Tackling inequalities in health through volunteering – insights from research

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Why is volunteering a public health issue?

- Volunteering has potential as a population level intervention to support better health & wellbeing
- Part of wider (public) health workforce
- Volunteers can connect to at-risk groups extending the reach and uptake of public health programmes
- BUT there are inequalities in volunteering and barriers to participation
Volunteering – the benefits

For volunteers
For recipients
For health & social care organisations
For communities
Number of health and social care employees, volunteers and carers in England

Roles – bridging and connecting

“It’s not that sort of authority figure that’s part of this establishment coming over telling me how to live my life sort of thing, you know it’s informal, it’s done on the scene sort of thing, your asking when you have finished your pint let’s go over and wee into that bottle or whatever.” (volunteer)

“They tend to get to know your face, you can talk to them in the paper shop, in the queue at the post office. They know who you are. They’re not frightened to approach you at a fete or anything like that, they come across, they have a natter with you.” (volunteer)

Volunteering, inequalities and public health: Barriers to Volunteering – review findings

Jane South
Kris Southby
Older men and older women more likely to volunteer *formally* volunteering…but older men less likely to volunteer *informally* (DCLG, 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Older people - barriers</th>
<th>Younger People - barriers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ Poor health, physical functioning</td>
<td>➢ Lack of institutional support</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Poverty</td>
<td>➢ Not being socialised into volunteering</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Stigma</td>
<td>➢ Negative perceptions of volunteering</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ Lack of skills</td>
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<td>➢ Poor transport</td>
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<td>➢ Time constraints</td>
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<td>➢ Volunteer management</td>
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<td>➢ Caring responsibilities</td>
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</tbody>
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**Disability**

Disability not found to be significantly related to formal or informal volunteering (DCLG, 2011) – surprising (???)

Literature suggest disabled people may experience…

- Disablist attitudes, including...
- Perception of very little to offer
- Too much effort to support
- Stigma
- Lack of skills
- Concerns about participating outside of ‘safe spaces’
Social exclusion

Social gradient to volunteering in the England and Wales

Citizenship Survey 2009-2010, Participation in formal and informal volunteering regularly, by Index of Multiple Deprivation
Barriers to volunteering

Demographic groups
- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Pregnancy/maternity
- Ethnicity
- Relationship status
- Religion
- Sexual orientation

BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

Socialisation
- Parental/peer support
- Social justice/pro-social values

Institutional factors
- Access to opportunities
- Volunteer management
- Stigmatising/exclusionary context
- Lack of appropriate support

Personal resources
- Skills/qualifications
- Time
- Financial cost
- Transportation
- Social connections
- Healthy/physical functioning

View of volunteering
- Poor perception
- Knowledge of volunteering/roles
- Different conceptualisation

Caring responsibilities
- Caring roles
- Not having children
- Not being married

Employment
- F/T employment
- Not in F/T employment
- Employer support
Myth – people don’t want to be involved

1. How many volunteer walk leaders are there in England?
2. How many health champions were recruited by Altogether Better in first 4 years?
3. How many volunteers in the City of Manchester in 2017?
CONCLUSION - Volunteering is a public health issue

- Volunteering has potential as a population level intervention to support better health & wellbeing
- Volunteering can provide positive pathways for those experiencing social exclusion
- Volunteers can connect to at-risk groups
- People want to be involved
- BUT…we need to ensure that all groups, but especially those who experience disadvantage, can benefit from volunteering opportunities
- Volunteering = a social justice issue
Acknowledgments

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**Full report can be found** [here](#).

**Summary can be found** [here](#).

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