pm.