

# Cross-Party Group on Volunteering – Held on Microsoft Teams

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2025, 13:00-14:00

## Minutes

### Present

#### MSPs

Jeremy Balfour MSP – Co-convenor and Meeting Chair  
Foyso Choudhury MSP – Co-convenor

#### Invited guests

Charlotte Jones, Royal National Institute of Blind People  
Daniel Bustillos-Arell, LGBT Youth Scotland

#### Non-MSP Group Members

Ewan Macleod, Volunteer Scotland  
Bethany Sikes, Volunteer Scotland  
Debbie Maltman, Volunteer Scotland  
Mhairi Bowe, Heriot-Watt University  
Ruth Hutton, Scottish Government  
Gemma Campbell, Scottish Government  
Ann Wilson, The Ayrshire Community Trust  
Ralph Throp, Scottish Government  
Ruth Hall, Scottish Cycling  
Lorraine Moir, East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action  
Fraser Clark, YouthVIP / Volunteering Matters  
Beth Cowen, CVS Inverclyde  
Kirstin White, Victim Support Scotland  
Naomi Clarke, Impact Funding Partners  
Bryony Hudson, Community Leisure UK  
Paul Wilson, Volunteer Edinburgh  
Sarah Duckmanton, LifeCare Edinburgh  
Georgia Artus, Vintage Vibes  
Sophie Bridger, CHSS  
Lesley Giudici, Cruse Scotland  
Rebecca McDonald, Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity  
Sue Bowen, Dyslexia Scotland  
Ashleigh Gillespie, CVS Falkirk & District  
Kirstin Worsley, The Breastfeeding Network

Susan Hunter, Befriending Networks  
Martha Rodger, Machan Trust  
Sarah Murray, Royal Voluntary Service  
Ian McCall, Walking Scotland (Formerly Paths for All)  
Carol Clarkson, Voluntary Action North Lanarkshire  
Karen Garrott-Russell, Stroke Association  
Gillian Kay, Voluntary Action South Ayrshire

## Apologies

Margarita Sweeney-Baird, Inclusive Skating  
Liz Green, YouthLink Scotland  
Cate Nelson Shaw, Impact Funding Partners  
Jason Henderson, SCVO

## Agenda item 1 - Welcome, Introduction, and Minutes of Previous Meeting

Jeremy Balfour welcomed members to the CPG and explained that he takes turns to chair these meetings with Foysol Choudhury. JB explained this will be the final meeting before the upcoming election. JB explained the meeting will be recorded only for minute taking and will not be shared.

JB tells us that we will not be holding the AGM to elect new office bearers as this will be the last meeting before the election, after which we will emerge with a new Parliament. This election will happen when Parliament returns.

JB addresses the minutes of the previous meeting (circulated in advance of this meeting) for approval. Susan Hunter (Befriending Networks) approved the minutes which were seconded by Martha Rodger (Machan Trust). The minutes were therefore taken as approved and it was noted that there were no actions arising.

## Agenda item 2 - AGM

No AGM as explained above.

## Agenda item 3 - Debbie Maltman, Volunteer Scotland- Analysis and Discussion of Scottish Household Survey 2024

JB introduces Debbie to update us on the Scottish Household Survey Results. DM shares her screen to show a slideshow. She explains there is a full report on the

Volunteer Scotland website and this is an overview. Explains there has been a seven percentage point increase in formal volunteer participation in the last year. DM says we are cautiously optimistic about the findings. There has been an increase in participation across all age groups, and age 16-34 had the biggest increase with eight percentage points. There was an increase in both male and female participation by seven percentage points, with the difference between male and female rates staying the same. There was an increase for disabled adults by two percentage points and an increase for non-disabled adults by nine percentage points. Unfortunately that increases the disparity between the two groups from three percentage points to ten percentage points. This raises issues with inclusion gaps.

There was a similar increase in the deprivation gap, despite increases in every quintile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. The gap between quintiles 1 and 5 (the most and least deprived areas respectively) has increased from twelve to fifteen percentage points.

On employment status, there was an eight percentage point increase from those in employment. DM explains we will break this down further when the full data set is released next year. On income, the biggest increase was from those earning more than £30,000 per year, the smallest was for those earning up to £15,000. Again this increases the difference between these groups, from six to ten percentage points.

Looking at the groups that people most often volunteer with, local community is the most popular kind of volunteering, although this has fallen by four percentage points from 2023. The biggest increase was in hobbies & recreation, followed by physical activities, sports & exercise. DM says that the full report breaks these areas down into demographic groups.

DM says the informal volunteering side looks strange, as the rate has remained static at 36% since 2018. There have been no changes but there are some inclusion issues to consider. Again looking at SIMD quintiles, the participation gaps widened from six to nine percentage points from 2022 to 2024. There is a similar trend for disability, with a two percentage point decrease for disabled adults and a one percentage point increase for non-disabled adults, meaning an increase in the participation gap to three points. Keeping in touch with someone at risk of being lonely is the most popular form of informal volunteering, which is up to 62%. Providing transport or accompanying someone away from home had the biggest year on year increase, with an increase of seven percentage points.

JB thanks DM for her presentation and recommends the full report.

JB asks for question from members, Clare Scott (Marie Curie) asks if there is data for why these inclusion gaps are widening. DM says this isn't included in the SHS and we will need to wait for other sources to explore why this is. Bethany Sikes adds that some of our other speakers in this session will be helping us to unpack this, and that the National Inclusion Group is looking to address this question as well.

## **Agenda item 4 - Charlotte Jones, Royal National Institute of Blind People.**

JB introduces Charlotte Jones to share the experiences of blind and partially sighted volunteers.

CJ explains that RNIB has put together research which she will be sharing the findings of, and shares her screen to display a slideshow.

CJ says that the research is concerning volunteering experiences. RNIB this year conducted research to better understand volunteering experiences, particularly around motivations as well as exploring benefits and challenges. This was mixed-method research engaged with around 450 people, using focus groups, surveys, and online communities. They also monitored social media. For the research they spoke with four different audiences: blind and partially sighted people that volunteer with RNIB, sighted volunteers, blind and partially sighted people who volunteer elsewhere (whether in the sight loss sector or other), and also with blind and partially sighted people who do not volunteer.

One of the key learnings was around reasonable adjustments, supporting flexibility are essential for an inclusive volunteering experience. CJ says their survey asked people why they don't volunteering, with three fifths of respondents saying their illness prevented them from volunteering. This highlights how important reasonable adjustments are in removing this barrier and enabling people to independently volunteer.

Of those that don't volunteer, half of respondents felt that volunteering is not accessible to them, when it comes to finding a role inclusive of those with sight loss. Respondents also wanted more encouragement from organisations that appropriate adjustments would be in place.

Questions were raised about the costs of volunteering support, including the Access to Work scheme to cover costs for disabled people accessing paid work roles, this does not currently include volunteering positions. It was also highlighted that flexibility regarding time and location is key to encouraging disabled people into volunteering.

In positive news, the research found that four in five felt they did have support from their organisation. The report details adjustments that have been made, including installing ramps for wheelchair users. Others with sight loss reported accessible digital formats and large text printouts have been used to help them to read. Small adjustments to provide people with flexibility can go along way to encouraging participation.

CJ explains that anxieties and misconceptions can prevent people from attempting to volunteer. Organisations can help by asking themselves: are their role descriptions accessible? Do they know what reasonable adjustments they can make?

CJ ends presentation and opens the floor for questions. No immediate questions and JB says we will return for questions later.

## Agenda item 5 - Daniel Bustillos-Arell, LGBT Youth Scotland- The challenges to providing full inclusivity, regional differences in recruitment, and the essential contributions of all volunteers.

JB introduces Daniel who does not have a presentation but will verbally share his experiences.

DBA acknowledges that the themes discussed so far are very resonant. One of the things he has found in five years as a volunteer manager is that many volunteers believe lived experience is necessary to volunteer. This is not the case, everyone has valuable skills and has the potential to contribute meaningfully in their community, confidence is sometimes the only barrier.

DBA says he has one volunteer that he discussed volunteering with for a year before they actually started volunteering, and has flourished in the role. Volunteering does deliver tremendous value to communities but this is not without cost. We have to acknowledge that for organisations there are financial implications with reasonable adjustments. DBA shares that he has required interpreters for a deaf applicant for live sessions. He hadn't encountered this before and they had not budgeted for it. They were able to cover the cost but smaller charities may not have the funding to provide this. Travel costs are another barrier which are sometimes not considered.

DBA says a dedicated travel & accessibility fund for volunteers, which could be administered by Scottish Government, could be a means of reducing barriers and encouraging participation. Sustainable funding remains a problem throughout the sector and organisations are often not able to fund expenses themselves. More work should be done on this.

DBA explains they have a virtual service to allow those in Highland & island communities to participate.

It is important to enable entire communities the opportunity to participate. Everyone has something to give, and we should remind ourselves of this.

JB thanks DBA for his contribution and for keeping to time.

JB begins question and answers for the two previous speakers. He asks the opening question; is volunteering intended to benefit the volunteer, or to benefit the voluntary organisation? DBA says he views volunteering as a two way street, he has observed many volunteers grow in confidence and develop skills through their volunteering. CJ shares that her research covers how lived experience plays a role as a motivator for volunteering. A significant portion of blind and partially sighted people volunteer with sight loss organisations, but that they also want to gain new skills in return.

Karen Garrot-Russell (Stroke Association) says that volunteers are essential to her organisation, and so they work hard to make them feel valued. It is great to see volunteers flourish because they are developing and building their capacity. They have found since Covid that meeting together is so important, they set up annual events for their volunteers. They consider accessibility consciously as many of their volunteers are stroke survivors with disabilities. They consider, what can volunteers get out of volunteering?

Clare Scott (Marie Curie) shares that a lot of their volunteers have lived experience, but recently they have had many that do not. CS says she began at Marie Curie by volunteering in various organisations beforehand, and asks CJ if she has any easy tips for organisations.

CJ says you should be explicit from the outset in what adjustments can be offered to disabled volunteers. Being up front is crucial, RNIB has a top tips page which includes further ideas.

DBA adds that there is more that he could do to be clear up front about the adjustments they can make, but he ends his interviews with volunteers by asking what the volunteers need so that he can inform them of their capacity.

BS adds that it is interesting when considering participation trends, that we are seeing recovery after a long period of decline. Asks if our Government can do more to support accessible volunteering inclusion and close inclusion gaps.

CJ says she doesn't have a definitive answer, RNIB has a policy team that considers this. They have asked if Access to Work was extended to volunteers would make more people volunteer, only around 25% said they would which is less than she may have expected. It should be reinforced that reasonable adjustments are crucial.

DBA says that we don't know what we don't know. He says that Access to Work would make volunteering easier. Volunteering has a big impact on our economy, as the economy is not doing very well there should be some form of ringfenced funding available for volunteering.

## **Agenda item 6 - Ewan Macleod, Volunteer Scotland- Introduction to No Volunteers, No Community campaign.**

JB introduces Ewan Macleod to introduce No Volunteers, No Community campaign.

EM acknowledges the contributions of previous speakers, and highlights that the themes discussed are central to this campaign.

EM highlights that VS has three external partners to highlight in this campaign, and that volunteers are not 'nice to have' or expendable, they are the bedrock of all of our communities.

The SHS participation results are foundational to this campaign. The rebound in participation in the last year must be sustained, and the underlying inclusion gaps must be addressed. The NVNC campaign focuses on what society would lose without volunteers, and highlights the Royal National Lifeboat Institute as the first partner organisation which has saved 36 lives in the last year. EM moves on to discuss Food Train, another partner organisation, and shares the story of Dieter, a volunteer, and Peter, a veteran airborne paratrooper, who have developed a close friendship since being paired together by Food Train. Without volunteering, they would never have met.

EM highlights that VS will be in the Scottish Parliament Garden Lobby from 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> December to discuss the campaign and the VS manifesto.

## Agenda item 7

JB thanks all of the speakers for their efforts, thanks VS for guiding the CPG through five years as secretariat. EM says we will send around the annual membership survey.

JB wishes everyone a happy Christmas and that we will meet again next summer.