Sport England Volunteering Fund Evaluation

2nd Interim Report

CFE Research

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AUTHORS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors of this report are Sarah Leonardi, Sophie Spong and Peter Howe.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CFE Research and Dr Carolynne Mason were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Sport England Volunteering Fund. The aim of the fund was to find new ways to reach and engage groups currently underrepresented, to increase the diversity of people volunteering to support sport and physical activity. The evaluation will enable Sport England to determine the success and impact of the Volunteering Fund, particularly in terms of the outcomes for volunteers and the wider community. It will also help to ensure Sport England can understand the factors required for success at a project and Fund level, and examine what works for whom and why, and how outcomes vary by approach.

This report is the second in a series of reports which follows the volunteer journey, building upon the findings from the first report. It also coincides with the launch of Sport England's new 10 year strategy, Uniting the Movement, and will help to inform the detailed plans set out by Sport England during their transition to implementation.

Approach

This report is based on findings from:

— **Volunteer registration surveys** from 4,098 volunteers when joining their project.
— **Volunteer tracking data** containing the number of volunteering hours and occasions for 7,140 volunteers.
— **Volunteer experience surveys**, completed every six months, from 2,180 volunteers.
— **Project delivery information** submitted by projects relating to key successes, challenges, impacts and priorities for the next six months.
— **Depth interviews** with delivery staff from 12 projects.

The report brings together the data and key findings to date on:

— **Designing a volunteering programme,** including how to develop inclusive opportunities, the impact of COVID-19 on delivery and project sustainability.
— **Volunteers' experiences,** including what volunteering activities they had undertaken, and what encourages them to continue volunteering.
— The **impact of volunteering** on volunteers, communities and the organisations delivering the voluntary activities.

Key findings

Designing a volunteering programme

The Volunteering Fund projects were designed to trial new and innovative ways to recruit, engage and support a diverse range of people to volunteer in their communities. Projects used sport and physical activity as a hook to engage volunteers and to achieve a range of impacts unique to each project. Examples include increasing volunteers' physical activity levels; improving inclusivity of activities; improving volunteers' social connectivity, confidence, and wellbeing; volunteers learning new skills; and having an impact on their wider communities.

Understanding audiences and addressing barriers to volunteering

Understanding the target audience and addressing pre-existing barriers to volunteering continued to be imperative to project design, which was particularly important when reaching out to underrepresented groups. **Common barriers to volunteering** included language, lack of cultural sensitivity, lack of time, cost of travel, a lack of inclusive volunteering options, disengagement from school or employment, and the target audience previously lacking a sense of community voice.

Designing volunteering opportunities

It was essential that each project was designed with their target volunteers in mind. **Consultation with potential volunteers and communities during the design phase was a crucial** part of this process. This ensured that projects understood how activities could be designed to appeal to their target audience and overcome any barriers that they had faced to undertaking volunteering in the past.

In line with the 'test and learn' approach to delivery, some projects **iteratively refined their activities through on-going engagement with their volunteers**, whilst others found success in **designing activities collaboratively** with their volunteers from the outset. It should be noted that whilst this practice helped projects to successfully engage and retain volunteers, it was time intensive.

Designing inclusive opportunities

Many projects aimed to engage volunteers with personal and complex needs, including those with mental health issues, disabilities, and those from wider underrepresented groups. For these projects, consultation and co-design was critical to ensure that **inclusivity was at the heart of project design, recruitment, and delivery.** Many of these projects also **engaged with partner organisations to gain further knowledge and to influence their practice moving forward.**

Projects cited various practical examples of their inclusive approaches, nuanced to their specific target audiences. Generally, the **good practice used by projects can be mapped to an 'ADAPT' inclusion framework (Figure 2)**. These practical examples and the inclusion framework could be useful to help inform how Sport England tackle inequalities to engaging in physical activity, as part of their new strategy.

Ask the target audience facing barriers to volunteering how they can be supported.

Design volunteering opportunities with these barriers in mind.

Alter existing volunteering opportunities to better meet the target audience's identified needs.

Partner with other organisations to gain additional insight or to support them to develop their own practice e.g. community groups and charities.

Train staff and volunteers with the skills they need.

Figure 1: ADAPT inclusion framework[1]

Impact of COVID-19 on project delivery

The outbreak of COVID-19 had a huge impact on project delivery. In addition to the many **logistical challenges posed to ongoing activities**, projects experienced **difficulties recruiting new volunteers and engaging existing volunteers** because of the lockdown measures limiting the range of activities that were possible. **Mental health issues experienced by volunteers also exacerbated the difficulty of engaging volunteers**.

Revisions to project delivery and supporting communities through the pandemic

Projects made numerous revisions to ensure they could continue with project delivery. Changes included breaking volunteers up into **smaller groups, changing volunteering settings, adapting activities or running activities remotely using online technology. Maintaining contact with volunteers and providing extra support** during this time was also critical to reduce the negative impact of the pandemic.

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[1] This was designed with Dr Carolynne Mason.

Whilst these revisions worked well for some volunteers, **access to online activities and using technology presented barriers to others**.

In addition to the revision of project delivery, some projects **re-directed their efforts** to help meet the needs of their community. **Some projects were part of the direct COVID-19 effort** e.g. with volunteers supporting the distribution of PPE, undertaking deliveries to those self-isolating and opening foodbanks for those in need.

Legacy of the COVID-19 revisions

Most projects would prefer to **revert back to face-to-face project delivery** following the pandemic; however, the **value of using online platforms to improve connectivity** between staff, partners and volunteers efficiently could be continued. Some projects are also considering using a **blended approach of online and face-to-face delivery** moving forward because of their experience during lockdown.

Volunteering exit strategies

Depending on the reasons why a volunteer stopped engaging with a project, it was not always possible or appropriate to signpost them to alternative opportunities. Where it was possible, some projects had success in formalising this process as part of an exit strategy. For one project, this included a **one-to-one meeting with a volunteer to help them understand how the project had impacted on them, to take on-board learning and refer them onto other pathways** within and outside of the volunteering arena.

Sustainability and scaling up project activities

Project sustainability

Projects had **mixed views** on the sustainability of their activities following the period of funding; some were more confident than others. **Projects considered sustainability in one of two ways**: either through **continued delivery via projects** by securing more funding or scaling down activities, **or via volunteers** continuing to deliver the project.

Scaling up project activities

Other projects were already scaling up and replicating their activities elsewhere. They adopted different approaches to try and make this successful, including **undertaking research** to understand what opportunities already existed in new areas, **developing partnerships** with existing organisations, **piggy-backing on national events** in the absence of having an existing presence in the area, **recruiting highly effective volunteer co-ordinators**, and **setting up franchise models**.

Volunteer experiences

Volunteering recruitment

Projects have successfully recruited volunteers with varied demographic characteristics based on their aims and objectives. Potential Fund projects have successfully recruited young volunteers from school/college or sixth form. Opportunity Fund projects have recruited older volunteers with many living in areas of high deprivation. Across both projects a high proportion of volunteers recruited are BAME and many are also disabled. **However, it was challenging for projects to reach these groups, which needs to be considered for future work in this area.**

Volunteering to date

To date **7,140 volunteers** have taken part in **169,463 hours** of volunteering. On average, each volunteer has taken part in 24 hours of volunteering and 10 occasions of volunteering.

The most common volunteering activities were:

— **43%** coached, refereed, umpired, or officiated in sport or physical activity.
— **34%** undertook a leadership role (e.g. mentoring, training, supporting or leading volunteers).
— **34%** organised an activity or event.
— **29%** helped to renovate or clean up a space and/or decorated or fixed a building or equipment to make it more appealing for local people to get active.
— **26%** campaigned for a cause or undertook fundraising activity.

Volunteers were highly satisfied with the type of volunteering activities – scoring 8.4 out of 10 – and with the support they had received from their project – scoring 8.6 out of 10. Volunteers also reported that their **project met the principles of high-quality social action**.

On average volunteers stayed with their volunteering project for 31 weeks – 17 weeks for those on fixed term projects, 42 weeks for those who moved onto another volunteering opportunity and 31 weeks for those who disengaged for other reasons. Those who were still volunteering with the project, had done so for almost one year (45 weeks).

Training and support

Projects provided their volunteers with a **range of training and support**, including pre-volunteering support, health and safety training, specific activity related training, accredited provision to develop their skills and post-volunteering support. This was **important to ensure volunteers had the necessary skills to undertake their roles**, to **incentivise** them, and **to leave behind a legacy of volunteers** with the necessary skills **to continue leading sports and inspiring others to volunteer** in the future**.**

Motivations for continuing to volunteer

Overall, **volunteers' motivations for continuing to volunteer reflect their initial motivations for joining their project**. The biggest change was volunteers reporting that continue to volunteer because they enjoy volunteering – with 25% of volunteers reporting this as a motivation for continuing to volunteer who did not report this as being a motivator

when they initially joining the project. This highlights that **volunteer satisfaction and enjoyment of an activity should not be overlooked when designing volunteering opportunities**. Early findings suggest that with the outbreak of **COVID-19**, there has been a **shift towards more philanthropic motivators** for volunteering.

Projects reported various factors that had been successful in helping them to retain their volunteers, including:

— **Ensuring volunteers had ownership of the project**, which was achieved through co-design and ongoing volunteer consultation.
— **Giving volunteers autonomy** to maintain their interest.
— Providing **enjoyable activities** with **opportunities to socialise**.
— **Practical activities**, such as renovating or cleaning up a space/or decorating or fixing a building or equipment, were particularly valued by volunteers as they could see the immediate impact of their efforts.
— **Maintaining regular contact with volunteers** to build trust and keep them engaged. This has been particularly important since the outbreak of COVID-19.
— Using **incentives and rewards**.
— **Providing feedback to volunteers** so that they know they are valued.
— **Ensuring volunteers understand the wider impact** of their volunteering on the community or beneficiaries.
— **Continually improving the project** by listening and responding to volunteer feedback.

Impact

The Volunteering Fund has had a breadth of positive impacts on all stakeholders. Not least, it has had a range of positive impacts on volunteers, including on their subjective wellbeing, individual development, their sense of community and physical activity levels.

Volunteering levels

Since volunteering with their project, three quarters (75%) of volunteers reported an **increase in the number of days of volunteering they undertook**. Almost half (47%) had taken part in **additional volunteering activities** outside of their project, and over half (54%) **attributed the additional volunteering they had undertaken to their involvement in the project**.

Furthermore, over half (51%) had **encouraged others to volunteer** since taking part in their project. **Those from BAME backgrounds and those with disabilities were more likely to do this**, which is positive given that these groups were key target audiences in the first instance.

Most volunteers (79%) planned to volunteer in the future. A higher proportion of females (84%) and volunteers from BAME backgrounds (81%) reported that they would do so.

Wider impacts on volunteers

Since joining their projects, **volunteers' subjective wellbeing improved**. For example, satisfaction with their life increased, they believed that the things they do in life were more worthwhile, their happiness increased and their anxiety slightly reduced. Projects explained that they thought this was **a result of the activities connecting people**, and that **volunteers felt that they were contributing in a meaningful way**. They further explained that this was particularly important during the COVID-19 lockdown/s, as the activities alleviated feelings of isolation.

Volunteers' individual development also improved. Volunteers reported improved confidence, had a firmer belief that they could achieve their goals, were more satisfied with themselves, had a stronger belief that they had skills and experiences valued by employers, had improved resilience and a stronger belief that they had the skills to motivate and influence other people. Projects believed that many of these developments were **because the activities gave volunteers a sense of purpose and because they were doing something outside of their comfort zone**, for example leading a sporting activity – even amongst volunteers who were not regarded as 'sporty'. Projects also reported how the projects had resulted in **improved pupil attainment and behaviour for some of their volunteers** they engaged through schools, whilst others reported examples **of volunteers finding employment opportunities** as a result of their volunteering experience.

There was also an improvement in volunteers' sense of community trust, whereby volunteers felt they more strongly belonged to their immediate neighbourhood and that most people in their local area could be trusted. **Projects attributed this the improved inclusivity of the volunteering activities, the co-design of the project and because of new friendships and networks that had been developed** through the project.

Amongst projects which aimed to increase the physical activity levels of volunteers, **43% of volunteers reported an increase in the number of days on which they took part in physical activity**. Projects highlighted that this was likely to be a result of the volunteering activities incorporating elements of physical activity.

Impact on the community

Volunteers believed that the volunteering they had undertaken had **positively impacted their community,** by having a positive impact on other people and bringing different community members together.

Each project is tailored to the local area it is being delivered in; therefore, volunteering activities and the associated impacts differ. As a result, volunteers' activities had **impacted on communities in various ways.**

— Projects delivering sporting activities highlighted that increased capacity had improved their organisational offering to the community which resulted in **increased physical activity opportunities for the community** to engage in.

- Projects working with partner organisations explained how some of their partners had **improved their inclusive practice** and some were **working with young people more** because of improved perceptions of young people.
- Volunteers that had tidied, renovated and fixed outdoor spaces and sports facilities had created **more appealing environments to encourage others to get active**.

Impact on volunteering fund projects (host organisations)

A key impact for projects was the learning that the Volunteering Fund had afforded them to **test new approaches and develop new volunteering roles**, helping them to see how things can be done differently.

Partnerships with other organisations were improved. Their collaboration through the Volunteering Fund had strengthened relationships and the improved inclusivity among partner organisations meant that their partnership would further develop moving forward through future work.

Through the co-design process with volunteers, projects had an **improved understanding of the value of the volunteer voice** and how important this is for delivery and reported that this would be more prominent moving forward.

01.   INTRODUCTION

This section of the report introduces the Sport England Volunteering Fund, how it is being evaluated, and the focus of this report.

About the Sport England Volunteering Fund

The Government's strategy for sport, Sporting Future (December 2015), placed a new emphasis on the benefits of volunteering to the individual, communities and to the nation. In response to this, Sport England's Volunteering Strategy focused more closely on the experience and benefits of volunteering.

In November 2017 Sport England announced an investment of up to £6 million through a new Volunteering Fund to help them learn more about how to increase the diversity of people volunteering in sport and physical activity and to find new ways to reach underrepresented groups. They wanted to learn more about the relationship between volunteering and the positive outcomes and to understand what types of volunteering may be more beneficial.

The fund is split into two strands, each focusing on a different target audience:

— **Opportunity Fund** projects focus on engaging people aged 20 and over, from economically disadvantaged communities, to get into volunteering.

— **Potentials Fund** projects are designed to help 10 to 20-year-olds get involved in volunteering and social action. Social action is defined as activities that young people do to make a positive difference to others or the environment. These include volunteering, fundraising, campaigning or supporting peers. The Potentials Fund is match funded through the #iwill Fund, a joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Digital, Culture and Media and Sport to increase the number of young people engaging in youth social action. The opportunities developed by these projects aim to reflect six quality principles of youth social action, supported by the #iwill Campaign by being: reflective, challenging, embedded, youth-led, progressive and socially impactful.

A 'test and learn' approach has been adopted to trial new ideas to bring the benefits of volunteering and social action in sport and physical activity to new audiences. The funded projects are diverse, both in terms of the range of models and approaches they are testing and the types of organisations delivering them.

Objectives of the evaluation

CFE Research and Dr Carolynne Mason[2] were commissioned to undertake the evaluation of the Sport England Volunteering Fund. The evaluation will enable Sport England to

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[2] https://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ssehs/staff/carolynne-mason/

determine the success and impact of the Volunteering Fund, particularly in terms of the outcomes for volunteers and the wider community. It will also help to ensure Sport England can understand the factors required for success at a project and Fund level, and examine how outcomes vary by approach. The evaluation will also enable Sport England to make the case for volunteering and to inform future project design.

The objectives are:

— To understand the impact of the funded projects on the engagement and retention of target groups in volunteering to support sport and physical activity.

— To understand the impact of the funded projects on volunteers' mental wellbeing and individual development.

— To understand the impact of the funded projects on social and community development in the communities that the volunteers are operating in.

— To identify 'what works' to achieve the above impacts.
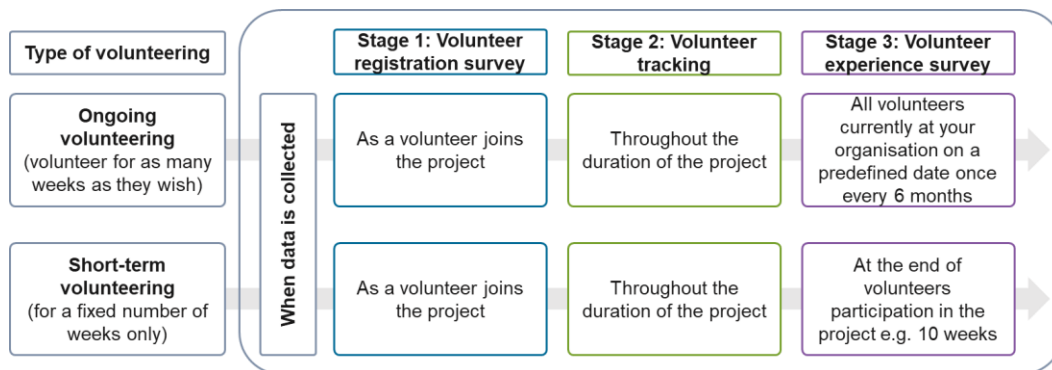
Methodology

This interim report is based on the key methods outlined below. The fieldwork period for all surveys and qualitative research has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, findings are likely to have been influenced by this.

Surveys and volunteer tracking

Volunteer surveys and tracking are carried out in three stages:

— **Stage 1 – Volunteer registration survey:** Volunteers are asked to complete a survey when they join the project. So far **4,098** have been received from volunteers who have undertaken some volunteering with their project (2,370 from Potential Fund volunteers and 1,728 from Opportunity Fund volunteers).

— **Stage 2 – Volunteer tracking:** Projects record the number of volunteering hours and occasions that each volunteer undertakes on an ongoing basis. So far **7,140** records have been received from volunteers who have undertaken some volunteering with their project (5,064 from Potential Fund volunteers and 2,076 from Opportunity Fund volunteers). These surveys were completed between December 2017 and July 2020.

— **Stage 3 – Volunteer experience survey:** Every six months a short survey is undertaken with all volunteers. If volunteers engage in a project for a long period of time they will complete the survey multiple times. If an individual only volunteers for a set number of weeks the survey is undertaken near to the end of their engagement in the project (e.g. during week 9 of a 10 week opportunity). So far **2,180** volunteers who have undertaken some volunteering with their project have completed an experience survey (1,286 from Potential Fund volunteers and 894 from Opportunity Fund volunteers). These surveys were completed between March 2018 and July 2020.

The following diagram outlines when data is collected and shows how this differs depending on the volunteering delivery model.

Type of volunteering	When data is collected	Stage 1: Volunteer registration survey	Stage 2: Volunteer tracking	Stage 3: Volunteer experience survey
Ongoing volunteering (volunteer for as many weeks as they wish)		As a volunteer joins the project	Throughout the duration of the project	All volunteers currently at your organisation on a predefined date once every 6 months
Short-term volunteering (for a fixed number of weeks only)		As a volunteer joins the project	Throughout the duration of the project	At the end of volunteers participation in the project e.g. 10 weeks

The national evaluation was designed to measure outcomes that are common to most volunteering projects. Most survey questions were based on those used within major national surveys or recognised evaluation tools, such as the Office for National Statistics. Other bespoke questions were developed by CFE's expert team. Questions and answer options were either taken directly or adapted to reflect the specific aims of the Fund. Further information about the surveys, the questions asked, and how these can be used by other organisations can be found in Sport England's Volunteering Evaluation Toolkit.

Project delivery information

Every six months project delivery information is collected from project staff who provide their perspective on: key successes and challenges experienced, priorities for the next six months and what they think the impact of the project has been on volunteers and individuals in the community. In addition to informing the content of this report, this also informs how Sport England supports projects on an ongoing basis.

Depth interviews and case studies

For this report, twelve semi-structured interviews were undertaken with key representatives of six Potentials and six Opportunity Fund projects. The interviews on average lasted 45 minutes and were undertaken by telephone. The interviews explored the design of the volunteering project, partnership working, barriers and facilitators to recruitment and retention on the project, key successes and challenges, impact of the volunteering project on the projects themselves, volunteers and the wider community, and sustainability of their initiatives post funding from Sport England.

About this report

This is the second interim report as part of the evaluation of the Volunteering Fund. The reports follow the volunteer journey, with the first report focusing on volunteer recruitment, volunteers' motivations for engaging in volunteering, and what works well to engage volunteers from various backgrounds. This second report builds upon these findings and includes further evidence about designing inclusive volunteering opportunities; what encourages volunteers to stay engaged; project sustainability; the

impact of COVID-19 on delivery; and the impact of the Volunteering Fund on volunteers, the projects themselves (the host organisations), and the community.

This report presents the findings from the two surveys, tracking data, project delivery information and depth interviews. Qualitative findings are based on overall themes identified across project delivery information and depth interviews unless otherwise stated.

Differences in the quantitative findings have been explored by project and volunteer characteristics. All differences have been tested for statistical significance and only those that are statistically significant at the 5% level are reported in the commentary of the report.[3] Multivariate analysis was also undertaken with information about the nature of the tests performed provided in footnotes. A slightly higher number of volunteers to date have been recruited by Potentials projects compared with Opportunity projects. This may skew the overall findings. Where there are differences by the two funds these have been described within the report. Differences by age, employment status, gender, disability and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) have also been explored and differences highlighted throughout the report.

Following this introduction, the report is structured in four main chapters: **Chapter 2** looks at designing a volunteering programme, how COVID-19 has affected project delivery, and project sustainability; **Chapter 3** examines the volunteer experience, including what works in retaining volunteers; **Chapter 4** summarises the impact on volunteers, projects and the wider community and **Chapter 5** highlights key findings for organisations considering delivering a volunteering project in the future.

Throughout the rest of this report, we refer to 'volunteering', but please note when referring to Potential Fund projects this is 'volunteering and social action'.

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[3] Please note that some graphs contain statistically insignificant findings. Please refer to the text for statistically significant differences.

02.   DESIGNING A VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

This section describes how projects have designed their volunteering activities.

Project aims

The Volunteering Fund projects were designed to trial new and innovative ways to recruit, engage and support a diverse range of people to volunteer in their communities. Projects targeted diverse groups of people across society who are typically under-represented in volunteering – for example age (from school aged to the retired); gender; ethnicity; and geography (those residing in rural areas, cities, and coastal towns and those from areas of high deprivation). People with learning difficulties and physical disabilities were also prioritised in recruitment of volunteers by some projects. Therefore, each project had unique aims that they were trying to meet and had designed very different opportunities. Across those who were interviewed there were common over-arching challenges, local issues and unmet needs that projects were seeking to address.

Understanding audiences and addressing barriers to volunteering

Barriers to volunteering are multifaceted which accounted for the previously low take up of volunteering amongst projects' target audiences. In the first interim report to Sport England, the evaluation highlighted barriers of **language and cultural sensitivities,** particularly when engaging with BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) groups in volunteering. For individuals on low incomes, barriers included **cost and time to travel** to participate in opportunities. Projects interviewed for this report supported these findings, but also highlighted further barriers that they were seeking to address.

Projects targeting disabled volunteers or those with mental health issues highlighted that **a lack of inclusivity** was a key barrier to their target audience engaging in volunteering. Projects highlighted that sporting facilities or local clubs had not proactively engaged or supported people with disabilities because of poor accessibility to their premises, a lack of tailored sports equipment or due to communication barriers. For example, one project explained that the clubs they worked with had no staff who could use sign language to engage with those who are deaf. Another project highlighted that the stigma associated with poor mental health had prevented their target audience from engaging in volunteering.

> *"A lot of people seem to think that if this person's got mental health issues then they no longer can participate in a positive way... a lot of people tend to shy away from it or don't want to support it."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Interviewees believed that these barriers had historically resulted in a general reluctance to participate in physical activity and volunteering from projects' target groups.

Projects also reported that their target groups' general **disengagement** from school or employment presented a key barrier to their involvement in volunteering. One project targeting disengaged, demotivated school pupils explained that their volunteers did not *"see the point of learning"*, therefore, the likelihood of them engaging in volunteering activities was even more remote. Volunteers **lacking a sense of community voice**, was particularly notable amongst younger people who felt unable to articulate their own interests and motivations. In one example, the work of Greta Thunberg had inspired many young people to want to be more involved in environmental social action; however, the lack of opportunities to manifest this meant that they felt unable to act upon this.

Intended impacts on volunteers, beneficiaries and communities

In addition to increasing the take up of volunteering amongst target audiences, interviewees reported a wide range of intended impacts they hoped to achieve on their volunteers and/or communities. **Increasing physical activity** was a common aspiration across projects for both volunteers and community members.

Alongside trying to increase levels of physical activity, **sport and physical activity were frequently used as a hook** to engage volunteers and community members to achieve a range of other impacts (described below).

> *"It was cool to use my skills and still keep it sporty. I am a creative advertisement student, so the opportunity was pretty unique."*
> — **Survey respondent**

By **improving the inclusivity** of physical activity opportunities, projects hoped this would **improve the social connectivity, confidence and well-being** among volunteers and community members. Projects aimed to achieve this through ensuring provision was made for those with disabilities to participate in volunteering, removing barriers to volunteering experienced by marginalised or stigmatised groups, and by improving the inclusivity of local partners and businesses to provide subsequent volunteering and physical activity opportunities. The approaches used by projects to make their practice more inclusive is detailed later in this report.

Other projects aimed to support their volunteers to **develop skills** to improve their employability, provide deprived communities with the opportunities to undertake **meaningful activities**, or equip volunteers with a platform to make positive changes in their communities to **improve their community voice**.

For many projects, their **intended impact was two-fold**: to achieve positive impacts on their volunteers whilst simultaneously having a positive **impact on the community**, for example improving public areas for the community to enjoy and providing activities for the community to participate in.

Designing volunteering opportunities

Projects designed volunteering opportunities to meet the specific needs of the volunteers and communities they were engaging with; therefore, the volunteering activities delivered were wide ranging and differed between projects. Each project was **trialling new methods** to assess what works, for whom and why.

There were no types of volunteering activities which were more appealing or enjoyable for volunteers than others. The key to their success was ensuring they were inclusive and that they were designed in **consultation with their target audiences and communities** when established. This ensured that projects fully understood how barriers to volunteering could be overcome, and that volunteering activities were of interest to and met the needs of their target groups and wider communities.

> *"We started talking to them about what they would like, what ideas they've got, and obviously there were lots of ideas. It turned out that there were kind of common themes that people wanted to do."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Some projects used **academic research to inform their design** whilst others undertook their own **primary research**. Projects undertook focus groups with their target audiences or engaged with existing clubs and societies to understand more about the barriers to participation and volunteering. Projects also used these activities as opportunities to see where sporting activity could be delivered (by volunteers) or where volunteers could provide supporting roles. Success was found by allowing ideas to flow from research participants and by testing out project ideas to gauge reactions and consider what changes might be needed.

Whilst projects tailored the design of their volunteering activities, the majority highlighted that aspects or themes of their volunteering programme related to their organisations' core purpose to draw on the skills and experience of the project's staff. Whilst some volunteer roles were pre-defined, one project highlighted the merits of employing a degree of **flexibility when considering volunteer roles**. They designed an application form allowing the project to gather information on volunteers' skills, experiences and interests. The project then created roles that were unique for individual volunteers and provided them with suitable training to ensure that they were able to carry out their assigned role.

> *"We might find that they won't be able to lead a centre on their own, but they could assist in one or two roles with a strict development plan of what they would need. So, their job might be just to unload the bikes in the morning out of the container, do a risk assessment check around the park to see whether there are any big branches in the way or anything like that, and also clean up the bikes."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

For some projects, volunteer engagement and activity re-design was undertaken **iteratively** and gaining continual volunteer feedback was valuable as they had made

incorrect assumptions about what volunteers would want to do when initially designing the project, which they subsequently amended.

> *"Lot of assumptions were made at the beginning that potential volunteers wanted to be qualified as coaches and do informal sports. It became apparent that volunteers did not want to do these things. They found they were more interested in progression and being competitive."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

For other projects, the focus of the opportunities was not pre-defined at the outset; therefore, opportunities were **designed collaboratively with volunteers on an ongoing basis**.

> *"They were different for every single project. The projects were based on young people's ideas… you might have had young people deliver socially distanced physical activity in the park once a week, and they would lead the sessions and take the activities. I think last year there were some where they might have organised a clean-up around a youth club, so that area could then be used for outdoor physical activity. So, there was no specific role, it just depended on the project and what the needs were.*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Designing inclusive opportunities

For many projects, a key driver was to engage individuals with personal and complex issues for example those with mental health problems or those with physical disabilities. In several examples, interviewees explained how their project had wider ambitions to forge new or stronger relationships with partner organisations (e.g. National Governing Bodies, local sports clubs) to extend the reach of their project beyond direct participants and to influence their attitude and approach towards inclusivity.

These projects had **inclusivity at the heart of the design from recruitment to delivery**. They co-designed the opportunities with their target audiences and ensured that flexibility was maintained during delivery to promote safe volunteering opportunities that were suitable for volunteers' skills, interests and abilities.

> *"So, if someone does need physical adaptions made, or we need to make something wheelchair-accessible, for example, we can do that. If it's around people needing things in easy read, or Plain English, we can make that accessible for them as well. It's really looking at anything we can do."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Project staff cited examples of how they were inclusive in their approach to their promotion and provision of activities to match the needs of marginalised groups:

— **Visual impairment:**
- Offering team building activities and development opportunities (including sport coaching qualifications) for visually impaired volunteers to develop their confidence, provide them with skills and improve their employment prospects.

- Volunteers running a sports day, which was advertised for visually impaired people of all ages to try visually impaired tailored sports.
- Linking with visually impaired groups, including National Governing Bodies for visually impaired sports, visually impaired schools and specialist colleges to promote the project and gain referrals.
- Training sport venues on how to support those with a visual impairment to participate in sport and volunteering.

— **Hearing impairment:**
- Consulting with people from the deaf community to identify their needs and physical activity interests and mapping this with available provision in the area.
- Delivering deaf awareness sessions, introducing basic sign language to sports providers and the provision of sign language 'cheat sheets'.

— **Disability:**
- Adapting or providing equipment that makes the volunteering activity possible.
- Ensuring venues and settings are accessible for volunteers and beneficiaries to attend through adaptations.
- For those with special education needs developing 'easy read' materials.

— **Mental health:**
- Partnering with local authorities and organisations such as Mind[4] and Crisis[5] to gain referrals to their volunteer activities. Having already been diagnosed or having explained their background to the trusted referral organisation, this meant that the volunteer did not need to explain this again to the project, which could have been a barrier.
- Providing a buddy system for volunteers to provide them with on-going support throughout the opportunity.
- Working with local businesses to secure volunteering opportunities and address the stigma around mental health in the community.

— **Low-income groups:**
- Making projects family oriented to provide meaningful opportunities for the entire family and remove childcare as a barrier to volunteering.
- Providing lunch as an incentive to participate reducing cost as a barrier to volunteering.
- These opportunities also had wider implications on reducing isolation and potential boredom for low-income families over the summer holidays.

— **Older people:**
- Improving opportunities for elderly members of the community to participate in physical activity e.g. training volunteers to operate electric rickshaw tricycles enabling the elderly to go on bike rides.

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[4] https://www.mind.org.uk/
[5] https://www.crisis.org.uk/

The first interim report highlighted how projects had developed inclusive opportunities to attract other underrepresented groups in volunteering, including those from **BAME communities**. Successful techniques included removing language barriers, working with partner organisations who already had a relationship with the target audience, being mindful of cultural sensitivities, and developing flexible opportunities to allow those with other responsibilities to engage in volunteering when it suited them – this was particularly beneficial for female volunteers who had family responsibilities. Further detail can be found in this report[6] .

In most instances, the **good practice** used by projects to improve the inclusivity of their activities **can be mapped to an 'ADAPT' inclusion framework** (Figure 2). Following such steps would help projects engage with underrepresented groups.

Ask the target audience facing barriers to volunteering how they can be supported.

Design volunteering opportunities with these barriers in mind.

Alter existing volunteering opportunities to better meet the target audience's identified needs.

Partner with other organisations to gain additional insight or to support them to develop their own practice e.g. community groups and charities.

Train staff and volunteers with the skills they need.

Figure 2: ADAPT inclusion framework[7]

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[6] https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-02/Volunteering%20Funds%20-%20Interim%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf?aRf8BrzC1hJt0jUJ6_C93qHpkWMAsNiX=
[7] This was designed with Dr Carolynne Mason.

Impact of COVID-19 on project delivery

Challenges posed by COVID-19

During interviews and within their six-monthly delivery reports, all projects highlighted the outbreak of COVID-19 as a significant challenge to project recruitment and delivery. Projects experienced **difficulties with meeting their planned recruitment targets** because of them needing to pause recruitment drives, lockdown restrictions limiting recruitment methods, and a lack of volunteering opportunities to recruit individuals to. Projects described how online recruitment methods were unsuccessful during this time.

Projects also referenced **difficulties engaging existing volunteers** during this time. For some this was due to a lack of activities for volunteers to take part in whilst others described how lockdown restrictions made it difficult to maintain contact with volunteers.

> *"We faced losing all registered users, and a steep drop off of users citing health reasons following lockdown, sports centres closed as did most charities we have links with. This led to most placements ending and users being forced into self-isolation. We found many users did not respond to digital communications and it took lots of phone calls to establish some WhatsApp groups in order to share information... We are trying to keep volunteers linked together in the clusters they volunteered in so that when activities reopen they will transform more easily with peer support."*
>
> **— Project Lead (delivery report)**

Projects also reported that mental health issues were also exacerbated by the pandemic, which presented an additional difficulty to engaging existing volunteers. In addition, one project noticed a drop in volunteers' confidence to use public transport which presented a barrier to their participation in volunteering activities which were available.

> *"I think it's confidence... you've got to go on public transport... a lot of the volunteers that we are working with have social anxiety so for them to come out and help and support was a big upheaval."*
>
> **— Project Lead (depth interview)**

Where volunteering activity had continued, projects referenced the **logistical difficulties presented by lockdown restrictions** in addition to the challenges involved in **planning how to resume activities** safely once lockdown measures were relaxed. Projects working in schools or workplaces noted particular difficulties with this. Interviewees described the difficulty they had in **finding appropriate settings** to deliver their opportunities and explained how in some instances they were no longer able to deliver in public settings or in venues which had closed. For others, activities which could continue could only accommodate a small number of individuals at a time.

> *"There have been enormous challenges because of COVID-19. Largely it has been an extended and difficult period of negotiation with schools for next year… particularly around external visitors on site. As such, we have had to work harder than ever before to secure the same amount of programmes as this year and have reduced our growth figures considerably across the organisation."*
> — **Project Lead (delivery report)**

The situation for projects was further exacerbated by **project staff being furloughed**[8]. This reduced staff capacity made volunteer engagement even more challenging and had a negative impact on staff morale.

> *"The project officer had hours cut so things took longer to achieve and became an incredibly labour-intensive job. Communication suffered, which meant volunteers became disengaged, which then meant re-engaging them was a bit of an uphill battle."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Depth interviewees referenced the detriment of **cancelled celebratory events** (i.e. award or achievement events) on volunteers. Such events provided volunteers with the opportunity to meet other volunteers and offered development opportunities through volunteers showcasing their experiences of engaging in the project.

Projects that embedded award programmes within their delivery also explained how lockdown restrictions meant that volunteers were **unable to meet the set number of volunteering hours necessary to achieve** this. Projects were able to negotiate with the awarding bodies to accept a lower number of volunteer hours for them to graduate/achieve the award.

Revisions made in response to COVID-19
Changes to project delivery

Where activities could continue, **projects altered sessions** to abide by lockdown rules by enforcing social distancing and separating people into **smaller groups**, **changing volunteering settings** (e.g. undertaking yoga in the park), **changing volunteering activities** (e.g. litter picking on the beach) or **running activities remotely** through the use of virtual sessions, e-courses and online events. Social media was integral as a communication, training, and recruitment tool and as a platform for virtual activities such as exercise groups.

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[8] Please visit Sport England's website to see their policy on their partners furloughing staff: https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/coronavirus/funding-innovation-and-flexibility?section=furloughing

> *"The [volunteers] rose to the challenge and they took part in a variety of challenges, live sessions and pre-recorded sessions, as well as delivering virtual sessions to units who were meeting online. We commissioned the making of 2 'top tips' videos to support the volunteers on the topics of session planning and risk assessments."*
> — **Project Lead (delivery report)**

> *"We have been unfortunate with the current circumstances of the virus temporarily closing the group. However, the way it has adapted by moving online for us all to share our time in isolation together and the activities provided have been a much needed distraction from the outside world but still being able to connect with nature… I feel the group is just as strong as when lockdown began. With weekly challenges set it gets us out in the fresh air and exercising as a family but also being able to share where we have been with other group members."*
> — **Survey respondent**

One project explained how the virtual activities had nurtured confidence in volunteers who had not felt able to lead activities with their peers in a face-to-face setting.

> *"Young people went online, sharing physical activity challenges through social media inspiring others to take part in their homes and gardens... young people who don't normally have the confidence to lead other young people face-to-face, have been able to engage in the programme. Many young people had never volunteered before."*
> — **Project Lead (delivery report)**

Finding volunteering opportunities for committed volunteers was sometimes a challenge, but projects **worked creatively to find opportunities** to maintain volunteer engagement. These often involved volunteers picking up tasks to help with the smooth running of the project itself, including improving the accessibility of social media content and developing newsletters. This provided volunteers with purpose at a difficult time whilst also reducing the workload and pressure on project staff.

Projects detailed their strategies to try to reduce the negative impact of the pandemic and lockdown on volunteers' and beneficiaries' mental health and wellbeing. Many projects referenced the use of social media, emails, telephone calls, online newsletters and videoconferencing to **maintain contact with their volunteers** to plan activity and help promote mental well-being amongst their volunteers. **Extra support for volunteers** was also added, particularly for vulnerable volunteers.

> *"With this in mind we are also planning to focus on wellbeing sessions to help with any issues that participants may have encountered as a result of COVID-19 due to isolation/increased anxieties for example."*
> — **Project Lead (delivery report)**

However, some of these **solutions presented additional challenges or did not work for all**. Whilst activities moved online some of the online replacement activities were less compelling or rewarding for volunteers, or not suitable for all volunteers. Projects and volunteers both had to learn to **adapt to using new technology**, with varying

degrees of success. Older volunteers struggled to adapt to digital media, videoconferencing, or using emails, so uptake of the alternative opportunities in these instances were limited. Some projects' volunteers and beneficiaries were unable to **access the online activities** either due to a lack of equipment, connectivity issues or because they were not digitally literate. In these cases, where possible, projects devised strategies to try and ensure these volunteers and beneficiaries were not cut off.

> *"Those that didn't have access on the computer, we put paper versions of those resources and activities so that they could be used by children in tower blocks nearby."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Supporting communities through the pandemic

Throughout the pandemic projects described **re-directing their resources** to help **meet the needs of their community** during this difficult time. Projects consulted with their communities to find out what they needed, and support was then provided. A variety of activities and services were developed including the creation of an online portal for organisations to upload their volunteer requirements; the provision of online physical activity classes, physical activity packs, geocache routes, and bike loans to support daily exercise; developing newsletters to signpost the community to a range of services; and e-learning courses.

Some projects described being part of the **direct COVID-19 effort,** supporting face mask distribution, volunteering at NHS Nightingale, delivering medication to those self-isolating, and opening foodbanks with targeted marketing for communities in need.

> *"Since lockdown, we have seen many highlights which have come from our ability to adapt the service and be part of the emergency community response in [name of place]. This centred around the development of a new foodbank in [name of place]. We worked closely with our team of volunteers to promote and collect food donations and have provided bilingual volunteers to support this new service. [Organisation] also supported with translation of the foodbank communication materials and ensured it was tailored to local communities."*
> — **Project Lead (delivery report)**

Legacy of COVID-19 revisions

Whilst most interviewees stated that their preference was to revert to face-to-face volunteering activities when possible, other amendments they had made would remain. Projects highlighted the value of **using online platforms for communication purposes** and planned to continue using these with project staff, partners and volunteers to improve connectivity and efficiency.

> *"This situation assisted in our charity to change and get with the times. So, before this we wouldn't have used Zoom and Teams to do any communication and now throughout COVID-19 we've had weekly volunteer chats every Monday morning with volunteers from anywhere in the network."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Online platforms had been particularly valuable in maintaining contact with volunteers during quieter times of the year when communication would traditionally be less frequent. Projects planned to maintain this going forward.

> *"We have found it will help reengage volunteers through utilising online technology we can offer things like zoom coffee morning when in colder months, when typically activity and communication would stop."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Some projects were also considering using a **blended approach of online and face-to-face delivery** moving forward because of their experience during lockdown.

Volunteering exit strategies

Projects engaged volunteers on either an ongoing basis or for a set number of weeks. Regardless of the duration, projects had different strategies to signpost volunteers to other opportunities once their involvement had ended.

Projects explained that volunteers often left to focus on other elements of their lives, such as exams, ill health, relocating to a different area and employment; projects also lost contact with some volunteers and did not know why they had decided to leave. Therefore, it was **not possible or appropriate to signpost these volunteers to other opportunities**. Other projects explained how they had retained most of their volunteers for the duration of project delivery, so they had little need to do this.

Where this was applicable, several projects explained how they **signposted their volunteers to other opportunities within their own organisation or an existing club or society** meaning that while an individual may have disengaged from the funded element of the project, they were still volunteering with them or often a linked organisation.

> *"We do offer young people various opportunities when they leave, but a lot of them will be signposted to local communities as well… It's like a steppingstone, so we create those links, we connect young people to different opportunities. And then, with that confidence, the experience that they gain even in a short period, as it were, through [project name] they then move onto either an entirely new opportunity or stay there in what they're doing, which is fantastic."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Some projects had a more formal process. One project explained how they invited their volunteers to attend a **one-to-one meeting to understand how the project had**

impacted them, to take on-board learning and to refer them on to one of four pathways. The project would then get back in touch with the volunteer between six and twelve weeks later to offer further support.

Sustainability and scaling up

Project sustainability

The projects interviewed were at different stages of contracted delivery, with some having ended in 2020 and others continuing into 2021. Interviewees had mixed views on the sustainability of their projects, some were less confident whereas other provided examples of where this was already occurring.

Projects considered sustainability differently and whilst most referred to the continuation of the specific project alongside their organisation's core activity, others framed sustainability as volunteers continuing to carry out their roles, inspiring others to volunteer or sparking positive change in partner organisations to become more inclusive. Interviewees' interpretation of sustainability influenced the extent to which they regarded their project was sustainable.

Continued delivery via projects

All volunteering opportunities were free, and projects were therefore **reliant on funding** to establish and manage the project. Unlike other activities that could be delivered at no charge (e.g. taster sporting activities) which then command a participant fee later – most projects cited the need for funding from an outside agency to continue.

A few projects were looking at strategies to maintain their project though **another funder or through sponsorship**. In a couple of instances projects had established an effective working relationship with 'potential' external funders, such as schools and Jobcentre Plus. They described how their volunteering offer was a valuable service to these organisations that could be monetised (e.g. to support children at risk of exclusion or those who are unemployed to become work ready). These projects were confident they could **secure contracts** or contributions from these organisations to continue delivery in the future.

In other approaches, projects were looking at the feasibility of **scaling down activity** or making the opportunities less intensive to make them sustainable. For example, reducing the volunteering co-ordinator role to a part-time post; however, the risk was that the project would be less able to support the coordination, outreach and engagement work, which had been critical to its success – particularly in developing inclusive opportunities.

Continued delivery via volunteers

Some projects already had examples of former **volunteers continuing to volunteer in their communities**. Reflecting on inclusivity, having supported and encouraged marginalised groups into volunteering, alongside supporting external organisations and sports clubs to become more inclusive, the project considered that this constituted sustainability.

> *"I think the [volunteer group] have grown as well and they've taken more leadership in what they're doing. There have been break-off groups of people doing different activity, which has been supported, but it's still happening because they've managed to build it into their routine, it's now part of what they do, it's like a hobby."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Projects also highlighted the creation of **effective social networks** (in both volunteering and physical activity) between volunteers and the community that would last beyond the end of a project. For one project this sustainable approach was critical:

> *"One of the other major things that was communicated to us is that these projects always start and then the funding finishes and then we are back to square one. I think the model that we have built with the buddies actually has embedded a [sustainable] approach."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Another project had developed a **volunteering toolkit**, from acquired learning to encourage and support future volunteering from those that they had engaged through the project.

> *"We developed a social action tool-kit, because that seemed to be a real driver for a lot of the parents, 'if you want to carry on volunteering in your community, this is how you can go about it".*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Scaling up project activities

Several projects had already delivered their volunteering activities across different geographical locations as part of their existing Volunteering Fund award and were able to reflect on their own experiences about how their activities could be scaled up and replicated. A notable learning point was doing sufficient **research or 'groundwork'** before commencing delivery. Practically, this involved researching the volunteering agencies, opportunities and forums already in existence locally and building links with them.

> *"It's all very well pitching up in a new area, but without having those links in place it's almost impossible to start delivering straightaway."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Projects that were run by national organisations had an advantage – being able to tap into their existing connections to map delivery opportunities, gain referrals and get involved in local community forums to raise the profile of their volunteering project. In another example, one project operated across a region in England using its existing network of clubs. Whilst each club had their own independence, interviewees suggested that if there was sufficient interest, it had the potential to be scaled up across their network at a national level – taking advantage of the badge and award system it operates for its members. Expanding on this, existing volunteers had the potential to influence other

partner clubs outside of the immediate network which would further grow the influence of the project.

Interviewees also suggested that **national events** could be used to increase scalability of their project. One project had already worked with parkrun and had provided them with inclusive materials (e.g. British Sign Language 'cheat sheets') to promote inclusivity. They felt their approach had scalability, but to support this it would need a critical mass of BSL interpreters at key stages to be successful.

> *"We know the power of parkrun, and we know how many people that each parkrun attracts every week but actually there's a huge cohort of people… not just involved with parkrun, but also supported to volunteer as well, it's a huge opportunity for volunteering."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Having **highly effective volunteer co-ordinators** with local connections, knowledge of the area and enthusiasm to launch and manage a volunteering service was also seen as **critical** to scaling up volunteering activity.

A couple of interviewees also discussed **selling their model and concept** for other organisations to deliver. One project was already investigating setting up a **franchise model** where organisations would pay a set fee to receive the necessary training and support to run a similar service.

03. VOLUNTEERS' EXPERIENCE

This section describes who has been recruited, the type of volunteering individuals have taken part in and what works to encourage volunteers to take part in activities.

Who has been recruited?

Projects have recruited volunteers with varied demographic characteristics based on their aims and objectives. Potential Fund projects have successfully recruited young volunteers from school/college or sixth form. Opportunity Fund projects have recruited older volunteers with many living in areas of high deprivation. Across both projects a high proportion of volunteers recruited are BAME and many are also disabled. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the volunteers recruited across the two Funds. Figures presented in bold represent the over-arching target audiences and highlight that the Funds have been successful in reaching their target audiences. However, it is important to note that it was challenging for projects to reach these groups, as detailed in the first report.

	Potential Fund	Opportunity Fund
Male	51%	41%
Female	48%	58%
<14	**53%**	6%
15-16	**20%**	7%
17-18	**15%**	4%
19-25	11%	13%
26-40	1%	**31%**
41 Plus	0%	**39%**
White British	53%	66%
BAME	47%	34%
Disabled	15%	24%
Not disabled	78%	68%
I am at school/college/sixth form	**87%**	9%
I am at university	9%	2%
I am working full-time	0%	20%
I am working part-time	1%	22%
I am unemployed	1%	27%
I am not employed and not looking for work	0%	19%
Other	0%	2%
High deprivation[9]	35%	**45%**
Mid deprivation[10]	53%	45%
Low deprivation[11]	12%	9%

Table 1 Demographic breakdown of volunteers[12] (variable bases[13]). Volunteer registration survey.

[9] Defined as the top 20% of deprived areas based on the IMD (deciles 1 and 2). A more detailed breakdown is provided in Appendix 1.
[10] Defined the middle 60% of deprived areas based on the IMD (deciles 3 to 8).
[11] Defined as the bottom 20% of deprived areas based on the IMD (deciles 9 and 10).
[12] Percentages may not add to 100% as prefer not to say not included in the table.
[13] Bases vary between demographic measures and funds: Potentials bases range from 1,626-2,357 and Opportunities bases range from 1,379-1,717.

Hours of volunteering

Up to July 2020, **7,140 volunteers** had taken part in **169,463 hours** of volunteering. On average, each volunteer took part in 24 hours of volunteering and ten occasions of volunteering. Opportunity Fund volunteers, on average, completed more volunteering hours and occasions than Potential Fund volunteers, as shown in Table 2.

	Average volunteering hours	**Average number of occasions**
Potential Fund	19	9
Opportunity Fund	36	13
Overall	**24**	**10**

Table 2: Average number of hours and occasions of volunteering

On average, **volunteers undertake 2.7 hours of volunteering each time they take part** (equating to 2 hours and 40 minutes). Those taking part through the Opportunity Fund on average undertook 35 minutes more per occasion (3 hours and 5 minutes) than Potential Fund volunteers (2 hours and 30 minutes).

By July 2020, on average, volunteers had stayed with their volunteering project for 31 weeks. Those who were still volunteering with their project had, on average, stayed for almost one year (45 weeks). For those who had stopped volunteering because they were on fixed-term programmes, the average time was 17 weeks. Only 8% had been recorded as leaving the volunteer opportunity when it was not a fixed-term project. Volunteers who left to engage in other volunteering opportunities remained with the project for an average of 42 weeks and those who disengaged with the project for other reasons volunteered for an average of 31 weeks.

Volunteering activities

As previously described, **projects developed different volunteering opportunities for different groups of people**. Whilst some of these opportunities cover more traditional sport volunteering (such as coaching, refereeing etc.) a wide range of other activities were undertaken (reported through the volunteer experience survey). The most common[14] were:

— **43%** coached, refereed, umpired, or officiated in sport or physical activity (traditional sports volunteering)
— **34%** undertook a leadership role (e.g. mentoring, training, supporting or leading volunteers)
— **34%** organised an activity or event
— **29%** helped to renovate or clean up a space and/or decorated or fixed a building or equipment to make it more appealing for local people to get active
— **26%** campaigned for a cause or undertook fundraising activity

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[14] Activities have been grouped into similar areas of focus. A full list of the individual activities undertaken can be seen in Appendix 1.

Analysis[15] was undertaken to examine whether volunteer characteristics or volunteer experiences influenced the type of activities they took part in. This is reflective of the nature of the activities projects designed to meet the interests and needs of who they targeted.

Volunteering activities	Characteristics which influenced the increased likelihood of a volunteer undertaking the activity
Coaching, refereeing, umpiring, or officiating in sport or physical activity	— Potential Fund volunteers compared to Opportunity Fund — White British volunteers compared to BAME — Female volunteers compared to male — Those from areas with higher deprivation (e.g. a lower IMD score) — Those who had been with their project slightly longer — Undertaking a slightly higher number of hours of volunteering with their project
Leadership role (e.g. mentoring, training, supporting or leading volunteers)	— BAME volunteers compared to White British — Potential Fund volunteers compared to Opportunity Fund — Those who had been with their project slightly longer — Undertaking a slightly higher number of hours of volunteering with their project
Organising an activity or event	— Female volunteers compared to male — Potential Fund volunteers compared to Opportunity Fund — Those from areas with slightly higher deprivation (e.g. a lower IMD score) — Slightly younger volunteers — Those who had been with their project slightly longer — Undertaking a slightly higher number of hours of volunteering with their project
Helping to renovate or clean up a space and/or decorating or fixed a building or equipment to make it more appealing for local people to get active	— Male volunteers compared to female — Those from areas with slightly lower deprivation (e.g. a higher IMD score) — Those who had been with their project for slightly less time
Campaigning for a cause or undertaking fundraising activity	— BAME volunteers compared to White British — Those who had been with their project slightly longer — Undertaking a slightly higher number of hours of volunteering with their project

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[15] Logistic regression.

Training and support

Training was an important element of project delivery. It enabled volunteers to support project delivery safely and effectively, inspire and motivate the community to participate in sport and social action activities, and provided volunteers with development opportunities. As a result, several projects hoped that volunteers would **increase their knowledge and skills** and then become more confident and employable.

Training was also intended to **leave behind a volunteering legacy**. One project that provided a leadership sports qualification for young people hoped this would provide a vehicle to give young people a voice in sports leadership in the future. Another project working in the voluntary sector hoped their young volunteers would become future leaders in their organisation and inspire more young people into volunteering roles in the future.

The different types of training provided to volunteers included:

— **Health and safety training.** This was principally used for induction purposes, particularly for volunteers who were leading sport activities. As representatives and new members of the project, it was paramount that volunteers were fully trained in health and safety procedures to minimise the risk to themselves and other participants. This was particularly important for projects that were targeting individuals with a physical disability or young people. Examples of such training included safeguarding (e.g. when working with children or vulnerable people), first aid and manual handling (e.g. when moving and repairing heavy sporting equipment).

— **Pre-volunteering support** to build confidence amongst those who were not ready to volunteer or undertake physical activity upon engagement with the project. For example, one project engaged volunteers with mental health problems, so included a 12-week fitness programme with wrap-around mentor support to improve volunteers' wellbeing. The training and support was important to help the volunteers gain self-confidence and develop the skills needed to lead others.

— **Specific training needed to undertake the volunteering activity**. This training was necessary to prepare volunteers for the activities they would eventually lead on. Several examples that interviewees provided include technical skills (e.g. bike repairs), social media and marketing training and sports coaching. This was done through training and shadowing project staff.

— **Accredited provision.** Whilst cost was prohibitive in most projects a minority offered opportunities that led to accredited qualifications. Examples included the Building Communities Pathway (a City and Guilds certificate) and Level 1 trade qualifications. For some volunteers accredited qualifications and development opportunities were important to maintain their involvement in the opportunity.

— **Post-volunteering support**. One project included a CV writing course and provided volunteers with references to support them in finding employment following their involvement in the project.

Satisfaction

Overall, **volunteers were highly satisfied with their volunteering activities and the support they had received** from their projects (as reported during the volunteer experience survey). High mean satisfaction scores were received across volunteers:

- **8.4** out of **10** for satisfaction with the type of volunteering activities
- **8.6** out of **10** for satisfaction with the support from their project

"My overall experience of volunteering at [project name] has been great I believe I will continue volunteering for the organisation as long as they need me."
— **Survey respondent**

Further analysis[16] explored whether volunteer characteristics and volunteering experiences influenced a higher score for volunteering satisfaction with the type of activities and the support they received from their project. Overall, satisfaction with the experience was universal across most volunteers with very few significant findings identified, highlighting that projects successfully tailored their activities to meet the needs of their volunteers. [17]

Volunteers also thought **their project met the principles of high-quality social action** that were measured through survey:

- **8.5** out of **10** for staff and other volunteers listen to volunteers' ideas
- **8.6** out of **10** for the project values the contribution that volunteers make
- **8.5** out of **10** for the volunteering opportunities are challenging and enjoyable

Motivations for continuing to volunteer

Overall, **volunteers' motivations for continuing to volunteer reflect their initial motivations for joining their project** (Figure 3). The area which showed the biggest change was 'I enjoy volunteering' with 25% of volunteers reporting this as a motivation for continuing to volunteer but did not report this when first joining the project; this highlights that although volunteers may not have expected to enjoy volunteering, they did so once they had started. Traditionally, volunteering is promoted as a way for volunteers to develop new skills, but Figure 3 highlights that a high proportion of volunteers were motivated to join their project and to continue volunteering to help people and to have fun, which are important points not to be overlooked when designing a volunteering project.

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[16] Multiple linear regression.

[17] The small number of associations that were found they only accounted for 4% and 3% (respectively) of the variance in the scores participants gave. Other factors which have not been measured through the study account for the unexplained variance. These small influences on providing a higher score were:
— Being involved in 'practical' activities (helping to renovate or clean up a space and/or decorating or fixing a building or equipment) compared to those who did not
— Females compared to males
— Older volunteers

Motivating factor

Motivation	A new motivator	Always been a motivator	No longer a motivator	Never been a motivator	Motivating factor
To help people	19%	40%	15%	26%	59%
To learn new skills	19%	36%	15%	30%	55%
To have fun	20%	33%	13%	34%	52%
I enjoy volunteering	25%	26%	10%	40%	50%
To socialise with other people	20%	26%	15%	39%	46%
To be involved with sport	16%	27%	14%	43%	43%
To make friends	18%	20%	13%	49%	38%
To make a difference in my local area	16%	19%	13%	52%	35%
The cause is important to me	18%	15%	9%	58%	33%
To improve my career prospects	12%	15%	13%	59%	28%
To get a qualification	13%	14%	11%	62%	26%
To help fill my time	13%	12%	11%	64%	25%
My friends/family did it	8%	4%	7%	81%	12%
To gain rewards	6%	3%	8%	82%	10%
To have my say	6%		6%	86%	9%
It was part of a lesson or course			6%	90%	4%
It is part of my religious beliefs				97%	1%

■ A new motivator ■ Always been a motivator ■ No longer a motivator ■ Never been a motivator
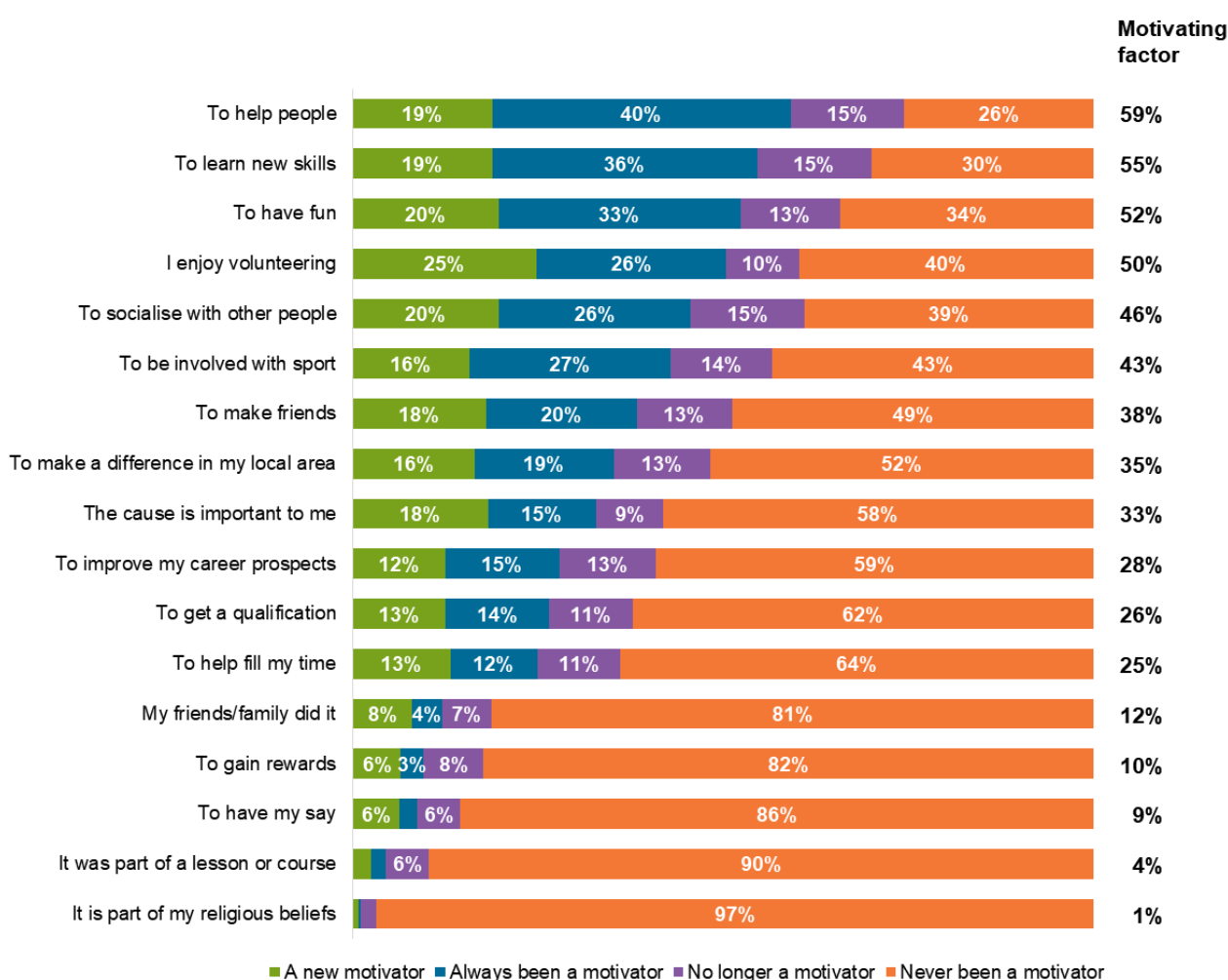
Figure 3: Change in motivations for volunteering between registration and experience surveys (base=1,646)

This also highlights the importance of ensuring volunteers are satisfied with, and enjoying, the opportunity to encourage them to continue. Whilst nearly two thirds of volunteers **(59%) continue to volunteer to 'help people'**, only 10% of volunteers continued to volunteer 'because without volunteers the project would finish[18]'; this highlights that a sense of duty is not a key driver for volunteer retention.

> *"I have seen the first hand the difference that myself and volunteers make. It gives you a warm feeling when you change someone's life."*
> — **Survey respondent**

> *"It gives them that good feeling when they go home that they can see a person with a disability change, scale up from four wheels to three wheels to two wheels. It makes them feel good inside."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

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[18] This is not displayed in the graph as was not applicable during the registration survey.

Projects also highlighted the various reasons why volunteers continued to engage in project activities. Whilst some projects used incentives, most described how it was elements of the project itself which influenced volunteers to stay. This reflects the findings above where very few stated that they continue to volunteer to gain 'rewards' (9%). Factors such as helping people, learning new skills, having fun and socialising with others were more important.

Projects described the following key factors that encouraged volunteers to continue volunteering:

— **Making the volunteer feel valued** and ensuring that what they were doing was being noticed. This was achieved through giving volunteers responsibility for tasks to ensure they knew their contribution was important, providing them with the opportunity to lead on the delivery of activities, presenting their experience at events, or allowing them to meet with partners to become a spokesperson for their activity and their own achievements.

— **Ensuring volunteers had ownership of the project.** This was achieved through projects co-designing the opportunities with volunteers from the outset. Because their ideas were listened to, they bought into the process and therefore wanted to see the project through. In addition, as the opportunities were often unique to the area, they stood out and volunteers wanted to remain part of the project.

> One project gave an example of volunteers having greater control in the delivery and branding of their volunteering opportunity. As a national organisation, their previous volunteering projects were branded (i.e. logos on promotional materials) as being delivered by the lead organisation. For this project, branding was designed and managed by the volunteers.
>
> *"As a group they've chosen designs for their own logos. They've got their own T-shirts and jumpers and hat. It seems like a reasonably insignificant thing, but it's not. What's it's done is, it's made it a very distinct project that is theirs, and people are proud of."*
>
> **Project Lead (depth interview)**

— Linked with ownership, **giving volunteers some autonomy**, particularly for younger volunteers, was a way to maintain their interest in volunteering.

— **Listening and responding to feedback from volunteers.** Interviewees explained the importance of ensuring their model was flexible enough to respond to volunteer feedback. Projects listened to volunteers' views, which could change over the course of their engagement, and opportunities were continually re-designed in response to volunteers' feedback and needs.

— **Maintaining regular contact with volunteers** to build trust, keep them engaged and to re-engage them if needed – although it was important to not pressure people by doing this too frequently. This was even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

— **<u>Volunteers understanding the impact their volunteering has on the community.</u>** Seeing the impact of their volunteering on others meant volunteers understood that what they were doing was worthwhile and encouraged their commitment to the project.

— **<u>Ensuring volunteering opportunities are enjoyable.</u>** Projects described how it was the nature of the volunteering activities themselves which often inspired their volunteers to keep taking part. One project described how their volunteering opportunities involved practical activities where items were fixed for community members to use to participate in sport. Volunteers were taught the skills needed and they continued to volunteer as they enjoyed the activity.

— **<u>Providing opportunities to socialise.</u>** Projects ensured that opportunities to socialise were integrated into their delivery. This helped to improve volunteers' social isolation and support them to make new friends.

> One project described how the activities were enjoyable so inspired their volunteers to keep taking part. Although equally important, many of the volunteers were socially isolated or had very small social circles so the project ensured that opportunities to socialise were integral to the opportunity itself.
>
> *"I'll visit my volunteers around the country and we'll just get together just for social volunteer breakfasts in the morning or we'll go out for coffee and cake somewhere or we put on a bit of a buffet spread at our headquarters and that's what the volunteers seem to want. The fact that it reduces that social isolation that they have and they get to make friends and just chat about life seems to be a main motivator for volunteering."*
>
> **Project Lead (depth interview)**

— **<u>Using incentives and rewards.</u>** Incentives and rewards helped to encourage some participants to continue volunteering. Examples included providing volunteers with development opportunities to complete qualifications and giving volunteers free gym membership. Incentives were particularly useful for Potential Fund projects, for example, where one project awarded their volunteers in a staged approach to help keep them motivated.

Impact of COVID-19 on volunteers' motivations for volunteering

Further analysis shows that COVID-19 may have impacted volunteers' motivations for volunteering. This was explored by isolating volunteers who initially completed their registration survey prior to the outbreak of the pandemic and completed their experience survey during COVID-19. Their motivating factors were mostly similar to the full cohort of volunteers; however, a larger proportion (29%) reported that the cause being important to them was a reason why they continued to volunteer (but was not a motivating factor when they started) compared with the full cohort of volunteers (18%).

In addition, when examining the responses of those who started and continued volunteering during COVID-19 (e.g. those who completed a registration survey and experience survey since the outbreak of the pandemic) some interesting findings are observed in relation to their new and existing motivations for volunteering. The cause being important to them was either a new or existing motivating factor for 72% of these

volunteers compared with just 33% of volunteers overall. Making a difference in their local area was also a new or existing key motivating factor for 58% of these volunteers (compared with 35% of all volunteers), as was filling their time (51% compared with 25%).

These findings suggest a shift towards more philanthropic motivators for volunteering, which can be explored further.

04. IMPACT

This section describes the impact projects have had on volunteering levels, volunteers' physical activity levels, wellbeing and individual development, the wider community and the projects themselves.

Volunteering levels

Whilst volunteering with their project, most individuals reported higher levels of volunteering compared with when they started. This had increased by almost a week, with volunteers reporting that they had undertaken 14.1 days of volunteering in the last 12 months prior to them joining the project to 20.6 days since joining the project. Three-quarters of volunteers **(75%) increased the number of days of volunteering they undertook**. This suggests that volunteering with the project may not have displaced existing volunteering that was already being undertaken, which is particularly the case for the third (33%) of volunteers who had never volunteered previously. This is also further supported in the next section. A higher proportion of volunteers from areas of high deprivation (81%), males (81%) and those from BAME backgrounds (80%) reported that the number of days they had volunteered had increased compared with other volunteers.

The proportion of volunteers who have experienced a decrease in the number of days they undertook volunteering has increased slightly since our previous report from 7% to 18%; however, the data collection period spans the time since the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Over 20% of all experience survey responses were submitted between March and July 2020 – when projects reported volunteering activities reduced drastically.

Volunteering outside of the project

Almost half (47%) of all volunteers had taken part in other volunteering activities outside of their project. Amongst these, **over half** (54%) described how **volunteering through the project had motivated them to do this additional volunteering**.

> *"I enjoyed the project and I am keen to learn more skills and help others in the local area. Volunteering with [project name] has inspired me to volunteer more as I enjoyed the experience."*
> **— Survey respondent**

> *"[Project name] has given me more self-confidence in sports and has allowed me to coach younger girls on the sessions that I attend. We will be forming a social action group to give more back to our communities as well as our school."*
> **— Survey respondent**

Further analysis[19] explored whether volunteer characteristics and volunteering experiences influenced whether someone had volunteered outside of their project. The differences associated with someone stating 'yes' were[20]:

— Being involved in 'leadership' activities compared to those who did not
— Females compared to males
— Those who were less satisfied with the type of activities they were undertaking with their project

Amongst those who stated 'yes', we further examined what characteristics were associated with someone stating this further volunteering was 'motivated by them taking part in the project' compared to another reason. The differences associated with someone stating 'yes' to this were:

— BAME volunteers compared to White British
— Being involved in 'campaigning or fundraising' activities compared to those who did not
— Greater satisfaction with the activities they took part in through their project

Recommending volunteering to others

Over half **(51%) of all volunteers had encouraged others to volunteer** since taking part in their project. Of those who had, over three quarters **(77%) stated that they had done so as a direct result of taking part in their project**, 15% said they would have done so anyway and 8% did not know.

Further analysis[21] explored whether volunteer characteristics and volunteering experiences influenced someone had encouraged volunteering to other people. The differences associated with someone stating yes were:

— Being involved in 'leadership' activities compared to those who did not
— Being involved in 'campaigning or fundraising' activities compared to those who did not
— BAME volunteers compared to White British
— Those with a disability compared to those without

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[19] Logistic regression.
[20] Two further characteristics were statistically significant; however, their overall contribution to the regression model were minimal. These were: those who undertook a higher number of hours of volunteering with their project were slightly more likely to state 'yes' whilst those who had been with their project longer were less likely to state 'yes'.
[21] Logistic regression.

Future volunteering

Most volunteers **(79%) thought they would continue to volunteer in the future**. Only 3% did not intend to volunteer in the future whilst the remaining 18% were not sure about volunteering again. A higher proportion of those in older age groups (26 to 40 and 41 plus) confirmed that they intended to continue volunteering (90% and 95%) whilst younger volunteers (up to the age of 18) were more likely to be unsure (25%). A higher proportion of volunteers from Opportunity projects (87%) females (84%) and BAME (81%) volunteers also intended to volunteer in the future.

Wider impacts on volunteers

The next section of the report measures outcomes that are common to volunteering projects. Most survey questions were based on those used within major national surveys or recognised evaluation tools, such as the Office for National Statistics. Other bespoke questions were developed by CFE. Questions and answer options were either taken directly or adapted to reflect the specific aims of the Fund. Further information about the surveys, the questions asked, and how these can be used by other organisations can be found in Sport England's [Volunteering Evaluation Toolkit.](#) For each question area volunteers were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 0-10 each time they completed a survey. A low score indicated low levels of wellbeing, a high score - high levels of wellbeing. For each measure the mean score across all volunteers is reported alongside the proportion who experienced an increase in their score. Volunteers were also asked whether they thought the project had a positive or negative impact on each area as outside influences may have affected a volunteer's score either positively or negatively.

Subjective wellbeing

Overall, **improvements in subjective wellbeing**[22] **were experienced by volunteers** whilst volunteering with their project with an increase in mean scores across all wellbeing measures (excluding anxiety)[23] as rated on a scale of 0-10 (Figure 4). For anxiety the responses have been amended so that high scores across all statements reflect a positive (i.e. less anxious) response and therefore can easily be compared.[24] Just under half of all volunteers reported an increase in their score for each measure.

As reported earlier, a significant number of experience surveys were submitted during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, positively the scores provided for subjective wellbeing (and areas later in the chapter) are relatively unchanged from the first interim report. As described in more detail below some projects were able to continue during this period providing volunteers with a meaningful activity to take part in which they believed

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[22] Is also known as personal wellbeing and gauges self-reported levels for life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety; measures of how people experience the quality of their life.
[23] Between volunteer's registration and experience scores, the overall change in anxiety was not statistically significant. Only Opportunity Fund volunteers were asked the anxiety question.
[24] For anxiety, the responses have been amended so that high scores across all statements reflect a positive response and therefore can easily be compared to reflect the direction of the above scale. So, if a respondent previously gave a score of 0 (not anxious on the original scale) this has been amended to 10.
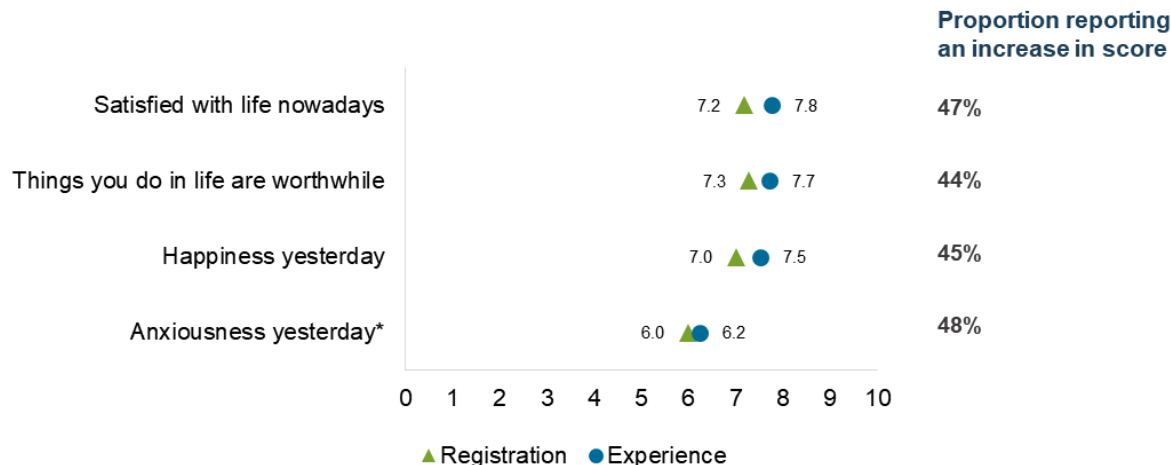
supported aspects of their mental health.

Figure 4: Change in mean scores for subjective wellbeing. Proportion who report an increase in their score. Volunteer registration and experience survey.

Key differences were found across three of the four measures:

— A higher proportion of those who were unemployed and not looking for work (72%), volunteers aged 41 plus (63%), those with disabilities (61%) and volunteers from Opportunity projects (54%) reported an increase in their satisfaction with life nowadays.

— A higher proportion of volunteers who were unemployed and not looking for work (63%), those aged over 41 (55%), those with disabilities 53%), and from opportunity projects (47%) reported an increase in their score for 'things that you do in life are worthwhile'.

— A higher proportion of those who are BAME (55%), or those from an area of high deprivation (55%) reported an improvement in their anxiety score (i.e. were less anxious).

Volunteers were asked directly whether their volunteering had made a positive impact on their subjective wellbeing (as reported through the volunteer experience survey). This shows to what extent volunteers attribute changes in their subjective wellbeing to taking part in their project. Around three-quarters of volunteers thought it had a positive impact on the various aspects of subjective wellbeing, with satisfaction with life receiving the highest score:

	Positive impact
Satisfied with life nowadays	**75%**
Things you do in life are worthwhile	**72%**
Happiness	**73%**
Anxiety	**70%**

> *"[Project name] has improved by mental health and made me a much happier person at home and when I'm outside the house."*
> — **Survey respondent**

> *"I enjoyed the learning curve – I feel I have gained valuable skills that are not only worth something to myself but future employers. It honestly brings a feeling of self-worth. I think this is a great opportunity for people to develop themselves practically and the project is certainly worthwhile."*
> — **Survey respondent**

During depth interviews, most projects reported positive impacts on volunteers' mental health (unprompted). Overall, **project activities connected people, made people feel good and made them feel valued**. Projects were able to work though issues pertinent to those they had engaged with to create activities that were meaningful bringing about greater impacts for volunteers. One project highlighted for example, how participation in physically active volunteering opportunities had reduced volunteer anxiety.

> *"We saw from some of our volunteers reductions in anxiety and there were those who were struggling to sleep. Once they've done a full day outside you're tired. They were getting to sleep and feeling so much better the next day. Once they've done that for six weeks the results are just phenomenal."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

As highlighted earlier, projects ensured that volunteering activities were tailored to ensure all volunteers could take part. This ensured **they felt that they could contribute in a meaningful way**. Regardless of the scale of their contribution, this made them feel that the **volunteering they were doing was worthwhile**.

Projects explained that the opportunities available (albeit restrictive) through national lockdowns and through COVID-19 Tier restrictions provided an outlet for volunteers to positively channel their time in a meaningful way for themselves and the beneficiaries of their efforts. The result was **alleviating the boredom of isolation and addressing the consequences of isolation** (i.e. a deterioration of mental health).

> *"The project addressed a need right now for young people to be engaged with each other, to support each other, to have a focus. A lot of provision has had to close down so this was an outlet for them."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Individual development

Volunteers reported improvements across a range of indicators designed to assess **individual development**.[25] Change across these indicators was similar to subjective wellbeing with just over two-fifths reporting a change in their score.

Proportion reporting an increase in score

	Registration	Experience	Proportion reporting an increase in score
I feel confident at having a go at things that are new to me	7.4	7.7	41%
I can achieve most of the goals I set myself	7.2	7.7	45%
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	7.2	7.7	45%
I have skills and experience that are valued by employers	7.2	7.7	45%
If something goes wrong I am able to bounce back and carry on	7.2	7.6	45%
I am able to motivate and influence other people	7.1	7.6	45%

▲ Registration ● Experience

Figure 5: Change in mean scores for individual development. Proportion who report an increase in their score. Volunteer registration and experience survey.

Key differences were found by disabled volunteers and those from Opportunity projects:

— More volunteers with disabilities reported an increase in their belief that they can achieve most of the goals they set themselves (52%), for their satisfaction with themselves (54%), and that they can bounce back and carry on if something goes wrong (54%)

— A higher proportion of those from Opportunity projects reported an increase in their confidence for having a go at new things (46%), that they can achieve most of the goals they set themselves (51%), being satisfied with themselves (53%), that they can bounce back and carry on if something goes wrong (50%) and being able to motivate and influence other people (51%).

Between two-thirds and four-fifths of volunteers reported that their involvement in the project had positively impacted on their individual development across a range of areas.

	Positive impact
How confident you feel about having a go at things that are new to you	**80%**
Believe you can achieve most of the goals you set yourself	**73%**
How satisfied you are with yourself	**66%**
Developing skills and experience that are valued by employers	**78%**

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[25] Motivating and influencing others & I have skills and experience that are valued by employers were only asked to volunteers at projects trying to bring about these impacts for volunteers.

| Ability to bounce back and carry on if something goes wrong | **69%** |
| Ability to motivate and influence other people | **79%** |

> *"This has given me confidence and made PE fun."*
> — **Survey respondent**

> *"Volunteering has been incredible; I have gained new skills and have secured a part time job."*
> — **Survey respondent**

Confidence and self-belief

During depth interviews, projects reported varying levels of perceived positive impacts on the confidence of their volunteers. For some individuals, volunteering was not a new experience therefore the impacts were not as significant; for others, impacts in confidence were greater. Projects reported that increased confidence for some volunteers was because of them **doing something outside of their comfort zone**, for example leading sporting or social action activities, contributing towards or being given a role in a session or event, or simply by interacting with others. These activities also **gave some volunteers a sense of purpose**.

> *"For one volunteer they were fairly in denial about their sight loss and they didn't want to address it and didn't want to be reminded of it, but then after going on a camp, their self-belief really increased, they are much more at peace with their sight loss, and they actually volunteered as a coach because they were so inspired by taking part in all the sports and leading sports on the camp."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Projects provided inspirational examples of what some of their volunteers were able to achieve because of this increase in confidence. The ability to lead larger groups of volunteers on sessions they had themselves designed (e.g. cycle routes for those with a disability) were described. Other examples included delivering presentations at their school or at national events designed to showcase their achievements to motivate and influence others to inspire change.

> *"We had four girls speak at a black history month event at the Royal Society of Arts about the integration of black women in football and they were, you know, twelve years old, stood up in an evening event in front of all of these people doing that and, kind of, shifting norms of what people thought, you know, thirteen year old girls could achieve."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

In another example, participating in volunteering activities built up a volunteer's confidence who subsequently was able to reengage back into the labour market.

> *"When I had the initial conversation with the volunteer they were not interested in work. They didn't think they had the confidence to go back, but then after a period of time of doing a number of different activities and getting involved in a different number of training opportunities, that raised their self-esteem and confidence and is now back within the workforce now."*
>
> **— Project Lead (depth interview)**

Projects also highlighted that their project had successfully increased the confidence of those who were not regarded as 'sporty' to engage in sport volunteering activities. This included not only participating, but also leading on sessions and supporting other roles such as marketing to increase the take-up of activities.

> *"We have seen girls come into the training that are not confident or not particularly 'sporty', they've been some of our best girls. One of them delivered live sessions, on Facebook and Instagram over lockdown. The girl that came into that training event at the start was definitely not that same girl who delivered that Instagram live session."*
>
> **— Project Lead (depth interview)**

Other benefits associated with increased confidence and self-belief was volunteers developing a sense of agency or the belief they can achieve social change, particularly noted with Potential project interviews. Increased confidence in volunteers then enabled them to make a positive difference in their own lives and within their community.

> *"They've basically realised that if they want to, they can make a change in society, or the things that are important to them, and I think creating that sense of self and that sense of belief in themselves that they can do that is transformative for so many reasons and allows them to go on and do loads of different things."*
>
> **— Project Lead (depth interview)**

Education and employment opportunities

Projects that had worked directly with pupils (often at risk of exclusion) reported an **improvement in pupil attainment and behaviour** amongst some of the volunteers. One project had inspired disengaged pupils to channel their energies into volunteering through sport initially, then introduced them to wider opportunities alongside re-engaging them in learning.

> *"We've seen improved engagement in school – attitude to learning, seeing themselves as a learner; able to achieve things; being able to form relationships; being more aware of themselves. They are all the programme outcomes that we aim for."*
>
> **— Project Lead (depth interview)**

Other examples included volunteering being used as a **springboard to employment** or training opportunities. Projects described how for some volunteers, their experiences had provided them with a new focus and improved their aspirations for what they wanted to do beyond the volunteer experience.

> *"Some volunteers have since gone on to get employment in the cycling sector or employment with our charity or just were able to utilise the skills in a different role.*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

> *"We've got a lot of young people who are now employed by us who mentor younger students and are training to be practitioners themselves. That also has obviously a massive benefit for the organisation, of how we learn from young people's experiences every single day."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Community and social development

There were improvements in volunteers' sense of community trust whilst undertaking activities with their projects.[26] With nearly half reporting an increase in their trust for people in their local area and over two-fifths stating an increase in their feelings for belonging to their immediate neighbourhood. These levels were often low on starting the project in comparison to the measures reported previously.
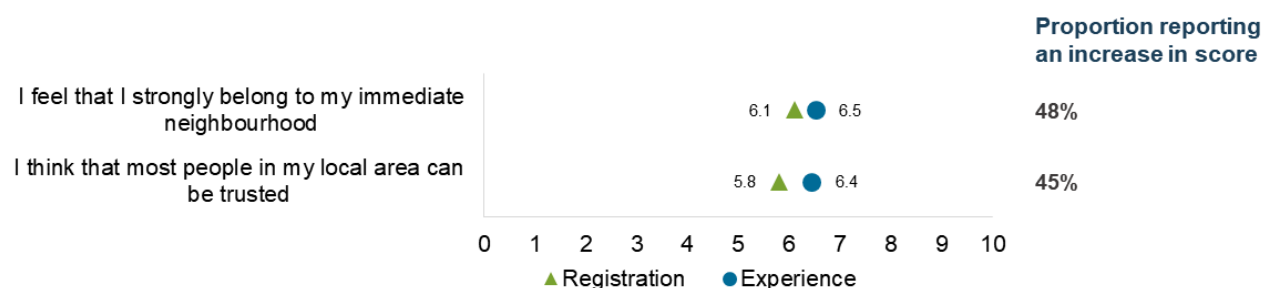

Figure 6: Impact on neighbourhood belonging and community trust. Proportion who report an increase in their score. Volunteer registration and experience survey.

A higher proportion of volunteers from Opportunity projects reported an increase in their score for 'I think people can be trusted' (52%) and feeling that they strongly belong to their immediate neighbourhood (51%).

Over half of volunteers reported that their project had positively impacted on their sense of community.

	Positive impact
How strongly you feel you belong to your immediate neighbourhood	**54%**
Belief that most people in your local area can be trusted	**53%**

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[26] I feel that I strongly belong to my immediate neighbourhood was only asked to volunteers at projects trying to bring about these impacts for volunteers.

During depth interviews, several projects reflected on how they perceived that their project was **increasing their volunteers' sense of inclusion or belonging in the local area**. This had been achieved through: **1)** improving the inclusivity of volunteering activities to engage marginalised groups who had previously experienced barriers to volunteering and at times isolation from their wider community; **2)** co-designing activities alongside volunteers to benefit their local area and community.

> *"The biggest incentive for them to keep going was the fact that they felt more included in their local area as a result of being involved in [the project]. Becoming part of that community or a larger presence within their own community."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

> *"Members of the non-deaf community now regularly interact with members of the deaf community at our sessions; this did not happen when deaf people first came to the sessions."*
> — **Survey respondent**

Other projects also highlighted that through participation in the project, some volunteers had **developed new friendships and support networks**. This was linked to group activities nurturing closer bonds between volunteers and as a result of volunteers meeting new people on the project.

> *"Summer holidays can be boring for families. The project linked with other parents whilst your children are entertained and you can have an adult conversation. They're the kind of elements of the project which I felt were successful."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

> *"Because a lot of volunteers have got their own WhatsApp group on the project they are all supporting each other along the way. You feel like you belong to a group and that gives you that little bit of confidence knowing that there is that extra support out there should you need it. A lot of good relationships have been built off the back of it as well.*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Physical activity

Approximately half of projects aimed to increase physical activity levels amongst volunteers alongside engaging them in volunteering activities. Within these projects, overall volunteers' levels of physical activity increased from taking part in activity on 3.6 days to 3.8 (in the week they completed their experience survey). In total, **43% of volunteers reported an increase in the number of days on which they took part in physical activity** between the volunteer registration and experience survey. Just under one-third (30%) reported a decrease in their physical activity levels and 27% reported undertaking the same level of activity. Only 0.1% of volunteers reported taking part in no physical activity whilst with their project which dropped from 6% at registration.

Increased physical activity levels were more common for Opportunity Fund volunteers (46%), whilst decreased physical activity levels were more common for females (34%).

Early data collected from volunteers since the outbreak of COVID-19 suggests that the pandemic had not impacted on volunteers' physical activity levels during the time they completed their experience survey.

Projects described through interviews how they had successfully increased physical activity levels amongst their volunteers. This was often through integrating physical activity into training or support sessions which volunteers were taking part in or through the volunteering opportunities themselves being active (e.g. litter picking).

> *"Volunteers are physically fitter and a little bit better at exercise because they are riding bikes, but they have to haul bikes and move bikes out of different containers which are quite heavy."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

> *"The small steps I have made in the last few week has made such a difference to everything in my life, my fitness and anxiety have improved."*
> — **Survey respondent**

Impact on the community

Overall, volunteers thought the **volunteering they had done through their project had positively impacted their community**. Volunteers gave a mean score of:

— **8.3** out of **10** for a positive impact on other people
— **8.0** out of **10** for it has brought different community members together

> *"It gives the members a new place to go to watch the games and gives the umpire a new seating area so it benefits the whole community. It looks better for the whole town."*
> — **Survey respondent**

> *"I've enjoyed the painting and putting in the drains. It is a way of giving back to the kids and the people of the community."*
> — **Survey respondent**

Further analysis[27] explored whether volunteer characteristics and volunteering experiences influenced the impact volunteers thought they had on both measures. These characteristics explain nearly one-quarter of the variance in the score (25% and 23% respectively). The factors associated with a higher score were:

— Greater satisfaction with the activities they took part in through their project
— Being involved in 'practical' activities compared to those who did not (for the measure 'positive impact on other people')
— Being involved in 'organising an activity or event' compared to those who did not (for 'brought different community members together')

Depth interviewees from projects delivering sporting activities explained how volunteers enabled them to **improve their own organisation's offer and gain new members**.

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[27] Multiple linear regression.

This also resulted in sporting activities being open for longer periods of time and opening at weekends, increasing the chances for more participants in the community to get active. It also improved the quality of the experience for members with more help on hand to answer questions and better maintained equipment.

> *"The centres have been better managed because we've had more people. It means that the quality experience of having someone to talk to is there, having the equipment always serviced and maintained and cleaned is another benefit."*
> **— Project Lead (depth interview)**

Projects that engaged with partners to deliver volunteering opportunities highlighted how **partners were now considering inclusivity** more within their organisation because of their participation. Examples of this included partners having an increased understanding of those with a disability or considering the valuable contribution young people can make to an organisation or to social action. Projects provided examples of partners hiring or working with young people more effectively to deliver sport. As a result, the perception of young people was being challenged and they were being viewed more positively:

> *"Communities now see young people as a positive part of their community. So, they're not just hoodies that stand on a street corner causing grief, they're actually young people that are really positive, and care about others, not just themselves, so I think that's a really positive statement."*
> **— Project Lead (depth interview)**

Projects also explained that by involving volunteers at partner sport venues, the venues had subsequently changed their policies and were now actively recruiting volunteers with disabilities.

Due to the broad range of volunteering activities on offer at projects, other community impacts were varied. Examples included:

— Tidier and more appealing neighbourhoods and outdoor spaces as a result of social action undertaken by volunteers e.g. litter picking by schoolchildren in the local park to encourage local people to get active.

— Volunteers applying their skills to maintain sporting venues (e.g. repairs and painting and decorating) which subsequently increased the number of visitors and paid membership.

— Fundraising activities resulting in the purchase of additional sporting equipment or money donated to charities to enable more physical activity to take place.

— A social action project designed to improve the environment and make the space more appealing for local people to get active described there was evidence of increased wildlife in the areas they had been working through collecting and disposing of litter.

— Care packages donated to food banks or transported food to food banks during COVID-19.

— The creation of fitness classes delivered online, in response to COVID-19, or conducted in open spaces in line with local tier restriction measures. Provided opportunities for people to get fit during lockdown.

> *"There's been a massive push towards people being more active generally in the media, you know with people like Joe Wicks, and all the channels on the telly, so for some of our projects they were quite inspirational warriors."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

More widely, projects described how the activities encouraged different community members to come together to volunteer.

> *"Over the three years of the programme, we've had a steady level of engagement from pupils in the schools who have really benefited from the programme, working alongside university volunteers…. we don't have many other programmes which work across a whole city, through a coalition, working in universities, working in primary schools, working in secondary schools, it kind of ticks off so many areas of a community from an educational perspective."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Impact on Volunteering Fund projects (host organisations)

Projects reflected on the impacts of the Volunteer Fund project delivery on their own organisation. Several projects articulated that funding from Sport England enabled them to **test new approaches which opened their ability to introduce new volunteering roles** that they would look to continue post funding. In collaboration with volunteers, projects had developed non-traditional volunteering offers moving beyond traditional sport volunteering of coaching or administration support. Projects highlighted roles such as those to help promote the project using social media, creating content for websites and newsletters, taking on elements of volunteer co-ordination roles (saving the project time), or technical volunteer roles such as bike maintenance.

> *"It was a demonstration that volunteering can be different, it doesn't have to be how you've always done it. Traditional volunteering is wonderful for many organisations, but have you thought there's a different way?' I think that's been a big impact."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Other projects highlighted that a **volunteer voice was now more prominent** within their organisation and part of their decision making. Projects cited improved communication at a strategic or operational level with their volunteering network.

> *"We send out the minutes to volunteers to have a look at so they can keep in the know with what's happening in the organisation and they can feed back and make decisions, so the coordinator helps those volunteers have the input where it's needed the most."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Interviewees also cited **closer ties with partner organisations** they had worked with during delivery of the project. Projects explained that because of the improved inclusivity of sports clubs they work alongside, they would be able to do more work with them in the future. Others highlighted how involving partners in the design of the project had strengthened their working relationship.

> *"There's been improved collaborative working. We've always worked across the region but this was a really nice project to be able to work very closely with and support each other, so I think that's been quite a big impact as well."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

Other projects now had a **better understanding of the value of undertaking research with the target audience in the project design phase and on an ongoing basis**. One example of this included a project that had re-designed their application process to make it more accessible. In another example, they had already applied the learning from the Volunteer Fund project to new projects they were delivering.

> *"All of the volunteering feedback goes to our senior management team in understanding what's working and what they want to see. Some of the new programmes we're delivering are entirely as a result of delivery of [project] and what young people have told us that they want."*
> — **Project Lead (depth interview)**

05. KEY FINDINGS

We have distilled the key findings emerging from the evaluation detailed in this report to provide tips for organisations considering delivering a volunteering project in the future:

— **Undertake research** with target groups, communities and partner organisations when designing a volunteering project to ensure that you are meeting the needs of your target audience(s) to engage in the opportunities.

— **Co-design** the project with target audiences to gain their buy in and give them a sense of ownership and autonomy.

— **Embrace inclusivity** in the design of your project by removing or alleviating barriers to volunteering that marginalised groups experience, being flexible about the range of volunteering opportunities available, and by supporting partner organisations to become more inclusive in their practice.

— **Provide adequate training and support** for volunteers to do their roles and consider how you could embed accredited qualifications into your delivery to provide volunteers with validated skills (where applicable).

— **Maintain regular contact with your volunteers** to build trust and keep them engaged.

— **Ensure opportunities are enjoyable** and embrace the **social aspects** of volunteering which can have positive impacts on your volunteers and encourage them to continue volunteering.

— **Practical activities** (e.g. helping to renovate or clean up a space and/or decorating or fixing a building or equipment) are particularly satisfying for volunteers and enable them to see the immediate impact of their volunteering.

— **Provide feedback to your volunteers** so that they know they are valued and understand the impact of the activities they are undertaking on others to encourage them to continue volunteering.

— **Continually improve** the project by obtaining **feedback from volunteers and beneficiaries** to promote volunteer retention and ensure you are meeting your target audiences' changing needs.

— **Online technology can streamline and improve elements of delivery** and remove barriers to participation **for some volunteers** – this is particularly useful when social contact is not permitted e.g. since the outbreak of COVID-19.

— **Signpost volunteers to alternative volunteering and support once their involvement in the project comes to an end**. Volunteers are keen to continue volunteering and are often already motivated to volunteer elsewhere, so keep up this momentum.

— **Consider the sustainability of your project** and how it could continue once funding is no longer available. This could be achieved through the capacity that has been developed amongst your existing volunteers or by securing funding from elsewhere, such as selling your services to customers or pursuing a franchise model of delivery.

— **A well-designed and delivered project can have a range of impacts**, including those on volunteers' subjective wellbeing, physical activity, individual

development, and their community and social development; on communities; in addition to the organisations involved in their delivery.

APPENDIX 1: ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS

IMD breakdown	Potential Fund	Opportunity Fund
Deciles 1 and 2 (top 20% of deprived areas)	35%	45%
Deciles 3 and 4	24%	20%
Deciles 5 and 6	18%	14%
Deciles 7 and 8	11%	11%
Deciles 9 and 10 (bottom 20% of deprived areas)	12%	9%

Table 3: IMD decile breakdown of volunteers.

Figure 7: Type of volunteering undertaken