

# Barriers prevent more older people from volunteering

UK

**H**elp the Aged and Volunteering in the Third Age brought together the new Minister for the Third Sector with 150 older people and representatives of the voluntary sector to consider how we can better promote volunteering opportunities for older people.

Volunteering is good for older people, good for society and good for the economy. Even the Government recognises its importance, as demonstrated by its strategy for an ageing society (Opportunity Age), which includes 38 mentions of volunteering, and its recent social exclusion unit report which mentions the 'V' word 46 times.

However, while the benefits of volunteering are massive, too many older people face too many barriers when it comes to participation. Consequently, rather than seeing a significant increase in volunteering when people retire, we actually see a big decline in volunteering among the over-75s.

While the number of voluntary sector organisations with explicit upper-age limits has declined, little is being done to tackle the indirect discrimination. For example, the voluntary sector is increasingly advertising more and more vacancies exclusively online, which means that the 80 per cent of over-65s who have never used the internet are missing out.

Age discrimination remains endemic in society. Almost one quarter of the adult population claims to have been refused a paid job because of their age. And even the Government insists on upper-age limits for participation in jury service and as magistrates.

Earlier this year the Government tabled the first piece of age discrimination legislation but refused to include volunteers in the scope of the age discrimination legislation. Had it done so, it would have made major inroads into promoting extended working-life initiatives and the annual £24 billion unpaid economic contribution of older volunteers, to increasing the volume of volunteers by removing age barriers for older volunteers, and to encouraging the social inclusion of older people. Age discrimination in volunteering can only hinder any volunteering strategy.

**David Sinclair**