

Consultation Response

Submission on volunteering and older people

for the

**Treasury policy review on the future role of the third sector in
social and economic regeneration**

August 2006

Help the Aged wants a world where older people are free from the disadvantages of poverty, neglect and isolation, so they can live with dignity as valued, respected and involved members of society

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Introduction

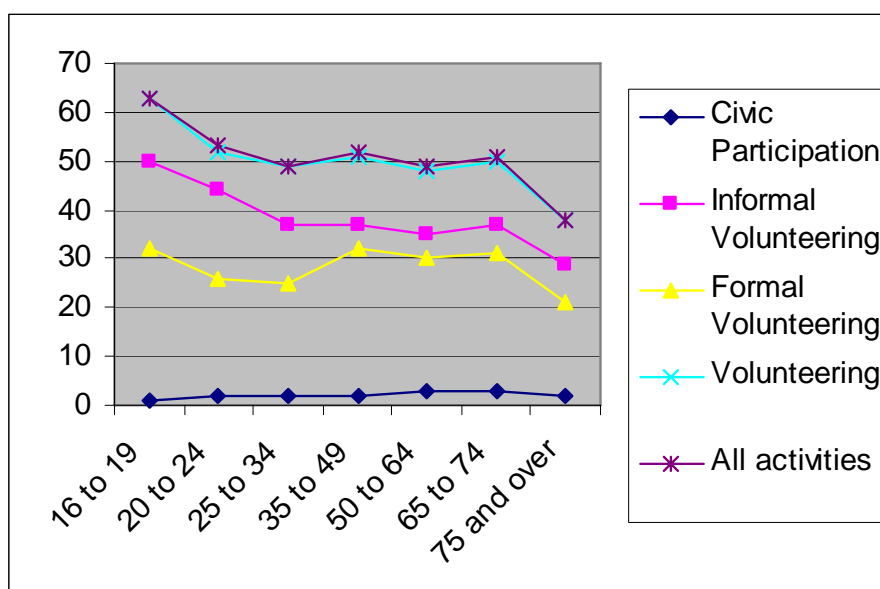
Participation in volunteering by older people

The Government, in their strategy for an ageing society (Opportunity Age) highlighted the importance of volunteering for older people and for society as a whole.

The years after retirement should be active and fulfilling... We will actively seek ways of opening up more opportunities for older people to learn, enjoy leisure activities, and be involved in volunteering....

Our vision is of a society where later life is as active and fulfilling as the earlier years, with older people participating in their families and communities. In the past, older people have often been treated as dependent and a drain on society. The reality is that many contribute a huge amount as grandparents, volunteers and in other ways. Being older or being a pensioner must not be equated with dependence. We want to build a society that focuses on what individuals can do, instead of making assumptions about capacity based on age...

In order to make that a reality, central government and local authorities, and the voluntary sector where appropriate, will work together to:...ensure that older people have access to opportunities locally, such as learning, leisure and volunteering.



Older people make a considerable voluntary contribution to society, often bringing valued life experiences. Age Concern estimates that those 50 + in the UK make an unpaid contribution of:

- £15.2 billion per year as carers
- £3.9 billion in childcare as grandparents
- £5 billion as volunteers

However, despite this, older people are often restricted in how they contribute to public life. For example, people over the age of 70 are not allowed to undertake jury service, and many people find it difficult to undertake voluntary work for charities because of arbitrary upper age limits.

Whilst the Government is keen to emphasise the benefits of volunteering, the table above highlights information from the DCLG Citizenship survey which describes participation in voluntary activities by age in the previous 12 months. The table shows that there is a decline in participation with age, particularly noticeable amongst the over 75s. Across all forms of participation, there is a steep fall amongst people in their early 20s and 30s. Participation then increases slightly for people in their 30s to 60s before we see a significant fall in volunteering amongst over 75s.

It is arguable that reasons for the big decreases in volunteering amongst are multi-fold, however it is at the age of 75 when insurance barriers often begin to hit in, when age discrimination becomes more rife, when mobility and income may be declining and where access to information and services becomes more difficult.

The key drivers to community participation

“The most depressing thing about my disability is that it means I can’t do anything for other people. I’ve been used to caring for others for my whole life”.

99 year old lady, care home, Sussex

“Helping each other makes you feel better in yourself”.

80 year old lady, dementia unit, care home, Sussex

Citizenship means different things to different people. It is about living together as a community, respecting those in the community and being interested and taking part in public affairs. To some it is also about the welfare, pensions and health services the citizen is entitled to. As Vincent et al (2001) state:

The current generation of older people make the moral link between citizenship and the pension, associating the sacrifices of defending the nation and contributing to its freedoms and economic success with the right to the basic income.

As well as the obvious demand for state entitlements, older people express a much stronger belief in the obligation to vote and participate in the community than the younger generation. Age Concern make a cautious estimate of an unpaid contribution to economy by those 50+ of £24 billion, which includes caring, grand-parenting, and volunteering.

Voting Participation

Whilst the country may be experiencing a general apathy towards voting (the 2001 general election had the lowest turnout since 1918), older people remain one of the most active voting groups. Analysis of the 2005 election confirmed that the over 65s are twice as likely

to vote as the 18-24 age group, only 45% of whom claim to have voted¹. In the last 40 years voting has fallen by nearly 20% in the whole population, but risen by 5% in the over 75s. As a result, the ageing population potentially provides older people with sufficient strength to influence election outcomes.

However, as Vincent et al (2001) comment, the older population do not see themselves as a collective group, and many are reluctant to label themselves in this group because of negative stereotypes. It is also a particularly heterogeneous group, with different life experiences and it seems more likely that people tend to be associated with a generation rather than the category of older people. Many feel that when the vociferous baby boomer generation reach retirement, they may exercise electoral power and swing the direction of policies towards older people.

Volunteering

The benefits gained from volunteering are enormous for the organisation, society as a whole and for the volunteer. As the Institute of Volunteering Research (IVR) states, for the older person voluntary work can:

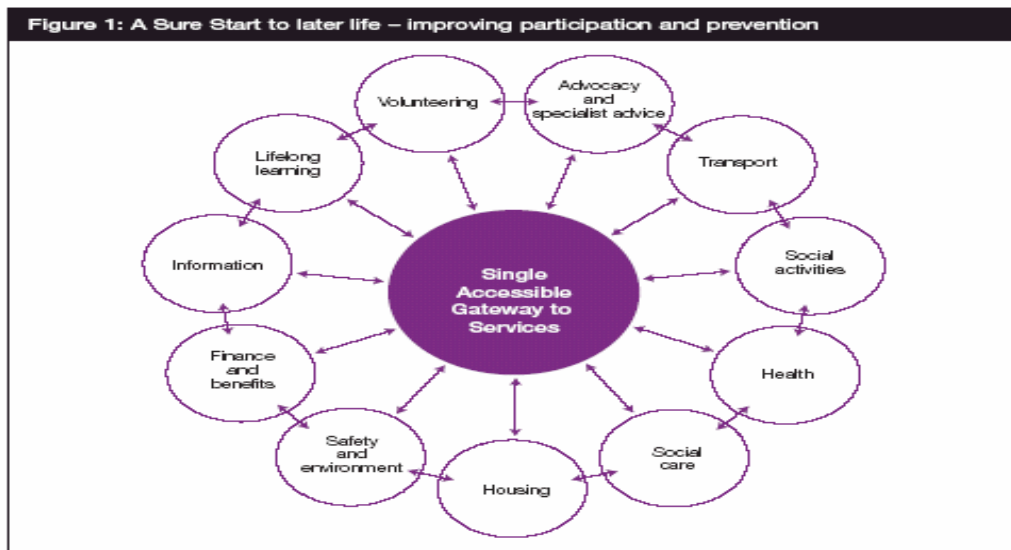
- help maintain a sense of purpose and self-esteem;
- lessen the social isolation felt by those cut off from social networks, the workplace and family;
- have beneficial effects on mental and physical health; and
- may help gain paid employment

Older volunteers can also provide additional benefits to the organisation they work for including:

- **Maturity and experience:** gained from both inside and outside the workplace.
- **Skills:** built up over a lifetime.
- **Availability:** older people usually have more time to spare and are more flexible with their hours.
- **Loyalty:** research shows that older people contribute more hours to volunteering than any other age group and tend to be more committed.
- **Numbers:** as the population ages there will be a larger potential pool of volunteers.

¹ Election 2005: turnout: the details, Electoral Commission, October 2005

Integrating services – A sure start for older people



The SEU report, Sure Start for Later Life, made the very strong case for investment in a single access point for services, particularly for excluded older people. Volunteering is one of the hubs which needs to be included within single access points for services, partly to help older people find volunteering opportunities and partly to harness volunteer led services to meet needs. This demonstrates a helpful approach and shows that volunteering should not be seen in isolation of other issues.

The key barriers to community participation

Despite the numerous benefits, older people often find that they are unable to volunteer because of their age. Of the 61% of organisations that responding to an Institute of Volunteering Research (IVR) questionnaire, 60% claimed to have a fixed retirement age. Many organisations blame insurance as a barrier to recruiting older people. Others felt that having a blanket policy avoids the need to assess volunteers on an individual basis. Some felt that older people would be less able to undertake the work on health grounds. The fact that there were discrepancies within organisations which had this cut-off point, suggests that these organisations could be more flexible and abolish age limits. Similarly, the fact that some organisations are able to find insurance for older people suggests that policies are available.

There is much evidence to suggest that not only is older peoples' ability to participate in the community restricted by a wide range of different factors including:

- One fifth of older people living in poverty. In 2003-2004, there were 2 million pensioners living in households with below 60% of median household income. The DCLG citizenship survey notes that "people with higher incomes are more likely to be involved with civic activism activities"
- Older people often have limited access to community, leisure or educational opportunities, due to inappropriate or unaffordable services.
- Older people are often heavily dependent on public transport, yet transport plans frequently fail to take their need for safe, accessible, reliable and affordable transport into account.
- Older people's needs are often overlooked in planning neighbourhood regeneration initiatives for the community.
- Older people are excluded from certain health treatments and tax and welfare benefits

These barriers are expanded on below.

Tackling the barriers to volunteering

Address age discrimination

Jean, an active and lively woman of 86, from Marlow in Buckinghamshire is unable to work as a volunteer in her local charity shop because she cannot be insured against accidents. Although she offered to write a disclaimer or pay her own insurance cover she was still turned down for the post.²

Age discrimination remains endemic in society. Research for the DCLG reveals, for example, that 23% of the population have been refused a job because of their age. Anecdotal evidence suggest that older people face similar age limits when volunteering. The age regulations, to be introduced in October, do not cover volunteering.

² Everyday Age Discrimination, Help the Aged, 2005

"Most charities rely on people of retirement age and over. All are active and have more time to devote to fundraising events... I considered this more ageism and a complete insult to such dedicated people - that their lives and services to charity are of so little value"

For several years this woman has fundraised for a charity that is now putting an age limit of 75 on its volunteers because it says older people cannot be covered by its insurance.³

Whilst the insurance industry argues that insurance should not be a factor in relation to older volunteers, it continues to be the case that insurance is, at the very least, being **used** by the voluntary sector as an excuse not to recruit older volunteers.

Indirect age discrimination also abounds and creates significant barriers to increased participation by older volunteers. When Government and the voluntary sector use language and imagery which sells volunteering as a youth activity, and when so much emphasis and funding for volunteering is targeted at younger people, older people are likely to be put off.

Similarly, the advertising of volunteering opportunities exclusively via the internet is indirectly discriminatory, with less than one in five older people having ever used the internet and the figures not increasing.

Improve transport

For far too many older people, there are barriers to getting out and about. A large minority of senior citizens, especially older women, are physically or psychologically unwilling or unable to go out. It is estimated that approximately a third of older people leave their homes on only two occasions during an average week. Whilst the introduction of free local bus passes are to be welcomed, they only benefit those who can use the bus system. Help the Aged believes that local authorities should offer flexible alternatives to the free local bus pass for those older people who cannot use public transport.

Access to education

"When I was younger I took part in plenty of courses but there is nothing available now you are retired."

The Government has placed a significant focus of their policy work on education. Lifelong learning has, at least in terms of rhetoric, been part of that focus. The DfES Five year strategy for Children and Learners (2004) noted that "Lifelong learning is at the heart of our agenda. By this we mean learning across the whole of life – not just post 19 or post 16 learning, but the development of learning communities from the cradle to the grave".

However, over recent years courses popular amongst older people have suffered from significant funding cuts. Adult and Continuing Education has been funded by £200m from the LSC budget through local authorities and £100m from within LSC's Further Education budget. However, Adult and Continuing Education is at risk because it is the least closely linked to employment. The Association of Colleges has argued that the focus on 16-19 year

³ Everyday Age Discrimination, Help the Aged 2005.

olds will risk increasing costs of courses for older people and result in cuts to courses currently provided.

Access to education is a vital part in encouraging participation in voluntary work, as highlighted by David Blunkett, in a preface to 'The Learning Age' (1998) who noted the societal value of learning. "Learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship".

Tackling fear of crime

Older people are less at risk, particularly of crimes of violence, but equally fearful as other age groups. The 2001 British Crime survey found that whilst 22% of women aged 65-74 are very worried about being mugged, only one percent experience this crime at first hand.

The impact on contributions to communities is significant. 47% of those over 75 years of age and 37% of over 50 no longer take part in social and community activities after dark because of fear of street crime⁴.

Tackling crime and fear of crime must be included as part of an volunteering strategy.

Little bit of help

The "little bit of help" I receive in the care home helps me do what I want to. "I care for my wife here. The help I get here really helps me. I'm the happiest man in the world". Lady, 80s, Care Home in Sussex

Sometimes very small barriers are placed in the way of older people's participation in volunteering. People sometimes just need support gaining confidence or to be provide with relatively small "reasonable adjustments". The voluntary sector should work to consider how it can provide 'that little bit of help', to help older people volunteer.

Targeting the over 75s

Given the evidence of the decline in participation amongst over 75s focussing policy effort on removing the barriers faced specifically by these age groups will be very important. However, there remains limited research about the over 75s in relation to volunteering.

Excluded older people

Help the Aged has welcomed the new Home Office Volunteering For All programme which seeks to tackle the barriers to volunteering faced by people with disabilities or limiting long-term illness; people with no formal qualifications; and people from black and minority ethnic communities.

⁴ Age Concern Report: 'The Fear Factor: Older people and Fear of Street Crime'

Almost 600,000 of the 60+ population of England and Wales come from BME communities; over a third of men and nearly half of women aged 50 and over in England have no educational qualification; and whilst 18% of the general population in England have a moderate or serious disability this increases to 43% of men and 51% of women aged 75-85.

It is extremely important that older people are not forgotten within this programme, however, there is no evidence as yet that older people are actively being involved.

Older people and intergenerational volunteering

Older people are keen to undertake intergenerational volunteering, whether these opportunities exist in sufficient number, and whether they are offered these kinds of issues proactively.

Possible initiatives

Without doubt, there are a whole range of significant national opportunities for the Treasury to consider major initiatives which could play a part in developing a very long term legacy in relation to older volunteers and intergenerational volunteering. Some examples are detailed below.

Digital TV switchover

Help the Aged have developed proposals for the development of a major national volunteering programme to run alongside digital TV switchover. A copy of the proposal is attached. Such a proposal could have a legacy and could be combined with ICT training.

Money advice

Help the Aged's new "Your Money Matters" programme will use Barclays staff and retired staff, to deliver basic money advice (generic advice) to older people. The concept, where both younger and older volunteers are used to deliver money management advice, has the potential to play a significant part in the Treasury's goals around financial inclusion.

Housing advice/ Transport advice/health advice

Using older people to advise other older people is proven to be a very effective way of communicating. Whilst there remain gaps in transport advice and housing advice for older people, a national programme could use expert volunteers to disseminate key messages to other groups.

Sport, 2012 and volunteers

If 2012 is to be a success, organisers of 2012 will need to actively engage older and younger people. However, much of the current focus of 2012 is younger people. Similarly, most initiatives to support increased participation in physical activity is targeted at younger people despite the fact that participation actually declines with age. There is real potential for older and younger people to work together to promote physical activity amongst all age groups.