



**Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface
Strategic Volunteering Framework**

1. INTRODUCTION

About volunteering

In its 2004 – 2009 Volunteering Strategy, the Scottish Government defined volunteering as;

“...the giving of time and energy through a third party which can bring measurable benefits to the volunteers, individual beneficiaries, groups and organisations, communities, the environment and society at large. It is a choice undertaken of one’s own free will, and is not motivated primarily for financial gain or for a wage or salary.”

In producing the Scottish Government Volunteering for All national framework in 2019, the term volunteering is used ***“...to describe the wide range of ways in which people help out, get involved, volunteer or participate in the communities (both communities of interest and communities of place).”***

Research undertaken by Volunteer Scotland has demonstrated that volunteering has a value for the individual volunteer, the beneficiary and society more broadly:

- Individuals gain confidence, skills, self-worth and social connections; all key components of being resilient;
- Beneficiaries – including both people and organisations – have access to a wide range of affordable activities and services. Some people find engaging with volunteers less intimidating than more formal structures;
- Society gains through the building of connections and a culture of community reciprocity. Volunteering is an essential part of developing a community that is more inclusive and compassionate and developing a participative democracy.

In addition to this, Volunteer Scotland has recently produced a report specifically examining the Contribution of Volunteering to Scotland’s Health and Wellbeing¹. The report makes ten recommendations, some of which this strategy aims to build on. They include;

- targeting support to the disadvantaged or excluded;
- adopting good practice in engaging and supporting volunteers;
- optimising volunteer engagement;
- developing volunteering roles which optimise health and wellbeing

Purpose of the Strategic Volunteering Framework

Volunteering is a fundamental building block of civil society, and it is widely recognised that volunteering opportunities have a positive impact on individuals, organisations and the wider community.

¹ The Contribution of Volunteering to Scotland’s Health and Wellbeing; Challenges, Opportunities and Priorities 2020 – 2040, Volunteer Scotland, October 2019.

The social impact local volunteers make to society is difficult to quantify, however, the financial impact of work undertaken by volunteers in Argyll and Bute is estimated to be valued at around £48 million.²

Whilst there is already an active volunteering culture within Argyll and Bute, demographic pressures now mean that there is a projected decrease in volunteering numbers. There is also a recognised issue with “volunteer fatigue”, with individual members of our communities carrying out multiple volunteering roles. This was noted in the Argyll and Bute CLD Inspection Report in 2019³.

The Strategic Volunteering Framework (SVF) aims to enhance the positive contribution of volunteering within the area by assisting volunteer-involving organisations, and other stakeholders that support volunteering, to adopt an effective, efficient and consistent approach across the area that will encourage people to volunteer and ensure that volunteering is a rewarding aspect of their lives.

The framework started as a discrete piece of work being led by the Third Sector Interface (TSI), with the involvement of partners. Following the CLD inspection in 2019, which highlighted volunteering challenges in the area, the work was taken forward within Outcome 3 of the Argyll and Bute Community Development Plan.

Vision

The vision for delivery through the framework is:

An Argyll and Bute where there is an opportunity for everyone in Argyll and Bute to enrich their life through volunteering.

This Volunteering Framework also links to our Community Planning Partnership Outcome 3 “*Education, Skills and Training maximises opportunities for all*”.

Relevance of the framework

This work forms a framework to enable the voluntary, public and private sectors to unite as partners to promote and develop volunteering in Argyll and Bute. It aims to enhance the quality of the experience for existing volunteers, to ensure volunteering is accessible to all, and to encourage new people to participate and share in the benefits of volunteering.

Volunteering can be either formal or informal. Informal volunteering refers to activities undertaken independently as an individual to help others e.g. checking on the wellbeing of an elderly neighbour or a one-off beach clean.

This strategy is primarily concerned with the formal volunteering. Formal volunteering refers to activities coordinated through an organisation.

² Volunteer Scotland, 2016

³ “Community Learning and Development in Argyll and Bute Council”, Education Scotland

(<https://education.gov.scot/media/igyfif3i/cldargyllandbutecouncil100619.pdf>), published 10th June 2019

Formal volunteering can be within a small community group consisting entirely of volunteers or a national charity carrying out fundraising and support activities locally.

Amateur sport relies significantly on its volunteers including coaches, referees, umpires and officials operating through a plethora of sports clubs and organisations. Likewise, volunteering is significant in arts and culture, for example in amateur dramatics.

Volunteering is an important part of our local “blue-light” service provision with much valued special constables in our police force and volunteer firefighters in the fire service; Those who volunteer with RNLI are vital in keeping our coastal waters safe.

Formal volunteering can also include individuals serving as trustees on the boards of voluntary and charitable organisations, or through major public sector agencies such as NHS Health Boards or educational establishments e.g. through university programmes or students associations. Volunteers also serve on a range of bodies that are connected with local democracy, in our area these include, for example, Area Planning Groups and Community Councils.

The private sector too is often involved in volunteering, encouraging team members through a variety of mechanisms to “give-back” to local communities in which organisations are based.

In summary, most partners within our Community Planning Partnership have a key role in encouraging volunteering and ensuring they provide a high-quality and rewarding volunteering experience for all of our local volunteers.

Widening Participation

A key aim of this framework is to widen participation in volunteering. This will require an acknowledgement and understanding of the barriers that may prevent or deter people from becoming involved in volunteering e.g. lack of appropriate provision for cultural or access needs; fear of homophobia, racism; or simply a lack of confidence. In addition, it demands a commitment to addressing these barriers in line with the principles of diversity and inclusion.

2. Key components of the framework

National Context

The Scottish Government's Volunteering for All national framework (published in April 2019) aims to set out clearly and in one place a coherent and compelling narrative for volunteering; define the key outcomes desired for volunteering in Scotland over the next ten years; identify the key data and evidence that will inform, indicate and drive performance at a national and local level; and enable informed debate and decision about the optimal combination of programmes, investments and interventions.

Development of the framework took account of a range of evidence, including research, which suggests that:

- Disadvantaged groups are under-represented in volunteering due to their exclusion from formal volunteering opportunities;
- There is a heavy reliance on a 'civic core' of highly engaged individuals who provide the majority of volunteering hours in Scotland;
- There is evidence emerging from the pre-retiral age group (45 – 59 years) of a decline in formal volunteering participation rates over the period 2007 – 2017.

Consequently, the national framework that supports volunteering that builds on 6 key good-practice principles, ensuring that volunteering:

- Is flexible and responsive;
- Is supported and enabled;
- Is sociable and connected;
- Is valued;
- Is meaningful and purposeful;
- Recognises diversity.

Local Context

About 20% of Argyll and Bute's adult population volunteers. That translates to about 14,500 people in the area⁴. However, it is also worth bearing in mind that it is difficult to verify the accuracy of this information as this depends very much on the sample size within the Scottish Household Survey which is the primary source of volunteering information in Scotland. For many years it has been believed that the figures for Argyll and Bute are significantly understated.

There are key demographics in which people are less likely to volunteer. According to research⁵, volunteers are less likely to be;

- Male;
- From lower socio-economic and income groups;
- From urban areas; and
- From more deprived areas.

⁴ Scottish Household Survey, 2017

⁵ Scottish Household Survey, 2017, pp201.

When we look at the above in relation to the latest Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data (2016) for Argyll and Bute, 10 of the Council area's 125 data zones were identified as being amongst the 15% most overall deprived data zones in Scotland. These ten areas were all located in the towns of Helensburgh, Dunoon, Rothesay, Campbeltown and Oban. None of Argyll and Bute's rural data zones fell into the 15% most deprived data zones in Scotland. All of these data zones are located in the area's towns, however, deprivation, can, and does, occur elsewhere. Because the SIMD identifies concentrations of deprivation, smaller pockets and instances of individual deprivation are not picked up by the index.

Age is also a factor to consider when discussing volunteering rates. Argyll and Bute is widely known for having a declining population base, with an aging population. Most recent studies confirm that individuals between the ages of 26 – 34 tend to volunteer least often⁶ and that highest rates of volunteering can be found among the 65 – 74 year olds.

Because Argyll and Bute has an aging population, it is easy to take this information and see it as positive, however, there are a number of additional factors that we need to consider to get an appropriate picture across the area;

- **Loss of young volunteers** as they leave the county for further education and work opportunities
- **Higher retirement age for women;** when the retirement age increased from 60 to 67, there was little consideration given to the impact this would have on volunteer numbers. We know that as a result of working longer and later, many people *"just don't have time"* to spare.
- **Increased carer responsibilities;** we know that people are living longer, and we know that there is an increasing number of individuals identifying as having carer responsibilities, for example, a daughter caring for her elderly mother.
- **Accessibility;** it is also worth being aware of the remote rural make up of Argyll and Bute, and the reliance on public transport. In some areas, there is poor public transport links, and therefore, being able to access volunteering opportunities is increasingly difficult.

If we want to increase the number of people volunteering, we need to understand the challenges and barriers that are faced by those who are not volunteering at all and those who are unable to increase their volunteering contribution and look at the solutions which can overcome these barriers.

Providing meaningful volunteering opportunities

⁶ NCVO Almanac, 2018.

Volunteering is an activity which is underpinned by particular values and is quite distinct from paid work. Volunteering builds upon the interest and motivation of volunteers, providing them with opportunities to develop their interests and make personal contributions to their communities. For successful recruitment and retention of volunteers, especially outside of traditional volunteering demographics, considerable thought has to go into the framing of the opportunity from a volunteer standpoint rather than a definition of organisational need.

In some cases, volunteers work alongside paid staff, complementing and adding value to the work done by employees. Where this is the case, it is important that there is a clear distinction between the roles of volunteers and those of paid staff to ensure that volunteering is not seen only as a substitute for paid staff, but as an activity delivering significant additional benefits for volunteers.

Flexibility in role design and “working” patterns

Volunteers start volunteering at many different points in their lives and their volunteering can change over their lives. Some have very little total time they can devote to volunteering when they start out, while others cannot guarantee their availability for a regular commitment on a set day and at a set time every week, for example, a particular challenge for volunteers of working age. Some volunteers need to step down their commitments during school holidays, for example.

Flexibility in role designs and “working” patterns can be key to attracting volunteers and also in retaining them throughout the changing dimensions of their lives and at different times in their volunteering journey. For example, can elements of the volunteering role be done from home? Can ongoing training be undertaken without going out of county?

Providing management and financial support for volunteers

Volunteers do not “come free”. There are significant management costs associated with the recruitment, induction and ongoing training and support for volunteers which is very often more labour-intensive than management of paid staff, but is essential for motivation and retention of volunteers. There is also a necessity to budget for and to properly meet expenses associated with volunteer roles such as travelling expenses and financial support for child care.

Volunteers are increasingly being asked to undertake work that is more complex, bears more responsibility and is often more visible. The development of appropriate roles, underpinned by clear policies and procedures and a robust risk management approach, is particularly pertinent where there are statutory or legal responsibilities that govern the delivery of services. Recent experiences of charities failing in safeguarding responsibilities towards volunteers illustrates this very clearly.

Increasing the diversity of volunteers

People can experience significant barriers to volunteering that with help can be overcome. These include:

- **Sickness and disability:** across Scotland, the volunteering rate for those with a long-term health condition of 12 months+ and/or a disability was only 13% in 2017, compared to a national volunteering rate of 28%.⁷
- **Unemployment and receipt of benefits:** a study in 2005 showed that 40% of individuals in receipt of benefits were concerned that undertaking volunteering activities would negatively impact upon their benefits⁸. This is something nationally that needs to be addressed, as well as the impact of volunteering within an work capability assessment.
- **Deprivation and low income:** there is a clear correlation between deprivation and formal volunteering. Only 19% of the population volunteered in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland in 2017, compared to 37% in the 20% least deprived.⁹
People on a low income may not find it possible to volunteer if this would create extra costs for them.
- **Age:** involving young people can present additional challenges, particularly those under the age of 18, where additional safeguards need to be put in place by the organisation before they can allow a young person to volunteer. This reduces the number and types of opportunities available for young people. Young people may also struggle to enjoy volunteer opportunities where there is a significant older age demographic associated with certain organisations or groups such as charities and community councils.
- **Perceived barriers:** people whose personal circumstance mean they are unfairly assumed to be high risk or challenging to involve in volunteering – including those with addictions, mental ill-health issues, a history of offending behaviour and those who are homeless.
- **Cultural:** those with cultural barriers to volunteering, including asylum seekers and refugees (New Scots) and people who do not feel that they “fit” because of the cohort of people who already volunteer within many types of volunteer-involving organisations.

There are a number of initiatives already underway to address some of these barriers, for example, it is intended that in line with national direction, the TSI will work with local job coaches to build their knowledge of the relationship between receipt of benefits for job-seekers and the ability to take up volunteer opportunities which provide valuable experience on the pathway into work. Similarly, the TSI is committed to developing an approach to volunteering within the Argyll and Bute “Custody to Community” pathway, currently in development. Other individual partners have their own plans to increase volunteering participation, however, if Argyll and Bute is to overcome both its increasing

⁷ Scottish Household Survey 2017.

⁸ “The benefits barrier: What impact do welfare benefits have on volunteering?”, Citizens Advice Bureau, 2005

⁹ Volunteering Trends in Scotland, Volunteer Scotland, updated January 2019.

shortage of traditional volunteers, and prevent volunteer fatigue, dismantling barriers to participation and widening diversity of the volunteering base will be key elements of partnership approaches going forward.

PRINCIPLES OF THE FRAMEWORK

The Argyll and Bute Volunteering Framework is underpinned by the following core principles:

Choice – volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. Volunteers will be provided with a range of opportunities and roles that can accommodate their needs, aspirations and lifestyles;

Support – volunteers need to feel safe and supported in their roles. This comes about through working within appropriate systems and procedures for guidance, and receiving individual support at all stages of their volunteering journey. Volunteers in Argyll and Bute will be supported in all aspect of their volunteering roles.

Diversity and Inclusion – everyone has some skill or knowledge that can enrich someone else’s life as well as their own; volunteering will be open to all, regardless of background, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, faith or impairment. Where people require additional support to realise their full potential this will be provided;

Recognition – volunteers offer their time and skills without pay but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution. Explicit recognition of volunteering inputs encourages further volunteer commitment and encourages volunteering in its widest sense. Volunteers will be recognised for their contribution to the organisation, the community, and wider social objectives;

Quality – we must work to create structures that support a positive and high quality volunteering experience for both volunteers and hosts. This recognises the need for robust mechanisms, but must be proportionate to the role undertaken.

Partnership – in order to ensure that volunteering in Argyll and Bute realises its potential, partners across the voluntary, public and private sectors will be innovative and pool knowledge, understanding and resources;

Volunteering can be a powerful driver of change: social, economic, cultural and environmental. It can empower people to fulfil their potential and acquire new skills and knowledge, but also build their capacity and creativity to contribute to the vibrancy of their own communities. Implementation of Argyll and Bute’s Volunteering Framework will help to ensure that this potential is realised.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE FRAMEWORK

Many partners, such as Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, will have support to involve volunteers centrally. For those who do not, Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface can provide support and guidance around all aspects of volunteer management.

There is an abundance of guidance around supporting and managing volunteers on Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interfaces’ self-serve system (www.argylltsi.org/selfserve), linking to national organisations and policies, where relevant.

In addition to the above, all partners are encouraged to use the new volunteering system for Argyll and Bute, which can be found at www.volunteerargyllandbute.org – any partner can register to provide volunteering opportunities on the system, which also doubles as a volunteer management system, and is free to all at the point of use

