

# Older People Volunteering in Rotherham

Report on a research project, 2013



# Background

*Age UK Rotherham* and *Rotherham Older Peoples Forum (ROPF)* have been working together over the past couple of years to raise awareness of issues that affect older people in the Borough, and to involve older people in discussions about these issues.

Consultation in 2011 highlighted that a priority for older people in Rotherham is being able to be involved in community life. Research nationally indicates older people make a massive contribution to community life and that volunteering in later life has many health and well-being benefits.

The *Transforming Rotherham Infrastructure Services (TRIS)* Project, which aims to increase access to information and advice for voluntary and community groups in Rotherham, and also to promote and develop volunteering opportunities for older people, asked *Age UK Rotherham* and *ROPF* for information about older people's experience of volunteering.

*ROPF* members and *AgeUK Rotherham* also wanted to explore this issue further, particularly as more organisations are needing to draw on the skills, time and expertise of volunteers.

# Project aims

*ROPF* and *Age UK Rotherham* successfully sought funding from *TRIS* to deliver a small project looking at older people and volunteering in Rotherham.

The aim was to get a picture of:

- Why they might be a volunteer
- What they get out of volunteering
- What the community gains from older volunteers
- What are some of the barriers to becoming a volunteer
- What opportunities there are in Rotherham to do volunteering

*This research would help agencies across Rotherham to improve their support to older volunteers and create more opportunities for volunteering.*

# What we did

1. Produced an information factsheet about volunteering in later life. This was based on the feedback from two workshops with eighteen *ROPF* members on the theme 'Getting Involved' facilitated by Iain Cloke from *TFR*. Members discussed why they get involved with community activities and what kinds of things make it difficult. The factsheet included stories from two older people in Rotherham who are active volunteers and it also gave details of where to go to find out more about being a volunteer. The factsheet was printed and distributed at the listening events and at Rotherham Show.
2. Ran 'Listening Events' in June with groups of older people:
  - Harthill and Wath  
Two drop-in events organised with *Rural Action Yorkshire*.
  - *WING*  
An older people's weekly activity group in Wickersley. There were 40 members plus eight volunteers who ran the group (all older people themselves) organising activities, making refreshments etc.
  - *Kimberworth Over 50's*  
A thriving weekly group for people over 50. There were 70 members present. The management committee are all older people and all members take turns washing and tidying up.
  - Active volunteers  
A specific session was held at Mowbray Gardens library for 13 known active older volunteers. This was organised with support from Chris Gaynor (RMBC Resident Engagement Officer).
3. A Feedback Event was held with strategic partners from
  - *Police*
  - *Health & Wellbeing Board*
  - *NHS Rotherham*
  - *Voluntary Action Rotherham*
4. Produced a final briefing paper to be produced and printed for Older People's Day



# Key Messages

One of the most important findings was that most older people we talked with don't recognise what they do as 'volunteering'. They more easily related to terms such as "helping out friends and neighbours" or "getting involved in the community".

Other key points from all our discussions with older people are summarised in the following table:

<b>Older people in Rotherham are and have been involved in a vast range of formal and informal volunteering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tenants &amp; Residents Associations</li><li>• Youth Club</li><li>• Various Committees</li><li>• Running groups and activities (over 40 specific groups were listed)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• WRVS</li><li>• Teaching reading / computers</li><li>• Helping neighbours</li><li>• Knitting for fundraising</li><li>• Coffee mornings</li></ul>
<b>Older people stop volunteering for a mixture of practical and emotional reasons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Loss of mobility</li><li>• Transport</li><li>• Over protective families</li><li>• Worried about responsibilities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fear of crime or exploitation</li><li>• Done my bit!</li><li>• Seen as a busy-body</li></ul>
<b>Older people experience some real practical difficulties in being a volunteer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training and paperwork</li><li>• Hard to say "No"</li><li>• Transport</li><li>• Being over-committed</li><li>• Time</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Don't always feel valued by paid workers</li><li>• Attitudes: people don't expect older people to volunteer</li></ul>
<b>Volunteering brings a wide range of benefits to individuals health and wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feel valued</li><li>• Increased confidence and self esteem</li><li>• Keep busy / active</li><li>• Sense of purpose</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Giving something back</li><li>• Keeps communities together</li><li>• Always done it!</li><li>• Lovely feeling of being needed</li></ul>
<b>Those helped by volunteers have increased quality of life</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feel less isolated</li><li>• Feel part of the community</li><li>• Breaks down barriers between young &amp; old</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contact: human to human</li><li>• Knowing someone cares</li><li>• Company</li></ul>
<b>We can do more to support older people to volunteer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More information about what is available</li><li>• Transport</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activities that don't rely on being mobile</li><li>• More with young people</li></ul>

# Conclusions

Throughout this project we have listened to the direct views and experiences of almost 130 older people.

*The picture that has emerged is that older people in Rotherham contribute an enormous amount to community life.*

Many of the lunch groups, tea & chat groups, bingo etc. that are essential to reducing the social isolation of hundreds of frail and vulnerable people are run and organised by older people themselves. However several committee and group members did express concerns about who would take over when they no longer felt they were able to do it.

Older people stop volunteering as a result of a change in their circumstances. For example:

- Their physical mobility decreasing
- Loss of a spouse
- Increasing difficulties accessing transport

But it is clear that keeping involved brings tremendous benefits in terms of emotional and physical health, both to those who volunteer and those who are helped by volunteers. This results in increased quality of life and ultimately less dependency on statutory services.

# Next Steps

- Volunteering in later life needs to be openly promoted as a positive and valuable activity for older people, regardless of physical mobility or finances.
- Older volunteers, both formal and informal, should be valued and respected for the contribution they make to Rotherham.
- Voluntary and statutory organisations need to consider what support can be offered to ensure older people's groups are appropriately supported and sustained whilst maintaining the groups' independence.
- There needs to be a 'stepped' approach to volunteering. This would entail ensuring voluntary activities are designed so that older volunteers can gradually reduce the amount they do at their own pace, rather than have to stop altogether.
- Barriers to volunteering in later life need to be identified and tackled such as affordable, accessible transport; appropriate language around volunteering; levels of bureaucracy and commitment and better information about opportunities to volunteer.



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