

# Giving back going forwards

How volunteering should respond to changing needs



**citizens  
advice**

# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>Part 1: Why volunteering matters</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>Part 2: More than 'giving back' - how volunteer needs are changing</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.1 Employability and skills</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.2 Community engagement and influence</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.3 Health and wellbeing</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Part 3: A new volunteering agenda?</b>	<b>29</b>

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# Executive Summary

Volunteering involves people giving their time to help others outside of their household, without being motivated by money or mandated by the state. It is one of the most valuable forms of citizen contribution to society, and can take many forms: from carrying shopping for an elderly neighbour, to helping at a homeless shelter over the holiday period, to serving as a Governor at a local school.

Many millions of people give their time freely for the good of others every year, and their voluntary action generates enormous value. Successive governments have rightly recognised this value. The new Conservative Government looks set to build on this through its manifesto commitments to extend the National Citizen Service and give everyone who works for the public sector or a large company three days paid volunteering leave.

Welcome as these measures are, in a society that prizes volunteering, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels.

The volunteering landscape is changing. Demographic shifts, changes to people's working lives, the advent of new technology, and much else, means that volunteering over the next few decades is unlikely to look much like volunteering of the past.

Organisations that depend on volunteers need to understand the changing motivations and needs of volunteers, acknowledging and responding to competing pressures on their time against a changing backdrop of working, family and community life. Volunteering organisations need to ensure their offer to volunteers fits with people's real lives and is responsive to their motivations and needs, to ensure that volunteering remains a core part of our society.

In this report, we take the experiences and motivations of our own volunteers as 'prompts', for wider inquiry into volunteers' needs in a changing social and political backdrop, and consider how volunteering can meet some of the major challenges facing wider society as well as the social good volunteers deliver to others.

Firstly, our research found that many people are motivated to volunteer into order to improve their employment prospects. Volunteering can help people to gain the skills and experience that will help them move closer to work. Being responsive to this means volunteering needs to fit with people's experience of today's labour market and new working patterns, or support those transitioning to work.

In doing so, the sector can help the Government achieve one of its central manifesto commitments: full employment.

Secondly, we found that many people are motivated to volunteer to develop a stake in their community, or get involved in an area by helping others. With the context of more and more people living in private rented accommodation, more diverse and in many areas more 'virtual' communities, volunteering organisations need to reach out to people and create institutions to help people come together and help each other. This means volunteering organisations need to connect with people in communities beyond their "civic core". They must also better harness the time and energy people spend online, and translate that time and energy to impactful, offline local community action.

Finally, we found that for many people volunteering is a way to help improve their health and wellbeing. Volunteering organisations should establish and promote the health and wellbeing benefits of their work, and collaborate with agencies to ensure that those likely to benefit have access to volunteering opportunities. Organisations should also create opportunities for volunteers to connect outside of their 'working day' and ensure that the opportunities they provide are flexible and responsive to changing or fluctuating health needs.

This paper argues for a new agenda for volunteering organisations and for government: responsive volunteering. Volunteering shouldn't exist as peripheral to the challenges society faces: an ageing population, increased pressure on public services and labour market insecurity, all in an era of constrained public spending. If it is to be fit for modern life, volunteering must respond to the changing needs of volunteers and wider society.

### **Box 1: Volunteers are central to the Citizens Advice service**

As the one of the largest voluntary organisations in the UK, Citizens Advice has an important stake in the future of volunteering and the voluntary sector.

In 2013-14, over 21,500 Citizens Advice volunteers donated nearly seven million hours of service, amounting to a contribution of £111 million worth of volunteering hours. Our volunteers perform all sorts of roles - from advising to administration, technology support, press relations and trusteeship - and their contributions enable Citizens Advice to provide our services within local communities in over 3,300 locations across England and Wales.

The new Government and voluntary organisations should consider how volunteering can be an effective means of directly addressing social challenges, not solely through the work that volunteers do, but by using volunteering as a mechanism to support employment, health and community life for our volunteers and society more widely. We conclude this report with some challenges for the sector and government to encourage both to begin considering how this could be achieved.

Citizens Advice will be using these insights to challenge our own practice through research, delivery, and innovation across our service. Many other charities and voluntary organisations have been and will be doing the same.

## Data sources

This report draws on primary quantitative and qualitative data from our volunteers about their motivations and experiences of working with Citizens Advice. The quantitative data is from primary research with nearly 1,500 Citizens Advice volunteers in 2013 (hereafter referred to as Citizens Advice Volunteers survey). The qualitative data is from in-depth interviews and focus groups with a non-representative sample of 29 volunteers from across our service in April 2015.

This report also presents new findings from a nationally representative survey of England and Wales about public attitudes and engagement with civil life more broadly (hereafter referred to as Civic Life survey). This was an online survey of 2,025 UK adults, carried out between 15 and 29 December 2014.

We also reference our own internal demographic data on our volunteer workforce, from our 'Bureaux Characteristic Survey'.

# Part 1: Why volunteering matters

Volunteering is one of the most valuable contributions citizens make to society. It involves individuals performing activities for the good of others, outside of the household, without pay or compulsion.<sup>1</sup> This can take many different forms, ranging from informal help we give directly to others - such as helping an elderly neighbour with their shopping - to formal unpaid work through charities or institutions - such as sitting as a magistrate in court.

## Volunteering provides value to our society

Citizens freely giving up their time, skills and energy to support others provides enormous value to society. A recent analysis from Andy Haldane, Chief Economist at the Bank of England, calculates that the economic value of volunteering could exceed £50 billion per year, which is around 3.5% of annual UK GDP (and the same size the UK energy sector).

Furthermore, Haldane calculates that for every £1 invested in voluntary activities - such as providing support to the homeless - society reaps at least £2 in terms of social value in return by tackling the costs of problems.<sup>2</sup>

Experience from our own service supports this. In 2013-14 Citizens Advice volunteers contributed the equivalent of £111 million worth of volunteering hours.<sup>3</sup>

So it's welcome that successive governments have widely recognised the value of volunteering. The last Government formally renewed the Compact<sup>4</sup> - the voluntary agreement which sets the framework for effective working between Government and the voluntary sector - with a view to enabling more opportunities for volunteering. The coalition government also established the Centre for Social Action and the National Citizen Service to recognise volunteers' contribution to public services and encourage more people take a more active role in their communities.

The new Conservative Government looks set to build on this agenda by expanding the National Citizen Service, and giving those employed by the public sector or large company a new workplace entitlement to three days volunteering leave on full pay.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Manual on the measurement of volunteer work* (2011) International Labour Organisation

<sup>2</sup> Haldane, A. (2014) *In giving, how much do we receive? The social value of volunteering* <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Documents/speeches/2014/speech756.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Citizens Advice Bureaux Characteristic Survey 2013-14

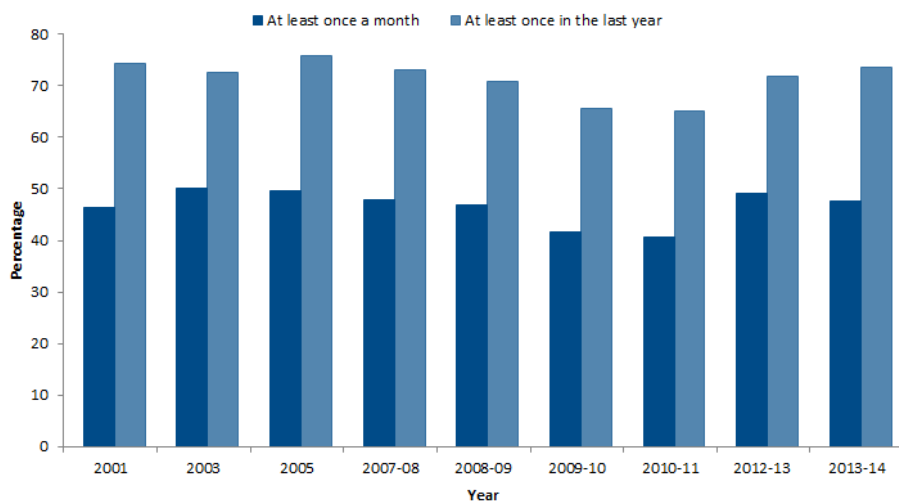
<sup>4</sup> *The Compact: The Coalition Government and civil society organisations working effectively in partnership for the benefit of communities and citizens in England* (2010) Cabinet Office

<sup>5</sup> *The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015*. <https://www.conservatives.com/Manifesto>. Citizens Advice has offered all our paid employees three days paid volunteering leave for a number of years, so we welcome other organisations and institutions doing the same. Many of our staff members use these days to give back to their communities at various points across the year.

## Volunteering is a core part of civic life

There is a considerable number of people who freely give their time to help others. In 2013-14, almost three-quarters (74%) of people in England had taken part in some form of volunteering at least once in the last 12 months.<sup>6</sup> Just under half (48%) participated in volunteering at least once a month, amounting to 26 million people who regularly volunteered in 2013-14.<sup>7</sup> And this commitment is lasting; participation levels have remained relatively stable over the past few years.<sup>8</sup>

Chart 1: Percentage of people who volunteering in 2013/14<sup>9</sup>



Rates of formal volunteering (where individuals give their time through clubs, charities or organisations) had lower participation levels than informal volunteering (helping someone directly) as might be expected given the level of participation required. 35 per cent of people in England said that they volunteered informally at least once a month in 2013/14, compared to 27 per cent of formal volunteering. This rises to 64 per cent of people who volunteered informally at least once that year, compared with 41 per cent who had volunteered formally at least once.

<sup>6</sup> *Community Life Survey: England, 2013-2014 Statistical Bulletin* (2014) Cabinet Office

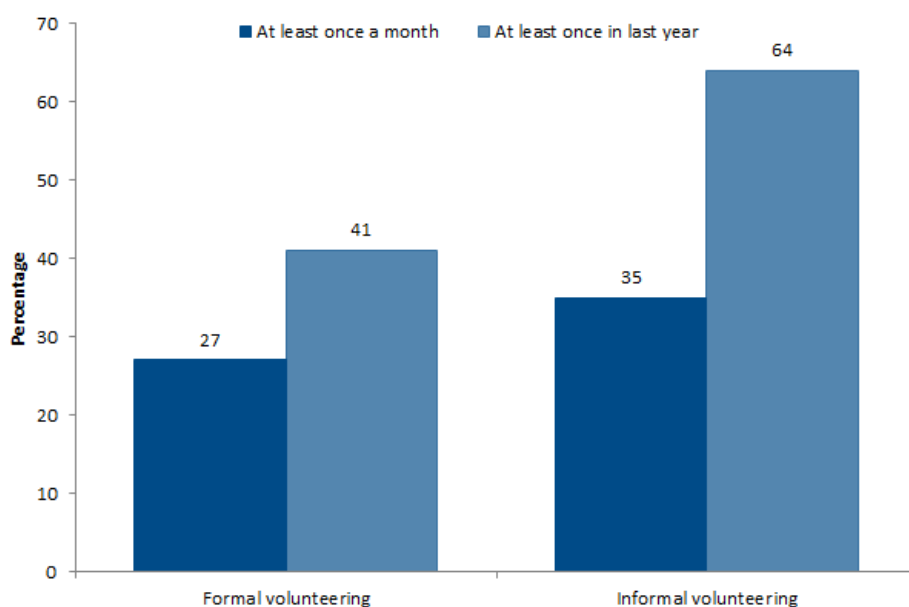
<sup>7</sup> Based on ONS population estimate mid-2013. Exact figure is 25,855,592

<sup>8</sup> Data prior to 2012/13 comes from the Citizenship Survey which ran from 2001 to 2011, when it was discontinued and replaced by the Community Life Survey in 2012

<sup>9</sup> *Community Life Survey: England, 2013-2014 Statistical Bulletin* (2014) Cabinet Office



Chart 2: Percentage participation in formal and informal volunteering in 2013/14<sup>10</sup>



Those 50 years old and over contribute the most voluntary hours per year.<sup>11</sup> But volunteering isn't only the preserve of older generations: 16-24s are the age group with highest participation in informal or formal volunteering; 80 per cent of this age group had participated at least once in 2013/14. And younger generations are more likely to value volunteering as a core part of civic responsibility. Our Civic Life survey found a third of the population cite volunteering as an important part of being a responsible person in society. This rises to 45 per cent amongst those born in or after 1990.<sup>12</sup>

### **Volunteers are motivated for altruistic reasons, and this should be celebrated**

People are primarily motivated to volunteer for altruistic reasons. Millions of citizens give up their time because they want to help others or improve their community.

Amongst those engaged in regular (at least once a month), formal volunteering, by far the most popular reason to start volunteering was "to improve things or help people."<sup>13</sup> Secondly, that the cause was important to them (40 per cent of respondents). 28 per cent of people said that they felt there was a need in their community, and 25 per cent indicated it was part of their philosophy of life to help others.

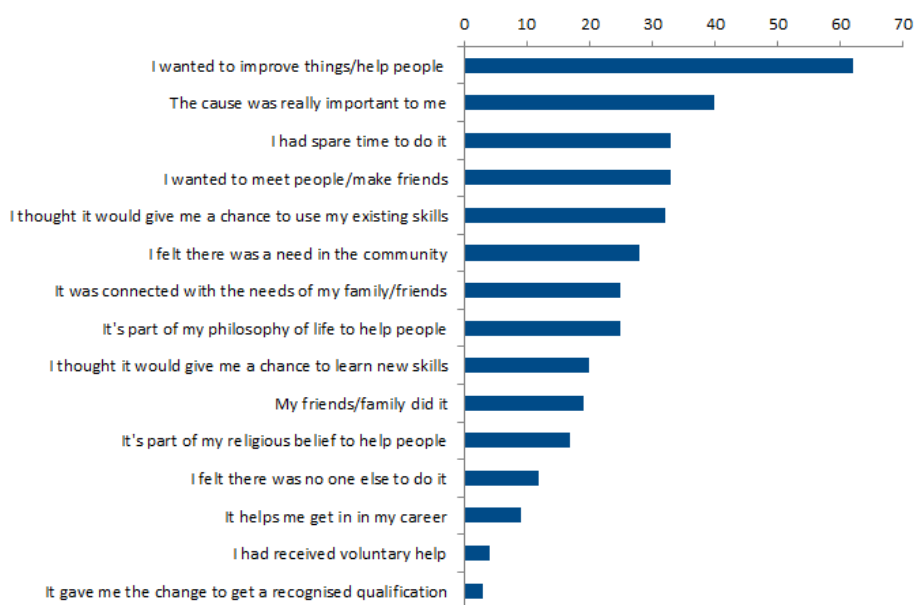
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *Household Satellite Accounts* (2013) Office for National Statistics

<sup>12</sup> Civic Life survey

<sup>13</sup> *2008-09 Citizenship Survey: Volunteering and Charitable Giving Topic Report* (2010) Department for Communities and Local Government

Chart 3: Percentage those who participated in formal volunteering at least once a month who selected each motivations for volunteering<sup>14</sup>



### But despite this commitment, we can't rest on our laurels

Every organisation that relies on volunteers knows that their commitment cannot be taken for granted. Volunteers choose to freely give their time, but this does not mean working with volunteers doesn't demand investment in return. It costs money. Volunteers themselves need support, training and a decent volunteering offer that fits around their lives. And given wider social and economic changes to how we work, where we live, and how we grow old, those who are able or willing to engage in structured, formal volunteering may become a scarce resource.

Looking ahead, people wanting to volunteer may face an even more complex set of choices about how to give their time.

Recent years have seen changes to the labour market such as a rise in maternal employment, an increase in precarious work patterns, and a longer journey from education into employment which will put pressure on individuals' ability and time to contribute to volunteering. Our experience of older age and retirement is already very different to that of those retiring twenty years ago in part due to the increase in the state pension age and no compulsory retirement, and an ageing population living longer than ever before (often requiring care and support).

As fewer people own their own homes, there may be more people with less of a 'stake' in their communities given volunteers tend to be people who have lived in areas for a long time. Communities are also in many areas more diverse, and many engage and act online in virtual communities rather than on their doorstep. Volunteering organisations can play an important role in strengthening

<sup>14</sup> 2008-09 Citizenship Survey: Volunteering and Charitable Giving Topic Report (2010) Department for Communities and Local Government.

communities to provide opportunities for local social action. But we need to take account of how people's expectations of communities may be changing.

Finally, as the population ages, more people face longer life living with long-term health conditions and complex social care needs. Volunteering brings important health benefits for the volunteer through preventing isolation, supporting people with mental and physical health problems to keep active and engaged, and improving wellbeing and self-esteem. Those wanting to volunteer may do so for different reasons, demanding different capabilities and opportunities from volunteer organisations.

Organisations that depend on volunteers need to meet the needs and motivations of modern society by providing volunteering opportunities that keep pace with modern life.

Furthermore, volunteering cannot operate as peripheral to the changes and challenges of working, family and community life. As a society we need to consider how best to spend the billions of hours given in volunteering to ensure they deliver returns, both to the individual and to society as a whole.

# Part 2: More than 'giving back' - how volunteer needs are changing

This section looks at three areas where we argue the prominence of motivations of volunteering, are especially significant in the context of new challenges of modern life: employment; community cohesion; and mental and physical health

We spoke to Citizens Advice volunteers about their motivations, as a prompt for understanding more about how people's experience of volunteering is changing. We consider these motivations in the context of broader social and economic trends, to explore how the volunteer offer could better fit with modern life.

We suggest how local and national government could consider volunteering as a core mechanism for addressing some of the social and economic challenges we face: improving employability and skills, supporting integrated communities, and promoting physical and mental health.

## 2.1 Employability and skills

The link between volunteering and the labour market is an increasingly important motivation for volunteers. The difficulty of getting into stable employment has led more people to volunteering to gain skills and improve their employability.

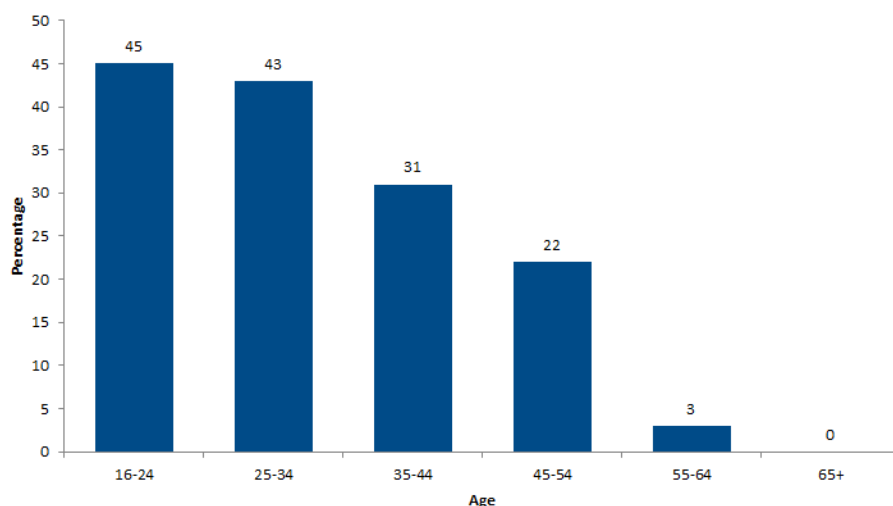
### **Improving employability and gaining skills are important to our volunteers, and becoming even more important amongst young people**

There are strong drivers to volunteer to improve employment prospects. One in eight of our volunteers selected improving their employment prospects as a key motivation for volunteering with Citizens Advice. This was strongly linked with age, as might be expected the youngest of our volunteers were most likely to select this, with almost half of 16-24s, falling to almost a third of 35-44s and no over 65s.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Citizens Advice Volunteers survey

Chart 4: Percentage of volunteers who selected “improve my employment prospects” as a motivation



We have also seen more and more young people looking to take advantage of volunteering opportunities, with an increase in the proportion of young people applying to volunteer with our service. Between 2007/08 and 2013/14, the proportion of our volunteers who are under 25 has risen from 6 per cent to 10 per cent. Since April 2013 20 per cent of our new joiners are from this age group.<sup>16</sup>

Many of these young people are students or unemployed looking to gain skills to improve their employment prospects.

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*“I’m 22 and in my opinion you have to be thinking about employability, you have to be thinking about a career... You’ve got literally the rest of your life ahead of you and you hear all the time how difficult it is to be in employment and an actually worthwhile career. So, for a young person, whether they say it or not, it has to be employability.”*

**Citizens Advice volunteer**

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One recently graduated law student volunteering with Citizens Advice explained that they were motivated by wanting to learn new skills and reported the challenge of trying to enter the labour market with little or no experience: “I don't actually have any work experience. I just have my degree and I found it's been really tough looking for jobs”.

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<sup>16</sup> Citizens Advice Bureaux Characteristic Survey 2013-14

## **Others are motivated to volunteer to help them move closer to the labour market**

Through qualitative research with Citizens Advice volunteers, we found that volunteering has a strong pull for people who have taken time out of work. Those seeking work (either for the first time, following a career break to raise children, or after a spell of unemployment) were motivated to volunteer both to contribute to the good of others and as a way to acquire the skills, references and experiences which will improve their employment prospects.

Several volunteers mentioned colleagues (usually women) who had left a job to look after children, and began volunteering as a possible pathway to work.

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*“We also have people - probably women - who have had their family and want to get back into employment. They are not that old. This is a sort of step up into employment. Sometimes they have a part time job and they come into CAB.”*

**Citizens Advice volunteer**

*“I know a lot of women who have stopped working when they had children, for example. When they want to get back into working - full time or part time - they can find it easier to start by volunteering somewhere.”*

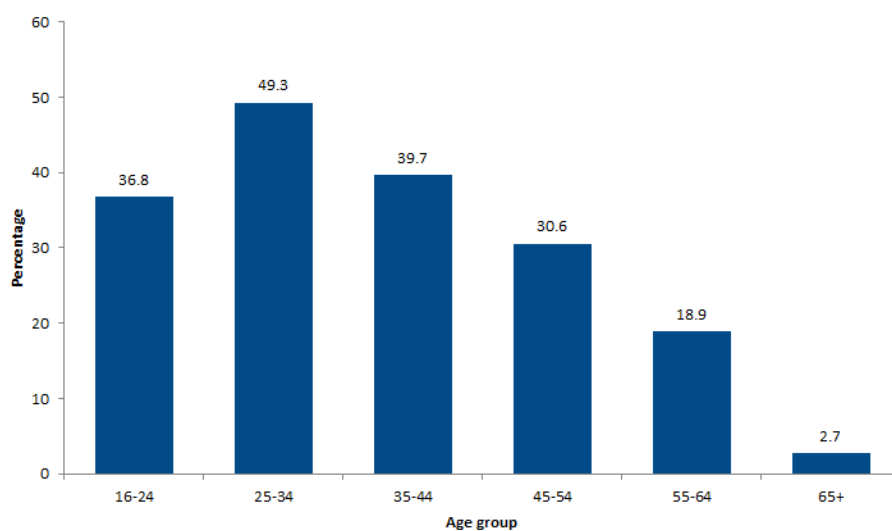
**Citizens Advice volunteer**

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## **These motivations reflect people’s experience of a more insecure and changing labour market in the wake of the downturn**

Although the economy is recovering, many people are still worried about their ability to find and secure work. Almost a third of people still regularly think about the security of their job, a figure which peaks at almost half for 25-34 year olds.

Chart 5: Percentage of individuals who think about the security of their job on a day to day basis<sup>17</sup>



### **This is particularly the case amongst young people, who worry about lasting effects of unemployment**

The transition between education and employment has become longer and riskier. This is most pronounced for those with lower-level educational qualifications and less or no work experience. Even those who are in employment are much more likely than older colleagues to be “under-employed” by working part-time but wanting to work full time, or working in jobs that don’t reflect their qualifications or utilise their skills.

There are currently almost a million 16-24 year olds in the UK who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs).<sup>18</sup> While youth unemployment rose in 2008 as a response to the recession, the transition into stable, secure work for young people has been getting harder, even in the boom years of the 00s.

The number of under 25s who are NEET and have never worked has been steadily increasing since early last decade.<sup>19</sup> This may relate to the rising number of young people who have never had any kind of part-time job while in education or training.

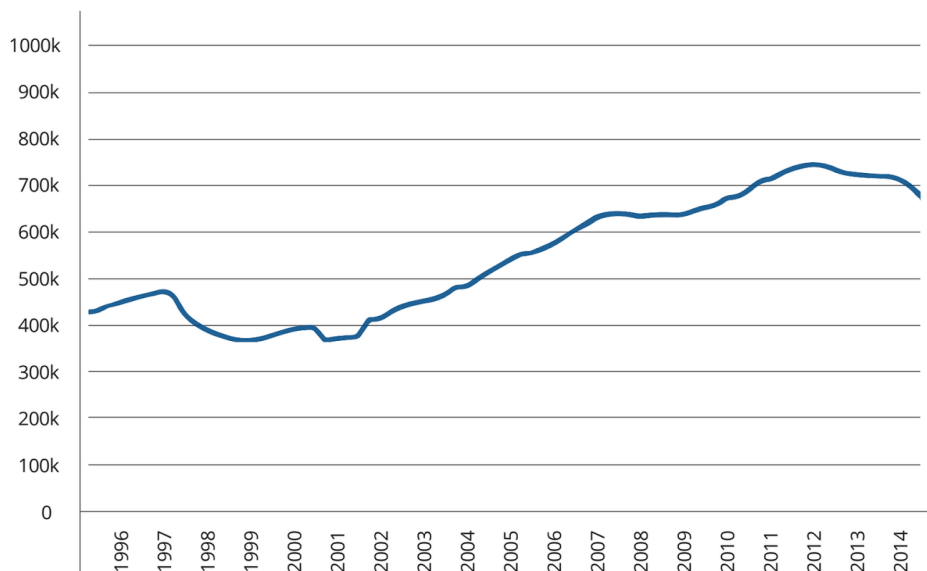
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<sup>17</sup> Civic Life survey

<sup>18</sup> *Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), May 2015* (2015) Office for National Statistics

<sup>19</sup> Dolphin, T. (2014) *Remember the young ones: improving career opportunities for Britain’s young people*. IPPR

Chart 6: The number of under workless under 25s, not in full-time education, who have never had a job<sup>20</sup>



The ‘scars’ of unemployment for the young are acute, diminishing the likelihood of ever moving into secure employment: the percentage of long-term unemployed young people (those unemployed for over a year) has been rising across the last ten years.

**And jobs themselves are becoming less certain, with more people working in temporary or part-time roles**

While more pronounced amongst the young, Britain has also seen a rise in insecure or more precarious work affecting older workers as well.

There has been a rise in precarious work and insecure work. Currently 1.7 million people in the UK are in temporary jobs,<sup>21</sup> and 700,000 people in the UK are on zero-hours contract, which provides no guarantee of paid work from week to week.<sup>22</sup>

Changes to the retirement age and an ageing and growing population means that more and more people will continue to work or move to part-time work in later life, blurring the line between work and retirement.

**Can volunteering improve employability?**

What little research has been done on volunteering as a route to employment isn’t straightforward: it provides work experience, but it can take time away from applying for and engaging in paid work. Evidence from the British Household Panel

<sup>20</sup> National Minimum Wage: Final government evidence for the Low Pay Commission’s 2015 Report (2015) Department for Business, Innovation & Skills

<sup>21</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2015) Labour Force Survey, May 2015

<sup>22</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2015) Analysis of Employee Contracts that do not Guarantee a Minimum Number of Hours



survey, found a mixed outcome, depending on who was volunteering and how frequently.<sup>23</sup>

However the data used for the study had no information on the type (formal or informal) or quality of volunteering activity that was undertaken. Volunteering experiences which were formal, offered extensive training and had opportunities for management or clear outputs, may have had different impacts on employment than other more informal engagement.

Our Value of Volunteering research found that all our volunteers report they gained a practical skill through volunteering with Citizens Advice, and 9 in 10 say they gained more than one. 4 in 5 working volunteers believe that their employability has increased and 8 in 10 unemployed volunteers believe that volunteering with Citizens Advice is helping them to overcome at least one barrier to employment.<sup>24</sup> 35 per cent of those who are self-employed and 40 per cent of those employed and working at least 30 hours a week, cite wanting to learn new skills as a reason for them volunteering with Citizens Advice.<sup>25</sup> For some individuals, volunteering at Citizens Advice was the first step back to work. In 2012/13, almost a third of volunteers who left Citizens Advice did so for paid employment, education or training.<sup>26</sup>

### **Conclusion: Volunteering opportunities need to fit people's experience of today's labour market and help people to balance their commitments alongside work**

A volunteering sector which boosts skills or employability can support the government in meeting their manifesto commitments. To pursue an agenda of full employment, the government will need to not just support job seekers into work, but encourage those who are not employed or formally seeking employment to engage with the labour market.

Volunteering can be complementary to employment strategies from Department of Work and Pensions, or by partners like local government or Job Centre Plus. Volunteering can be a first step for those who are furthest away from work, and may face barriers to job seeking, such as parents who have left employment to raise a family or individuals with disabilities. This can be an opportunity for individuals to assess their own needs to gain a better understanding of their own ability to move closer to the world of work.

Volunteering can also help increase productivity by protecting against underemployment of educated young people who struggle to move into graduate

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<sup>23</sup> Paine et al. (2013) *Does volunteering improve employability? Evidence from the British Household Panel Survey* Third Sector Research Centre Working Paper 100

<sup>24</sup> *CAB volunteering - how everyone benefits: The value of CAB volunteering to individuals, communities and society* (2014) Citizens Advice

<sup>25</sup> Citizens Advice Volunteers survey

<sup>26</sup> Citizens Advice Bureaux Characteristic Survey, 2012/13

jobs without relevant work experience. Volunteering can also harness the skills of those who have retired.

Volunteering opportunities need to reflect the context of people's experience of today's labour market, and match motivations of people wanting to volunteer with the needs of organisations who rely on volunteer commitment.

First, volunteering will increasingly be done alongside work, rather than in place of work. Currently, people 50 and over make up the majority of volunteering hours. Changes to people's experience of later life means volunteering will need to fit around other demands, particularly as people are more stretched caring for family members, partners, or caring for grandchildren as more mothers return to work.<sup>27</sup>

Second, increasing numbers of people are working in irregular or fluctuating patterns. As people's time is more fragmented, volunteering opportunities should reflect the different kinds of contributions people are able to give, for example through more discrete volunteering opportunities with low barriers to entry.

Third, as people struggle to move into secure work, they may value volunteering as an opportunity to upskill, and gain confidence and experience. For those who face more significant barriers to getting a job, for example the long-term unemployed, or those who have never had a job, volunteering can provide the basic skills and structure that can increase their employability, enabling them to begin more formal job seeking.

#### **Box 2: Responding to the needs of young volunteers**

Citizens Advice is being more proactive in seeking out young people as volunteers, and tailoring the offer that we make to reflect their motivations to increase employability and improve their skills. One example is the approach of Manchester Citizens Advice towards reaching out to students, and boosting their employability. Manchester is a city with two large universities, and Manchester Citizens Advice actively engages with the student population through placing adverts on the university website and attending events at the university such as pro bono fairs. Manchester Citizens Advice will soon begin to specifically target social policy students to help with their research and campaigns work. This creates a 'win-win' scenario for both parties: the local Citizens Advice can benefit from the enthusiasm and academic expertise of the students, and the students benefit from the skills and experience that come with being able to apply their knowledge of social policy in a practical, 'real-world' setting.

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<sup>27</sup> Ben-Galim, D and Silim, A. (2013) *The Sandwich Generation - Older women balancing work and care*. IPPR

## Challenges

For government:

1. The Department for Work and Pensions, as well as partners in Job Centre Plus, should consider how volunteering could help to support full employment
2. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should consider how volunteering opportunities might help to boost productivity, by upskilling and protecting against under employment

For the sector:

To be fit for modern life, volunteering organisations need to consider:

3. Making explicit opportunities to improve employability: reflect on their offer for volunteers to address their motivations of skill development and work experience prized by employers
4. Creating transition opportunities for those leaving volunteering to work: to keep the valuable skills, knowledge and links individuals develop, organisations should think about providing transition models where trained volunteers maintain contact if they get a job, through mentoring or training new volunteers, keeping a small number of contact hours, or using 'volunteer days' at their new employment to return
5. Developing effective volunteering opportunities that fit around work, by:
  - a. exploring 'micro' volunteering opportunities for those who may only have small amounts of time to give
  - b. working with organisations who offer volunteering opportunities to their employees, to develop mutually productive activities
  - c. enabling those who work irregular or changeable hours to volunteer around their working week, through digital or project-based work
6. Engaging with individuals who may have time to give, but face barriers to paid work: work with charities and government to proactively engage with those who may be further from the labour market, for example those who have never worked, have left employment to raise a family, or have disabilities making it hard to seek paid employment
7. Approaching those in education or training to ease their successful transition into work: offer volunteering opportunities which run alongside other qualifications

## 2.2 Community engagement and influence

Many people volunteer to give something back to their community and connect with people in their area beyond immediate friends and family. Volunteering has an important role to play as communities are becoming more diverse, more transient, and in some areas more virtual.

Volunteering can support government aims to build and strengthen community cohesion and resilience.

### **Many people are motivated to volunteer to connect with their community**

Building a stronger connection to the place where you live is a motivation many people give for volunteering with Citizens Advice. One in four (24 per cent) of Citizens Advice volunteers refer to a desire to be more involved in local community life as a key motivation for volunteering.<sup>28</sup> Research with our volunteers found that 9 in 10 Citizen Advice volunteers report feeling more engaged with the local community<sup>29</sup> and 95 per cent gained knowledge of local issues.<sup>30</sup>

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*“Having lived in Hackney for a year at that point, I wanted to be part of Hackney more. Having moved around unendingly for the past few years, I wanted to feel like I belonged somewhere a bit more.”*

Citizens Advice volunteer

*“If I go into a pub - I usually only have a half or a pint of bitter, that’s it - but getting to actually pay for it is very difficult! There’s usually somebody who says ‘hey! you told me what to do, can I buy your drink for you?’ It is very rude to say no.”*

Citizens Advice volunteer

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### **This goes beyond warm feeling; volunteering gives citizens the resources to help each other to solve problems**

As a network of local charities, Citizens Advice provides a powerful infrastructure through which citizens can help each other. Volunteering with the Citizens Advice service gives people the resources to to give back to their communities. 3 in 4 Citizens Advice volunteers feel better equipped to be an advocate for their

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<sup>28</sup> Citizens Advice Volunteers survey

<sup>29</sup> *CAB volunteering - how everyone benefits: The value of CAB volunteering to individuals, communities and society* (2014) Citizens Advice

<sup>30</sup> Citizens Advice Volunteers survey

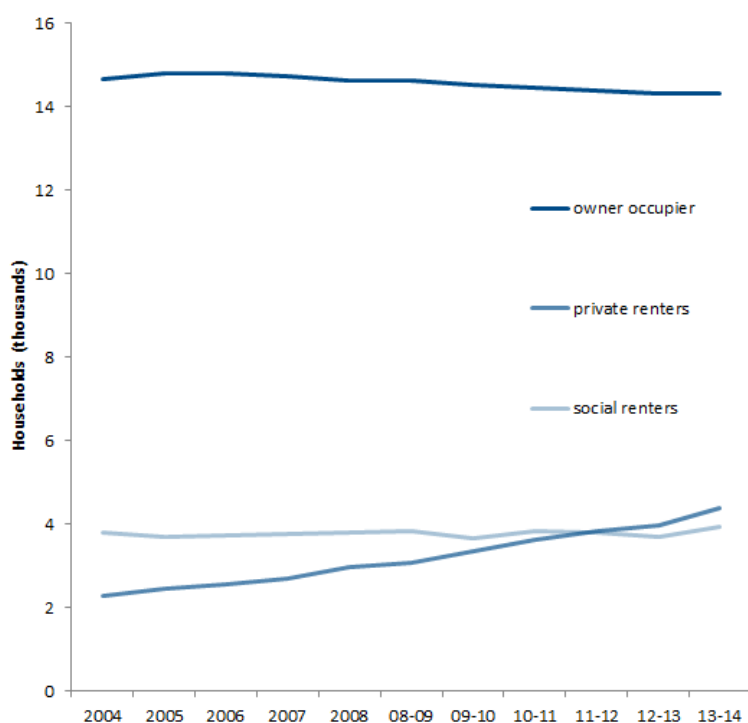
community, and 4 in 5 feel better equipped to volunteer in other capacities within their communities.<sup>31</sup>

### Recognising these motivations is even more important as communities change

Research shows a relationship between both the length of time somebody lives in a community, whether they are a homeowner, and the amount of volunteering they do. Homeowners and long-term residents (those who have lived in their neighbourhood for over 10 years) are more likely to be members of the “civic core”: the 31 per cent of the population who provide nearly 90 per cent of voluntary hours.<sup>32</sup>

Over the last decade in England, we have seen a decline in homeownership, and the number of households in privately-rented accommodation has been rising sharply.<sup>33</sup> Private renters spend less time in a property on average: 35 per cent spend less than a year in a home, compared to only 5 per cent of owner occupiers. As a consequence, increasing numbers of people have a more temporary relationship with their local area, and potentially fewer people are able to engage in community life, especially in the kinds of volunteering activities that demand local knowledge and representation, being a school governor or magistrate for example.

Chart 7: Households by type in England<sup>34</sup>



<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Mohan, J. (2011) *Mapping the Big Society: perspectives from the Third Sector Research Centre*. Third Sector Research Centre Working Paper 62.

<sup>33</sup> *English Housing Survey, Headline Report 2013-14*. (2015) Department for Communities and Local Government

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, we are also seeing communities becoming more diverse in ethnicity, religion and household composition. Migration over many decades has led to a greater plurality of ethnicities and religions.<sup>35</sup> There has also been an increase in the proportion of cohabiting, lone parent and lone person households.<sup>36</sup>

There is not a straight-forward relationship between changing communities, and sense of community, or willingness to volunteer. Increased diversity within communities means that volunteering practice must become more flexible and accommodating to the different lifestyles and commitments people have. More transient populations, with more people living in the private rented sector, may demand the opportunity for more short-term, immediate opportunities to volunteer.

Amongst our volunteers, meeting people and making friends is a key reason for volunteering. Evidence from beyond our service shows volunteering is associated with having diverse social networks by age and ethnicity.<sup>37</sup> When successful in engaging individuals in diverse communities, volunteering can kick-start a virtuous circle. Individuals volunteer to meet new people, thereby building more networks and a more engaged and connected community - within which voluntary action is more likely to take place. We should be focussing energy and resources on facilitating voluntary action in diverse communities as a way to jump-start and accelerate the turning of this circle.

### **Box 3: Creating spaces that facilitate community engagement**

A number of local Citizens Advice have developed ways to deliver their services that facilitate interaction and engagement between different elements of the local community. Hammersmith and Fulham Citizens Advice, for example, runs a local public library from where volunteers help it to deliver its services. The premises are used as a community hub providing a model of integrated services, including a children's sing and rhyme session, a digital literacy training project, and a project to increase financial inclusion for people as they reach retirement. By delivering multiple services targeted at a diverse range of groups under one roof, Hammersmith and Fulham Citizens Advice is able to serve as a space where people from across the community can come together to interact and build relationships.

### **And more and more people find communities online**

A new and powerful sense of community has emerged: online. 76 per cent of adults in Great Britain - 38 million people - accessed the internet every day in 2014, 21

<sup>35</sup> *Religion in England and Wales 2011* (2012) Office for National Statistics

<sup>36</sup> *Families and Household, 2014 - Statistical Bulletin* (2015) Office for National Statistics.

<sup>37</sup> *Giving of time and money: Findings from the 2012-13 Community Life Survey* (2013) Cabinet Office

million more than in 2006, when directly comparable records began. Over half (54 per cent) of adults regularly participate in social networking, and this has grown from 45 per cent in 2011. Over 9 out of 10 16-24 year olds used social networks in 2014.<sup>38</sup>

The internet has reshaped how people spend their time, interact with one another, and engage on issues that affect them. This has changed our conception of community, diluting its relationship to physical geography. Communities can be built and sustained online, connecting millions of people from different places to come together to campaign, provide support and advice, and create knowledge. As just one example, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia with 38 million articles in 288 languages and nearly 500 million visitors a month, is moderated by a community of around 69,000 active editors worldwide.

Some worry that the rise of digital technology and communication may create a more atomised or individualistic society, and erode or undermine the commitment to place and community that underpins so much voluntary activity.<sup>39</sup> Yet the internet provides opportunities for voluntary organisations to facilitate interaction and cooperation amongst many people, and share information and support instantly. Digital technology can also enable people to give time to a cause miles away from them. It can facilitate engagement with the local community and ensure the efficient allocation of expertise, interest and time.

#### Box 4: Harnessing the potential of social networking

Streetlife is a social network for local communities in Britain, which currently has over 900,000 users. People sign up with their email address and postcode and are automatically connected with other Streetlife users in their local area. They are then free to share information, discuss local issues, find other local people with common interests, and organise campaigns and voluntary action which they can take part in offline. For more information see: [www.streetlife.com](http://www.streetlife.com)

### **Conclusion: Volunteering opportunities can help people get involved in communities, and should seek to tap into communities where they are**

To better fit with modern life, volunteering organisations should explicitly consider their offer to volunteers who want to feel more connected to the community. Rather than relying on the “civic core”, organisations should proactively consider how to engage with those new to an area, who may be unsure, or simply not have considered, volunteering opportunities. Volunteering which reaches out into community spaces - libraries, churches, nurseries - and creates mechanisms for beneficiaries to in turn volunteer themselves, all enable diverse groups of people to gain a greater stake in their communities.

<sup>38</sup> *Internet Access - Households and Individuals 2014, Statistical Bulletin* (2014) Office for National Statistics

<sup>39</sup> Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster

Volunteering organisations should also assess how to capitalise on people's time spent online in a more impactful way. This could involve letting people volunteer remotely, encouraging voluntary activity online or finding ways to translate digital activity to offline engagement in local areas. Finally, organisations with an online presence should be thinking about pathways offline, into formal, physical community activity, to connect the digital activity to local communities.

The government, home office, and local government should consider the role of volunteering as an effective tool in building community cohesion and capital. Volunteering can bring people together around a common purpose and goal. It can create friendships and understanding spanning ethnic or religious differences, helping to strengthen a shared understanding of values. Volunteering groups can build strength and resilience in communities, by helping individuals help themselves and others in their community.

## Challenges

For government:

1. The Home Office, and the Department for Communities and Local Government should consider using volunteering as a tool for community integration. Volunteering can strengthen community cohesion and resilience for an increasingly diverse modern Britain

For volunteering organisations:

2. Consider how to proactively engage beyond the civic core by visible community engagement. Think about promoting volunteering as a tool for community engagement, and integration for those moving into an area.
3. Explore online opportunities for volunteering, and develop pathways from online activity to local community



## 2.3 Health and wellbeing

As more people suffer from poor mental health, live alone or struggle to access the care they need, improving health and wellbeing is a growing motivation for volunteers. Volunteering can boost activity, improve self-esteem, provide structure and purpose, and guard against isolation through promoting interaction.

Public services in health and social care face rising costs of long-term health conditions, mental health problems and an ageing population. Volunteering has an important role to play in strengthening public services by alleviating some demand, and giving people alternative routes back to health through opportunities to boost self-esteem, structure and personal relationships that support recovery.

### **Volunteers want to give their time to improve their health, and boost wellbeing**

Our research shows that volunteering with Citizens Advice helps to improve our volunteers' health and wellbeing. 9 in 10 have increased purpose and self esteem.<sup>40</sup> 3 in 4 have gained social and personal relationships through volunteering.<sup>41</sup>

The health benefits of volunteering are an important motivator for people wanting to give their time freely. 39 per cent cited wanting to keep physically and mentally active as a reason for volunteering with Citizens Advice. This figure rises to 62 per cent for those who are 65 and over.<sup>42</sup>

### **The social benefits of volunteering are also an important driver, as a way for people to make friends and improve their self-esteem**

Feeling valued, making friends, and improving self-esteem and confidence are all increasingly recognised as having a direct benefit to people's physical and mental health, both for prevention of ill-health and to improve recovery.<sup>43</sup>

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*"I think in general I think it's feeling that you are still of use. You are helping somewhere. It's ...finding that you've got some worth in helping other people."*

**Citizens Advice Volunteer**

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<sup>40</sup> CAB volunteering - how everyone benefits: The value of CAB volunteering to individuals, communities and society (2014) Citizens Advice

<sup>41</sup> Citizens Advice Volunteers survey

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> How to increase your self esteem. (2013) Mind

<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/self-esteem/consequences-of-low-self-esteem/#.VWgZx2TBzGd>; Marmot, M. (2003) *Self esteem and health: Autonomy, self esteem and health are linked together*. BMJ

1 in 7 volunteers reported being motivated by the desire to feel valued and part of a team. This desire was particularly prevalent amongst our volunteers who are unable to work because they are permanently sick or disabled.<sup>44</sup>

One example is a participant who had done well in education, had good jobs and “very high expectations from family members”, who came to Citizens Advice to volunteer after suffering a physical injury to her neck, rendering her unable to work. She discusses the sense of identity and increased confidence volunteering gave her, after the embarrassment she felt when, “after...being so successful in my life” being asked by friends and family “what are you doing now?”. Since volunteering “I don’t have to say nothing anymore. I can say I’m doing something with me life”:

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*“I couldn't work at all. I'm still technically disabled. I'm not allowed to do more than 8 hours a week anywhere. I'm not allowed to do paid work because my social security department could be sued, or something. I literally had to beg for a year or so to be able to do something in the community because I was doing nothing, but I knew I had the ability to do something. There was a need for volunteers at CAB and it fitted in with what I was capable of doing and it gave me some confidence so that when I am able to get back to the workplace, I'll still probably stay at the CAB for a little while. It gives me a sense of identity; it gives me a routine. It's brought me back to doing something that keeps my mind active. It gives you a new social group as well.”*

**Citizens Advice volunteer**

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### **This reflects growing concerns about social isolation, and more people coping with poor mental and physical health**

More than 1 in 4 people regularly think about “feeling alone” in their day to day lives.<sup>45</sup> The number of people living alone in the UK more than doubled in the last

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<sup>44</sup> Of the 26 volunteers in this position who completed our survey, 9 reported wanting to feel valued or part of a team as a motivation. Citizens Advice Volunteers survey

<sup>45</sup> Civic Life survey

forty years, from 3.8 million in 1974 to 8.7 million in 2014.<sup>46</sup> Almost a third (31%) of those aged 65 and over are living alone.<sup>47</sup>

Loneliness or social isolation has serious negative impacts on health. Recent research has found that lacking social connections has comparable health impacts to smoking and alcohol consumption<sup>48</sup>, and that actual and perceived isolation (loneliness, social isolation or living alone) significantly increases the risk of early mortality.<sup>49</sup> Evidence also suggests that loneliness is particularly bad for mental health.<sup>50</sup>

As well as having negative impacts on health, social isolation is also a reason individuals use health services. Recent polling with GPs found that almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of GPs report that social isolation issues had been raised by patients.<sup>51</sup>

Long-term health conditions are becoming a persistent feature of our lives, especially as we are living longer.<sup>52</sup> The number of people living with multiple long-term health conditions is set to rise from 1.9 million in 2008 to 2.9 million in 2018.<sup>53</sup>

Poor physical health is matched with poor mental health, with a quarter of the population experiencing at least one diagnosable mental health problem in any year.<sup>54</sup> This has big costs to society. Lost productivity, health and benefits expenditure currently cost around £70 billion every year, or 4.5 per cent of GDP. Mental ill-health is now the leading cause of disability benefit claims, accounting for 40% of all new claims.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Calculations from LV=, with data taken from the General Household Survey 1973-2007, the Government Actuary's Dept. 2008-based projections for marital and partnership status, and the GAD 2010-based UK population projections by single-year age band (2010-based, through to 2034). Based on population figures of 56.2 million in 1974 and 63.7 million in 2012. Source: ONS, Mid-1971 to mid-2012 Population Estimates, Quinary age groups for Constituent Countries in the UK, estimated resident population. See: [http://www.lv.com/adviser/working-with-lv/news\\_detail/?articleid=3227666](http://www.lv.com/adviser/working-with-lv/news_detail/?articleid=3227666)

<sup>47</sup> *What Does the 2011 Census Tell Us About Older People?* (2013) Office for National Statistics

<sup>48</sup> Holt-Lunstad, J, et al. (2010). *Social relationships and mortality risk: a meta-analytic review*. *PLoS Medicine*

<sup>49</sup> Holt-Lunstad, J, et al. (2015) *Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review*. Association for Psychological Science

<sup>50</sup> Griffin, Jo. (2010) *The Lonely Society*. The Mental Health Foundation

<sup>51</sup> Caper, K (2015) *A very general practice. How much time do GPs spend on issues other than health?* Citizens Advice.

<sup>52</sup> The Office for National Statistics estimates that, by 2037, there will be 17 million over 65s in the UK, accounting for almost a quarter of the population. This is an increase of nearly a third on today's over 65 population; the populations of older age groups are set to increase by even more.

<sup>53</sup> NHS. (2012) *Long Term Conditions Compendium of Information*. Department of Health

<sup>54</sup> Mental Health Statistics Mental Health Foundation

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-statistics/>

<sup>55</sup> UK needs to tackle high cost of mental-ill health, says OECD (2014)

<http://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/uk-needs-to-tackle-high-cost-of-mental-ill-health.htm>

## **Conclusion: Volunteering opportunities should seek to improve people's health and wellbeing, both through prevention and in supporting recovery**

The right volunteering opportunities can support the Conservative Government's manifesto pledges to support the public to stay healthy, take mental health as seriously as physical health, and to ensure that people grow old in comfort and dignity.

Of our volunteers, 4 in 5 believe volunteering had a positive effect on their physical or mental health. 3 in 5 state that volunteering has made them feel less stressed. All retired volunteers believe volunteering keeps them mentally active, and 3 in 4 believe that volunteering keeps them physically active too. 3 in 4 identified as having a mental health condition felt more able to manage their condition.<sup>56</sup>

The Department of Health should consider how volunteering could be an effective tool in preventing, managing and improving health as part of a broader preventative and integrated health and care agenda. Successful prevention interventions will reduce pressure on primary and secondary care costs, alleviating pressures on health and local social care budgets, by keeping people active, and supporting citizens to structure their lives. Furthermore it can boost productivity of the economy by enabling those with skills and knowledge who may not be able to work to contribute to society.

As well as a tool for meeting preventative goals, volunteering should be considered as a route out of ill-health as a 'prescription' to support recovery, or treat social isolation. Public Health England should build an evidence base of what works in the field of health and volunteering, and routes to support public health outcomes for local authorities.

## **Challenges**

For government:

1. The Department for Health should explore the role volunteering could play as part of the Government's preventative health agenda. Volunteering can protect against isolation and inactivity, and be a tool for recovery, taking pressure of health and care budgets

For volunteering organisations:

2. Explore promoting the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering
3. Consider working with individuals and organisations with links into the community who have links with those who may welcome an appropriate opportunity to volunteer, but who may currently be isolated
4. Think about creating or facilitating social opportunities for volunteers beyond their 'work day'

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<sup>56</sup> CAB volunteering - how everyone benefits: The value of CAB volunteering to individuals, communities and society (2014) Citizens Advice

5. Where appropriate, develop volunteering opportunities which can be 'ramped up or down', so can be tailored to fit with fluctuating or deteriorating health needs. This allows individuals who have health problems to remain as volunteers - rather than beneficiaries - for as long as possible

## Part 3: A new volunteering agenda?

The Conservative manifesto placed volunteering as a central component of its strategy for a brighter, more secure future. As one of the oldest volunteering organisations in Britain, we welcome this commitment in recognising the immense value volunteering brings to individuals, organisations and society.

Volunteering should address the very real challenges of economic recovery and rise in insecure work, an ageing population and the 'baby boomers' retiring on mass, and planned cuts to all non-ringfenced budgets, all of which put pressure on our public services and our standards of living.

Volunteering can be a powerful tool to strengthen society, and support the government in its aims around productivity, health, communities and employment.

Furthermore, volunteering can harness local skills, needs and motivations to reflect the background of the community, supporting the government in a localised approach to managing health, employment or integration.

This presents the following challenges:

1. **The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should consider how volunteering opportunities can boost productivity.**

Volunteering harnesses the skills and experience of those in our society who stop working because of age or ill-health, and can provide work experience alongside education to protect against under-employment

2. **The Department for Health should explore the preventative effects volunteering can have on people's health.**

Volunteering can protect against isolation and inactivity, and be a tool for recovery, taking pressure of health and care budgets

3. **The Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government should explore volunteering programmes as a potential tool for community integration.** Volunteering can strengthen community cohesion and resilience for an increasingly diverse modern Britain

4. **The Department for Work and Pensions, as well as partners in Job Centre Plus, should consider how volunteering could support full employment.**

Volunteering opportunities can complement job seeking by improving the transition from education to employment, and bringing those 'hard to reach' groups closer to the labour market.

Volunteering organisations should think about how they can play a role in these broader objectives at local and national government. Both to improve the communities they live in, and to ensure that the value they offer is not overlooked by local authorities with increasingly tight budgets.

To continue to be successful, volunteering needs to meet the needs and motivations of the population. While citizens are altruistic and keen to volunteer, they lead complex and busy lives. Volunteering organisations must shore up supply for the future, by making volunteering about more than altruism, and as an effective means of addressing the challenges our volunteers face. Creating opportunities that, where appropriate, build structures for personal and transferable skill development, fit alongside work, and strengthen friends and communities, can ensure volunteering remains fit for purpose in modern Britain.

How volunteering organisations respond to this agenda will depend on the nature of their organisation. The following challenges for the sector as a whole to consider:

1. Making explicit opportunities to improve employability, and approach those in education or training to ease their successful transition into work.
2. Creating the transition for those leaving volunteering to work, and for those already in work, by developing opportunities that run alongside employment by:
  - a. exploring 'micro' volunteering opportunities
  - b. working with organisations who offer volunteering opportunities to their employees
  - c. enabling those who work irregular or changeable hours to volunteer around their working week
3. Engaging with individuals who may have time to give, but face barriers to paid work
4. How to proactively engage beyond the civic core
5. Promoting volunteering as a tool for community engagement, and integration for those moving into an area
6. Exploring online opportunities for volunteering, and develop pathways from online activity to local community
7. Promoting the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering.
8. Working with those with links into the community who have links with individuals who may welcome an appropriate opportunity to volunteer, but are currently isolated
9. Creating or facilitating social opportunities for volunteers beyond their 'work day'
10. Where appropriate, developing volunteering opportunities which can be 'ramped up or down', so can be tailored to fit with fluctuating or deteriorating health needs. This allows individuals who have health problems to remain as volunteers - rather than beneficiaries - for as long as possible

## **Looking ahead for Citizens Advice**

Citizens Advice will be using these insights to challenge our own practice through research, delivery, and innovation across our service. We are currently considering our volunteering offer, which will build on evidence about the wider benefits of volunteering to consider how we go further to support employability, health and communities.



## Our aims

To provide the advice people need for the problems they face.  
To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives

## Our principles

The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

Temi Ogunye & Imogen Parker  
June 2015

## [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

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