

# THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING TO HEREFORDSHIRE



**Herefordshire Voluntary Action**

**Executive Summary**

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Herefordshire Voluntary Action was commissioned by the Herefordshire Infrastructure Consortium to undertake desktop research on the value of volunteering to Herefordshire, both economically and socially. The brief was to collate existing information/research and to make links to any relevant LPSA2 research being undertaken by Herefordshire Council. The study has summarised volunteering surveys undertaken both on a national, regional and local basis in the last twenty five years.

## Introduction

Almost every aspect of everyday life in Herefordshire– the communities in which we live, our physical environment, our schools and hospitals, our leisure and recreational activities - benefit from the input of thousands of volunteers. Without them many vital services such as meals on wheels, community transport and advice services would cease, essential organisations such as the Air Ambulance, St Michael's Hospice and Macmillan Nurses would also be drastically affected without the income generated by countless hours of volunteer fundraising. All registered charities would have to close as they could no longer function without Trustees all of whom are volunteers.

Over the last ten years there has been increasing recognition from all political parties of the value of volunteering both as a cost effective means of providing services and its positive contribution towards an active and participatory society. This has been demonstrated by a number of government initiatives to encourage more people to volunteer.

At the same time, there has been a growth in research which has attempted to value the contribution volunteers make both economically and socially to society. Equally, the voluntary and community sector has been keen to demonstrate the value of its services and support to the community.

## An Overview

There are various definitions of volunteering but the Volunteering Compact Code of Good Practice (2005) has simplified it to mean:

*'An activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives'*

Collecting statistics on volunteering is extremely difficult not just because many people who actually volunteer do not identify their activities as volunteering, but there is the added problem of differentiating between formal and informal volunteering. Additionally trying to calculate the number of hours undertaken provides another dilemma as some volunteering is regular while some is occasional or for others, a one-off activity. These issues are reflected in

the different ways data have been collected in the various surveys and so makes comparisons difficult to achieve.

### **The National Picture**

A series of three national surveys on volunteering were conducted in 1981, 1991 and 1997. Figures from 1997 showed that 48% of adults in the UK had volunteered formally at least once in the last 12 months, with 74% volunteering informally. Although this was a decrease from the 1991 figures, people were actually volunteering longer with an average of 4.05 hours per week for formal volunteering and 1.7hrs for informal.

The Home Office conducted Citizenship Surveys in England and Wales 2001, 2003 and 2005 which included gathering information on levels of volunteering both on a formal and informal basis. They show a decrease on the earlier national studies but this may be due to the way the figures were collected. In 2001, 39% volunteered formally at least once in the last twelve months and 27% at least once in the past month, and by 2005 this had risen to 44% and 29% respectively. Full data for 2005 is yet to be published, but in 2003 formal volunteering was estimated to be worth £22.5 billion and informal, £22.6billion.

### **Previous Research on Volunteering in Herefordshire**

In 2000 the study 'Valuing the Voluntary Sector in Herefordshire and Worcestershire', found that 13,779 adults formally volunteered in Herefordshire, contributing a total of 1,788,643 hours per year. Applying an hourly wage rate of £8.53, volunteering was estimated to be worth £15,257,124. Representing 9% of the county's population, the numbers volunteering would seem to be an underestimate.

In 2003 Regional Action West Midlands mapped the contribution the voluntary and community sector made to the economy of the West Midlands and calculated that 435,000 people formally volunteered. An economic value was calculated at £255m based on minimum wage, or £658 million if based on equivalent administrative and management hourly salary rates. No countywide breakdown was undertaken.

Two other Herefordshire Council studies looked at voluntary activity – Herefordshire Voice Survey 2002 and Youth Survey 2003-05. Due to the way questions were phrased, data collected gave no clear picture of the levels of volunteering.

### **Volunteering in Herefordshire in 2006**

Information was gathered on volunteering by Herefordshire Council through its Customer Satisfaction Survey 2005-06 which was sent to 3057 homes. This provided baseline data for the Council's Local Public Service Agreement target of increasing formal adult volunteering by 5% points during 2006-08. It found that 37% of the 1137 respondents had volunteered at least once in the past twelve months and 27% had volunteered at least once in the last 4 weeks. While recognising that the sample of 412 who said they volunteered is quite low, this study used the Council's data to calculate that 19% of the county's adult population volunteered on average less than 2hrs per week, 12% volunteered 2-4 hours per week and 5% gave 5 hours or more a week of their time to voluntary activity. An hourly rate of £8.95

based on the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings average median hourly rate for Herefordshire in 2005 of £7.78 plus 15% employers on-costs, was applied to provide an economic value as follows:

**50,790 adults volunteer**

**4,941,500 hours per annum**

**or**

**Equivalent of 2376 full time workers**

**The value of volunteering is £44.2million**

### **Social Value of Volunteering**

There is no evidence in this county of a social value ever having been placed on volunteering. Consequently this report looked at some of the national studies which had been undertaken on the benefits of volunteering to the volunteers themselves and to their community. There appears to be no reason why these findings should not apply to Herefordshire. Summaries of the benefits in terms of employment, health, reduction in crime and increased community cohesion and citizenship are documented in the full report.

Volunteering can have enormous benefits for the volunteers themselves. As there appear to be no studies available that are specific to Herefordshire, Herefordshire Voluntary Action ran a competition in April 2006, asking volunteers to say in their own words what volunteering means to them. Some of the entries support far more eloquently the value of volunteering than any words in this study could hope to achieve and can be found at the end of this summary.

**I had some time on my hands during the long summer vacation, so I decided to do some voluntary work at a local nature reserve.**

**It was brilliant – I made loads of new friends. It also increased my social life and made me feel that I had made a real contribution to the environment.**

**James aged 19**

*For years I had been working in a dead end job and always felt something was missing from my life. I wanted a challenge and felt that I would like to train to become a social worker but didn't know if I would be any good at it. Hereford Volunteer Centre gave me lots of help on volunteering opportunities which would give me a taster of what I might be letting myself in for. I've now been volunteering for a couple of years mentoring young people and I've now started my social work diploma. Volunteering certainly helps if you're thinking about changing direction in your life.*

*- Chris aged 46*

*We all need to be needed in this world and, whilst I have my health, I want to use each day to some purpose. During the 17 years since I have been widowed I have become increasingly involved in volunteering in varying degrees – mainly in fundraising, not necessarily giving money, but giving TIME, the most valuable asset we have these days....So why has volunteering helped me? It has prevented me becoming a selfish, miserable old lady. I now know so many people and have so many commitments, I haven't time to feel lonely.*

*Jean – aged 83*

After leaving university last year it became apparent to me that learning theory alone would not be enough to a job in the profession I wished to pursue. In order to gain experience, I decided to undertake a voluntary placement with SHYPP. Not only have I learnt key skills for future employment, I believe it has helped improve personal qualities such as an increase in my confidence, helped me to communicate with others better as well as increasing my motivation. I would definitely recommend volunteering to anyone who wants to expand their knowledge and skills or simply try something different.

Lucy - aged 22.

*I started to volunteer when I was coming to the end of my Army service. I became secretary of Putson Residents' Association and then later, Chair. All this was to help me get better after leaving the army with serious back injury. Through attending a lot of meetings and events I became fitter and I was then able to become a sports leader after completing a course with HVA. Volunteering helped my confidence – I gained employment from my new skills. It also helped me to find out more about the needs of the local community and to try improving their quality of life.*

*Steve – aged 56*

Volunteering was a life saver for me. I was going through a really low period of my life – divorce, struggling to pay the bills – everything seemed to be collapsing around my ears. I couldn't work as I was so depressed. My doctor suggested volunteering so I started helping in a local charity, answering the telephone, photocopying, sticking labels on envelopes, that sort of thing. Some days I didn't feel up to going in and the staff always understood. Gradually, I built up my confidence again and began to feel much better. I now have a paid job with that charity and life's looking great.

Sue – aged 37

*I volunteer with Age Concern because I care about people, especially those less able to help themselves. To me, personally, the rewards from volunteering are greater than any I received in my working life – a happy environment, great people and best of all the thanks from the many I've been able to help – worth much more than a big salary! Try It!*

*Cynthia 72 and a bit*

**Being confined to a wheelchair I look forward to getting out of the house and I believe that through volunteering, meeting people and helping others, I am having a positive impact on my life**

**Stephen aged 30**

## Conclusion

The volunteering experience and contribution is unique but is often unrecognised or undervalued. Whilst this study has sought to place an economic value on volunteering, it should be stressed that volunteers should never be seen as a substitute for paid labour or exploited to do work that should be paid. We believe that the amount of time volunteers give should be acknowledged and celebrated by Herefordshire. As a frequently used anonymous quotation aptly states:

**Volunteers are not paid, not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.**

With so little statistical information available on the level of volunteering activity in Herefordshire, it has been difficult to make comparisons not just with the national trends, but also to ascertain whether volunteering has fluctuated on a countywide basis over any period of time. Certainly it can be argued that the economic value we have placed on volunteering in Herefordshire has been based on a relatively low sample and it is hoped that further surveys will be undertaken on a regular basis which will substantiate these calculations.

Herefordshire Council will be conducting another Customer Satisfaction Survey in 2007 to ascertain whether formal volunteering has increased. This summer it will also be consulting the Herefordshire Voice panel to look in more detail at why people do or do not volunteer and the barriers that prevent them from volunteering. It will also be interesting to see whether the ageing population of the county will have a significant impact on the pool of volunteers over time.

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