

 **THE** 

**SPECTRUM**

**OF VOLUNTEER**

**PARTICIPATION**



Volunteering is right at the heart of what it is to be human - no one makes it through life without someone else's help. Supporting people, being neighbourly and giving your time to a place or cause you care about connects people and communities and makes society stronger.





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# INTRODUCTION

**From simply being neighbourly through to running a charity, the many and varied ways people can volunteer and contribute to neighbourhoods and society as a whole supports stronger and more sustainable communities.**

A significant amount of informal volunteering – things like neighbourliness and helping one another out – goes unrecognised, and its contribution to our communities is undervalued.

It is important to highlight and recognise the breadth of forms of volunteering in order to promote understanding, encourage cross sector collaboration and foster the independence and ethos of community based organisations and informal networks.

Volunteering includes a huge range of activity, including neighbourliness, mutual aid, campaigning, activism, voluntary work with an organisation, trusteeship etc. Some of this volunteering is very informal, such as neighbourliness, and some is formal and has structure to it. When we are referring to informal and formal volunteering it is helpful to be clear about what we mean and the following definitions may be helpful:

## **INFORMAL VOLUNTEERING**

Unpaid voluntary work carried out without an organisation, often at neighbourhood level and beyond family care or support.

## **FORMAL VOLUNTEERING**

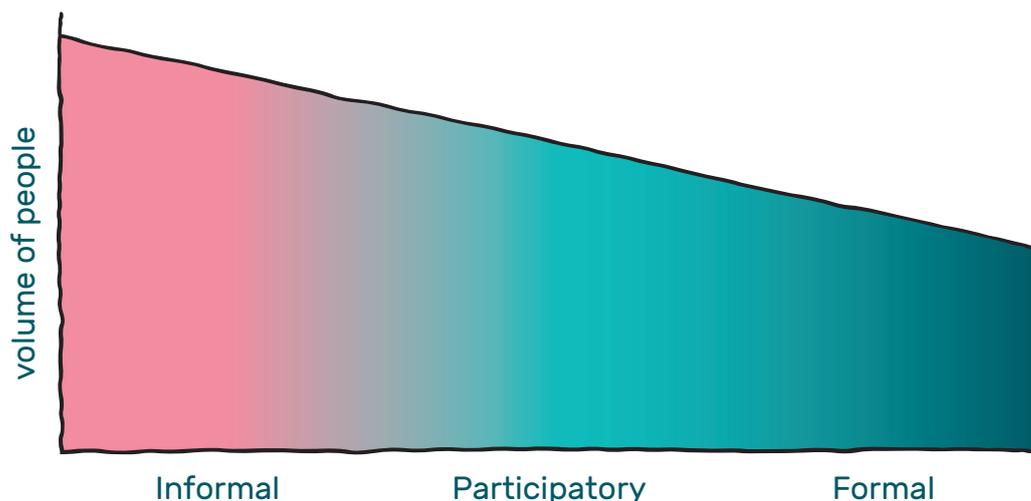
Unpaid voluntary work carried out for or with the help or support of an organisation.

# THE SPECTRUM OF PARTICIPATION

Voluntary participation comes in many forms which can fit along a spectrum – a range from very informal or casual activities through to very formal and structured volunteering.

Figure 1 is based upon research by Woolvin (2011) [1]

It shows the relationship between informal and formal volunteering and reflects the fact that different kinds of activity occur across a spectrum. The spectrum is wider at one end to reflect the number of individuals informally volunteering including providing neighbourly support of some kind, it is likely to be greater than the number who volunteer in formal roles.



## INFORMAL

**Without involving an organisation**

Helping someone one-to-one such as a friend, neighbour or community member.

Participating in/with a group...

- *At a protest*
- *Sharing babysitting*
- *Supporting the school run*

## PARTICIPATORY

**Involving an organisation**

Participating in...

- *Running a community centre*
- *Resident's committees*
- *Community groups*

## FORMAL

**Committing to volunteering with an organisation**

- *Conservation volunteering*
- *Volunteering in a shop*
- *Fundraising for charity*

# PERSONAS

In order to illustrate how different kinds of volunteering complement one another in a variety of situations, we have outlined a fictional scenario based on Sam, and the people who make a difference to his life.

Sam lost his wife, Mary, 15 months ago. He and Mary had 'done everything together' and he cannot face social activities alone. His stepson lives abroad and visits or phones occasionally. Contact with friends has all but stopped and he feels not only alone but lonely too. Sam has lost interest in food and has lost too much weight. Mary was the one to organise household finances and Sam struggles to keep track and pay the bills. The latest bills include some red 'final warnings'.

## JANE | FORMAL VOLUNTEER

Jane volunteers in the local community centre two days a week, which runs a charity shop, foodbank and a programme of activities. Jane talks to Sam about what is going on at the centre and what might be of interest or help to him. When he subsequently attends a coffee morning for those who have been widowed, Jane makes a point of introducing him to the others and gives him a tour of the community garden.

## AMIT | INFORMAL VOLUNTEER

Amit is on a 'WhatsApp' group for the street where Sam lives. Its members use the group to exchange information, to ask for or offer help and to organise occasional events. Amit is aware that Sam doesn't have a smartphone but makes a point of keeping him in touch. Now Sam has help with cutting his lawn and he gives most of his apple crop to Amit to distribute to a few local families.

## MO | FORMAL VOLUNTEER

Sam's weight loss causes concern and he is referred for an outpatient hospital appointment, but has no transport. Mo volunteers for the local hospital patient transport service and makes sure that Sam gets to his appointment on time, and home again safely.

# PERSONAS

## BOB | FORMAL VOLUNTEER

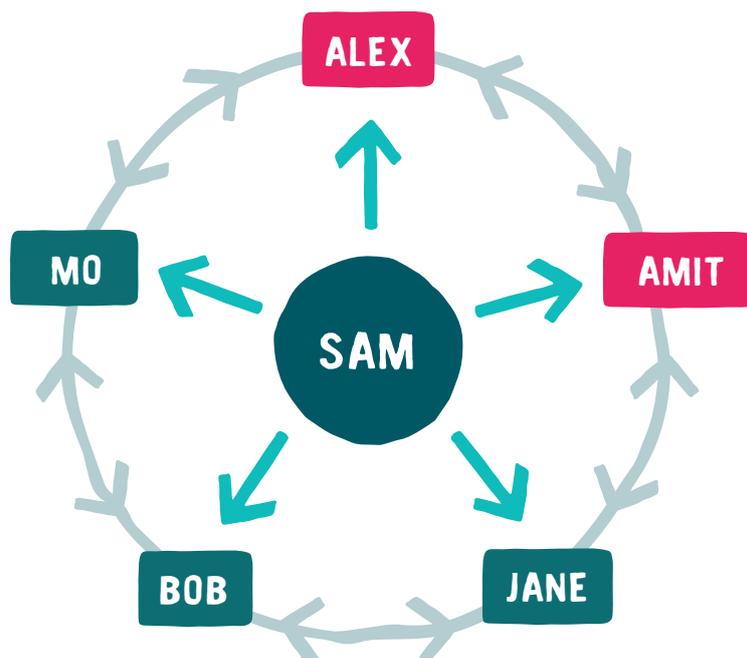
As the unpaid bills accumulate Sam is persuaded by someone at the community centre to make contact with a national advice charity, to talk about managing his finances. He is helped to register for an appointment with Bob who runs advice sessions at the centre. Bob helps Sam to work out financial priorities and to make a plan to clear debts and keep on top of the situation in the future.

## ALEX | INFORMAL VOLUNTEER

Alex lives next door. She has noticed that Sam is no longer out in the garden much and that he looks unkempt and sad. When she goes shopping she asks Sam if he needs anything. When she cooks she sometimes makes extra and pops round with a portion for Sam.

Figure 2 shows how these people create a circle of support for Sam.

It is clear that all of these people and their voluntary roles, both formal and informal, provide a strong circle of support for Sam. It is also clear from this scenario, that where formal and informal volunteers are aware of what support is available locally and how to access it, their combined impact is increased significantly.



# STAYING SAFE

**Volunteers are simply people who want to make a positive difference.**

The measures that are appropriate for ensuring safe and responsible action depend upon the context. Generally, more formal volunteering requires the volunteer to act within defined guidelines or boundaries. The moral principle of “do no harm” is crucial with all volunteering.

The information below highlights the organisational controls which provide the context in which each of our persona volunteers make decisions and take action.

**ALEX**  
 As a neighbour, Alex makes her own decisions about what she is willing and what it is appropriate to do. Alex informally weighs up the situation, using common sense to minimise risks.

**JANE**  
 Jane follows the guidance and training given at the Community Centre and acts within the policies agreed by the trustees (who have legal responsibility). The Community Centre has insurance in place that will cover her activities.

**AMIT**  
 As a neighbour Amit makes his own decisions about what he is willing and what it is appropriate to do. Like Alex, Amit informally considers the situation, using common sense to minimise risks.

**BOB**  
 Bob provides help within the policies and protocols of the charity where he works. The organisation meets the requirements of a national quality standard for advice giving.

Bob was trained for his role as an Adviser, has a role description and undertakes regular training to keep up to date. He has regular appraisal meetings with his supervisor, is accountable to a paid staff member day to day and has had a police check.

**MO**  
 Mo acts within the hospital transport service’ policies and protocols which are agreed with internal stakeholders, including trade unions.

She undertook initial training for her role, has a written role description and has regular ongoing training. She is accountable to a paid staff member day to day and has her mileage expenses reimbursed.

So we can see that people volunteering can involve varying degrees of complexity across the spectrum of informal to formal. In an organisational context, risk management and health and safety procedures focus on putting in place systems to protect everyone; where an individual, or informal support is being provided, there is greater reliance on common sense about the wellbeing of all involved.

# CONCLUSION

**Volunteering is a key expression of what it is to be a human being and to be a member of any community. It is important to recognise and value voluntary participation in all its diverse forms, informal and formal.**

In recent times the value and extent of the informal volunteering taking place every day in all our communities, often unrecognised, has become more visible. Volunteering has a huge part to play in maintaining the wellbeing of our communities and it underpins our society as a whole. In affirming the whole spectrum of activity and the interconnections, we can build a better understanding of it and encourage all expressions of volunteering to flourish.

Special thanks to everyone who contributed to the Community Action Response discussion on the value of the spectrum of volunteering in particular Fiona Liddell for editorial input. *January 2021*

# APPENDIX A CASE STUDIES

## YOUTH LED SOCIAL ACTION – PROJECT HOPE



**Project Hope involves about twenty hard working young people, supported by professionals, who aim to lift the spirits of young people across Wales.**

The volunteers reach out to young people aged 13 to 25 on a variety of platforms using Project Hope accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. There are daily encouraging and fun posts as well as invitations to get involved in regular gatherings. Three times a week they get together on zoom, engaging in anything from game nights to language lessons and virtual tea breaks. They are currently working on a website and are developing the use of Tik Tok.

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**“PROJECT HOPE HAS GIVEN ME SOMETHING THAT HELPS KEEP ME MOTIVATED DURING THIS WHOLE PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY, WHILST GIVING ME SPACE WHERE I FEEL SAFE AND COMFORTABLE TO LEARN AND DEVELOP NEW AND PRE-EXISTING SKILLS, SUCH AS CREATING WEB CONTENT.”**

**KELLY | YOUNG VOLUNTEER**

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO COVID19 - NANNY BISCUIT



**Nanny Biscuit is a multi-faceted project designed to identify, develop and embed a series of smaller community focused projects in the local area. It aims 'to achieve local community resilience by bringing back old fashioned values and lost community spirit'.**

The project is totally volunteer led, but works with a range of other groups and organisations and is supported by the local County Voluntary Council. Since COVID-19, all attention has been focused on helping vulnerable residents get the support they need, initially by doing shopping for people but subsequently through a food distribution centre. Volunteers also coordinate 'good deeds' including pen pals, letters and birthday presents for care home residents and socially distant music performances.

## COMMUNITY SOCIAL ENTERPRISE – ARTS FACTORY



**'No more throw away people' is the strap line of Arts Factory, which is housed in a listed church building in the Rhondda valley, purchased from the local authority for £1 in 1997.**

It has grown and diversified from its small beginnings when, 30 years ago, a 'man with a van' set up a garden clearance business for people with learning disabilities who felt 'written off' by society. Now Arts Factory runs two social enterprises: a design business and Factory Books, an online book selling enterprise. These reduce dependency on grant income.

Arts Factory runs a Citizens Advice drop-in, mental health recovery courses, dementia café, parent and toddler group and health and wellbeing programmes. It is a pick up point for the local food bank and part of the FareShare scheme, a charitable food redistribution network which benefits those who may not qualify for aid from the foodbank.

The building is staffed almost entirely by its 40 volunteers, many of whom have a learning disability or mental ill health. Some of them volunteer every day, valuing the ethos of inclusivity, opportunity to develop skills and the support they receive. Volunteers from many years ago still come back, either when they need help or to take part in activities. In 2010 Arts Factory achieved the Investing in Volunteers Award.

## GARDENING EXCHANGES TIMEBANK, UTTLESFORD



TimeBank is a national volunteering charity working to transform the lives of both volunteers and beneficiaries through volunteering by building stronger, happier and more inclusive communities.

Jacki, a member of TimeBank Uttlesford since January 2019, has been very active in the time bank, setting up a seated exercise class which has been a huge success for over a year.

During the pandemic, she had to move to holding an online Zoom class, helping participants to learn about Zoom in the process. She has also been helping out with shopping, prescription fulfilment, leading walks and 'neighbourhood nattering'! This meant she had lots of time credits and as a result asked for help with her garden.

Steve and Mark are friends, both working at Stansted Airport, and sharing a flat together. They found out about TimeBank Uttlesford through their Airport Community Team, which looks for ways in which the airport can help out in the community. As a result, Steve has been involved in some gardening exchanges during the Covid 19 pandemic while being furloughed from his job at the airport, including helping Jacki.

TimeBank Uttlesford's broker Tessa says, "These gardening opportunities have been hugely beneficial to both parties involved; as people have been stuck at home, unable to work and with shops, pubs, and gyms all closed, these exchanges give valuable social, health and wellbeing opportunities to the TimeBank members taking part."

For Jacki, Steve and Mark working on her lawn edging was ideal. During the afternoon Steve told her about one of his previous exchanges at a care home, of which Jacki wholeheartedly approved. "I think it is a very positive thing to do," says Jacki. "It's a great way to show others outside of timebanking what enjoyment one gets out of helping people. The fun those two chaps had at the care home – they really had a ball and were rewarded with tea, cake and very kind words. That's what it's all about!"

"Jacki was thrilled with the result and could not have been happier with such a great team," explains Tessa. "There was a lot of laughter and merriment and it was just wonderful to be able to be socialising, safely, during these testing and challenging times. All in all it was a really uplifting afternoon and we all came away feeling much more joyful and optimistic about everything."



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**TESSA | TIMEBANK BROKER**

# APPENDIX B SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

## VOLUNTEERING INFORMATION AND GOOD PRACTICE



Lessons from lockdown #1 - The power of community. The first report and blog from the Mobilising Volunteer Effort (MoVE) research undertaken by the universities of Sheffield, Hull and Leeds.

Stronger than anyone thought; Communities responding to covid-19 report from Local Trust and Sheffield Hallam University along with their series of rapid research papers into community responses to the covid crisis and the infrastructure that support it.

### **Third Sector Support Wales**

Information sheets and training resources

### **WCVA (Wales Council for Voluntary Action)**

News and information on volunteering, safeguarding, governance

### **Mutual Aid**

Resources to support local community groups

### **Volunteer Now** [www.volunteernow.co.uk/organisations](http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/organisations)

Information and support for organisations and individuals in Northern Ireland on volunteering, safeguarding and governance.

### **Royal Voluntary Service**

Getting started as a community response volunteer

[1] Woolvin M (2011) [www.volunteerscotland.net/media/624210/mw\\_phd\\_summary\\_30\\_07\\_15.pdf](http://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/624210/mw_phd_summary_30_07_15.pdf)