

**Evaluation of the DCMS
50+ Volunteering
Programme**

Final Report

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Report written by: Dr Sarah Smith, Joanna Stuart, Professor Daniel King, Dr Caitriona Logue, William Rossiter and Dr Ghazal Vahidi.

Evaluation Team: Professor Daniel King, Dr Caitriona Logue, Dr Nikolas Pautz, Jack Rendall, William Rossiter, Dr Sarah Smith, Dr Jessica Stockdale, Joanna Stuart, Dr Ghazal Vahidi, Dr Alice Corble and Dr Nene Ibokessien.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The 50+ volunteering programme was a government initiative focused on harnessing the skills and experiences of those aged 50 and over. It was made up of four innovation funds, managed by the innovation foundation [Nesta](#), and an evidence review undertaken by the [Centre for Ageing Better](#). The programme was part of the second phase of the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund with four of nine funds particularly focused on increasing the involvement of those aged 50+ in volunteering.

In total, £5.2 million was awarded to projects over the three-year 50+ volunteering programme, supporting 39 organisations to test and develop ideas or grow existing models involving volunteers aged 50+. Projects from a wide range of fields, backgrounds and sizes were involved, from those growing young people's mentoring projects to new emerging ideas testing the involvement of 50+ volunteers in community fraud prevention. A key focus for the programme was creating volunteering opportunities for those aged 50+ in and alongside public services, providing examples that could then be used to shape how services are planned, commissioned and delivered.

A 'funding plus' approach was adopted for the programme; alongside the grants, projects received significant bespoke organisational support from Nesta. Over the lifetime of projects, there were high levels of engagement between Nesta and grantees, with Nesta providing regular advice, coaching and networking support. Grantees were encouraged to appoint an independent learning partner to evaluate their work and to develop their capacity for monitoring and evaluation.

To bring together the learning from across the programme and evaluate its impact, Nottingham Trent University (NTU) was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the 50+ volunteering programme. This evaluation combined a variety of different methods including a meta-analysis of learning partner evaluations, analysis of monitoring data, qualitative interviews with grantees and in-depth case studies with four projects. Most of the evaluation activities were completed before the outbreak of COVID-19. However, many findings are relevant to recovery planning.

Summary of key findings

The findings on what the 50+ volunteering programme achieved and the difference it made reveals a mixed picture.

In terms of achievements, the 50+ volunteering programme enabled organisations to test and develop new ideas and scale their activities, reaching more volunteers and more beneficiaries. Collectively, the projects mobilised over 25,320 new volunteers and supported over 474,730 new beneficiaries. The level of match funding leveraged by grantees and the programme overall compares well with many publicly funded initiatives. Overall, every pound invested in the programme leveraged an additional 1.7 pounds from project delivery partners, other funders or stakeholders.

Grantees reported how the programme helped them develop new ways of working, including different approaches to recruiting and engaging volunteers, new collaborations and, for some, the programme led to cultural shifts within their organisations. There were examples of grantees who described their organisation's involvement in the programme as 'transformative'. The grant and non-financial support allowed organisations to test new ways of doing things and learn from doing so. Lessons were learnt about scaling projects, engaging 50+ volunteers and evaluation. The programme invested heavily in the learning partner evaluations. While the evidence captured by some evaluations did not meet the expectations of Nesta and grantees, others helped build grantees' evidence of impact or provided frameworks and tools for future evaluation.

The contribution that Nesta's high engagement support made was widely recognised and valued by grantees, in particular their role as an advisor and critical friend to the projects and, more broadly, to the wider organisations.

Positive outcomes for beneficiaries and volunteers were highlighted in the learning partner evaluations and the research informing this evaluation. Grants were awarded to a wide range of different projects with different aims and outcomes, despite this there were some common themes identified including improved social connections

and personal wellbeing. Projects linked to, and inter-connected with, a range of different public service areas, including health and ageing, families, children and young people and the environment. Some projects were able to demonstrate their contribution to public service priorities, such as improved physical or mental wellbeing.

While the above shows there were some successes for the programme, the evaluation also highlights there were some considerable limitations. The programme looked to create volunteering opportunities for 50+ volunteers and to mobilise them to get involved. However, while the experiences of organisations were mixed, many struggled to engage 50+ volunteers and the majority of projects did not meet targets set at inception for the recruitment of volunteers, or the number of beneficiaries supported.

Although volunteer recruitment targets were set by grantees and DCMS/Nesta, as projects progressed, some grantees felt that their targets for recruiting volunteers were too high and unrealistic. For some projects, this led to efforts being disproportionately focused on hitting targets rather than activities that would maximise the impact of the work. The active management of the portfolio by Nesta did, in agreement with DCMS as funders, however, enable some level of flexibility around targets and for some projects, there was a shift away from the numbers of 50+ volunteers to the quality of project delivery part way through their grants.

A key challenge for organisations was managing the multiple points of innovation for their projects and this is likely to have impacted on what projects were able to achieve. Some, for example, were growing rapidly, recruiting new 50+ volunteers and using new evaluation frameworks and tools for the first time. There were also issues with attributing change and outcomes to innovations as there were so many new approaches and practices happening at the same time.

Learning at the project level

During the lifetime of their grants, organisations tried and tested different approaches and ideas and experienced a wide range of challenges. The evaluation captured the learning from these experiences which include the following:

Engaging 50 + volunteers

When engaging 50+ volunteers, grantees highlighted the importance of:

- Using messages, language and images that are inclusive and relevant to 50+ when recruiting volunteers.
- Recognising that 50+ are not one homogenous group; their needs and circumstances are highly diverse.
- Developing meaningful and purposeful roles for 50+ volunteers.
- Identifying and addressing the barriers that 50+ might face, including stereotypes and assumptions about 50+ and making it easier to volunteer by reducing bureaucracy and streamlining systems.
- Creating flexibility so volunteers can fit opportunities around their own circumstances.

Growing social action projects

When growing projects involving volunteers, the evaluation pointed to the need to:

- Actively manage collaboration and allow for sufficient time to develop and manage relationships.
- Plan for how best to manage rapid growth including preparing for the instability that might result and how to support a growing pool of volunteers.
- Build in enough development time for embedding systems and processes including those for recruiting and supporting volunteers.

Evaluating social action projects

Key learning for the evaluation of social action projects included:

- Embedding evaluation into projects early on to ensure the purpose is clear to all.
- Being proportionate in the approach taken so that this reflects the time and capacity organisations realistically have.

- Recognising early on the barriers that might be experienced with data collection and how these might be addressed.

Programme learning

The findings from the evaluation highlight the following key areas of learning from the design and implementation of the 50+ volunteering programme:

- **Developing a coherent social action programme with a clear rationale** – the 50+ programme was part of the second phase of the Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund (CSAIF) but there was a lack of coherence to the 50+ programme. In part this was due to the different aims and approaches of the four funding streams, the reduction in the scale and ambition of the programme from what was originally conceived (see section 2.1) and the heterogeneity of funded projects which spanned a wide range of fields, beneficiary groups and contributed to different public service areas. It was challenging to bring together the learning across the funding streams and to draw conclusions about its impact on priority public service outcomes.
- **Building in, and learning from, evidence reviews early on** – an evidence review on volunteering was produced by the Centre for Ageing Better (CfAB) as part of the 50+ programme. This review would have helped to better inform and shape the design of the programme if it had been planned and carried out prior to the programme being developed rather than part way through.
- **Embedding evaluation into programme and project design** – this evaluation was commissioned over a year into the rollout of the 50+ programme and was not planned into its design. A programme level evaluation framework and plan developed before implementation would have maximised the value of the evaluation by laying the foundations for data to be collected by projects in a consistent way and would usefully have informed the design of learning partner evaluations.
- **Bespoke, high engagement support from the start makes a critical difference** - substantial non-financial support was built into the design of the 50+ volunteering programme and was a key area of success. Nesta worked closely with grantees from the beginning with a focus on innovating and learning.

Grantees were highly positive about the difference this engagement and support made to their work and how this helped build the capacities and capabilities of projects and their organisations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations from the evaluation team are informed by findings from the evaluation research.

For volunteer-involving organisations:

- Strive to make volunteering age-friendly and inclusive - review volunteering opportunities and processes for involving, managing and supporting volunteers and adapt them where needed to ensure that opportunities are open and inclusive. COVID-19 has created new barriers to volunteering, including amongst those who are 50+, that need to be identified and addressed.

Policymakers, funders and commissioners:

- Embed evaluation into programme design from the outset – ensure evaluation is considered early in the design of a programme to help clarify its aims and objectives and develop a clear evaluation framework for evidencing outcomes and learning across a programme.
- Recognise the benefits of bespoke, high engagement support – consider how grant making and funding could integrate high engagement and support for grantees to help strengthen the capabilities and capacities of organisations. This approach could support organisations in their recovery from COVID-19.
- Recognise that inclusive forms of volunteering can carry additional costs and require additional resources for organisations. Lack of time and resources to support different groups of volunteers as well as capacity to make changes at the organisational level, have been cited as barriers to inclusion and diversity in volunteering (Donahue et al, 2021). This may include changes to internal culture as well as practices, for example, recognising the contribution beneficiaries and those with lived experiences make as volunteers. Embedding inclusion within culture and practice will require additional

investment in time and resources. However, research also highlights that there are cost-effective actions that organisations can take to help embed a more inclusive approach to volunteering (see NCVO report on [Diversity and Volunteering](#)).

- Supporting organisations as they grow and change – help grantees prepare for the organisational changes that may occur when growing and support them to embed their learning into their organisations.

Glossary of Terms

50+ volunteering programme

This programme aimed to explore how organisations and public services can better harness the skills and experiences of volunteers aged 50 and over.

Beneficiaries

'Beneficiaries' is used in this report to describe the people who volunteer and who the projects support or help through their work, often referred to as 'service users'. There is, however, a considerable blurring between 'volunteers' and 'beneficiaries'; volunteers also benefit from being involved and in some projects, there were 'members' or 'participants' who would be considered both beneficiaries and volunteers.

Funding awarded

'Funding awarded' is the amount of grant funding that grantees received.

Funding committed

'Funding committed' is the size of the grant(s) confirmed at the start of the grantee funding period. For some funding streams and projects the 'funding awarded' was different from 'funding committed' as the size of the grant was reduced during the programme.

Grant-making process

The activities involved in giving a grant to an organisation, including the application process, making the award decision and the implementation of the award.

Growth

'Grow' and 'growth' is used as shorthand in this report to describe the processes through which grantees developed and progressed their projects. Funded projects were at different levels of maturity; some were early-stage ideas that were tested and developed, whilst others were established models which were scaled to reach and benefit more people.

Innovations

The 50+ volunteering programme funded and supported a range of social action innovations. Innovation is understood in broad terms and represents, for example, something new to an organisation, local area or field (Deacon, 2016). To be an innovation, the product, service, activity or model did not need to be 'new to the world'.

Innovation funds

The 50+ volunteering programme was made up of four innovation funds that aimed to identify, test and grow social action projects involving those aged 50+.

Learning partner evaluation

Grantees were encouraged to appoint their own independent external evaluators to undertake evaluations of their projects.

Logic model

Maps out the expected relationship between inputs, activity, outputs and outcomes associated with a programme. A logic model was developed for the 50+ volunteering programme and was used to shape the approach and tools for the evaluation.

Scaling

'Scaling' is used to describe the variety of processes through which social innovations grow. In the context of this report, this is primarily focused on increasing the number of people who benefit from a project or service (see Gabriel, 2014). Not all projects funded through the 50+ volunteering programme were 'scaling' as some were testing and developing early-stage ideas.

Social action projects

These are the projects funded and supported by the 50+ volunteering programme. Some of these projects were based on models of reciprocal exchange and peer support which some would view as more closely aligned to 'social action' rather than 'formal volunteering'. This report, therefore, uses the term 'social action project' rather than volunteering project to describe the work that was funded.

Volunteering

People get involved in their communities in a wide range of ways; taking action to help others. Programme partners used a variety of different terms to describe this activity including 'social action', 'volunteering' and 'community contributions'. This report uses 'volunteering' to describe these activities as this was the term most commonly used by the organisations and volunteers who participated in the evaluation. Volunteering can be understood as an unpaid activity, undertaken through an act of free will and is of benefit to others or the environment (Ellis Paine et al, 2010).

Volunteers

'Volunteers' is the term used in this report to describe those involved in volunteering activities and roles. Some projects did not use this term and some individuals described themselves as 'helping out' or 'helping others' rather than identifying themselves as 'volunteers'.

1. Introduction

1.1 The 50 + volunteering programme

This report presents findings from an evaluation of a national volunteering programme, which ran from March 2017 to June 2020. The 50+ volunteering programme aimed to explore how organisations and public services can better harness the skills and experiences of volunteers aged 50 and over (herein referred to as 50+ volunteers), in and alongside public services. It was funded by DCMS and managed by [Nesta](#), an innovation foundation and was part of the second phase of the six-year Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund. The 50+ programme supported 39 organisations across four innovation funds to develop and test innovative ideas and grow existing social action models involving 50+ volunteers. A wide range of organisations and projects were supported, spanning different sectors and beneficiary groups.

Alongside the innovation funds, the 50+ volunteering programme included an [evidence review](#), undertaken by the Centre for Ageing Better (referred to as CfAB throughout this report) on community contributions in later life. This brought together research evidence with the views of stakeholders and delivered practical recommendations to inform the work of government, funders and other stakeholders.

At the end of 2017, DCMS commissioned Nottingham Trent University (NTU) to undertake an impact and process evaluation of the 50+ volunteering programme.

1.2 Evaluation aims

The evaluation of the 50+ volunteering programme looked to bring together the learning from across the programme and evaluate its impact. Specifically, the key aims of the evaluation were to:

- Assess the impact of the 50+ volunteering programme on volunteers, the organisations that volunteers work with, beneficiaries, and if possible, the wider public services; and
- Identify what worked well and less well with the programme design and implementation to help inform future funding approaches and strategies.

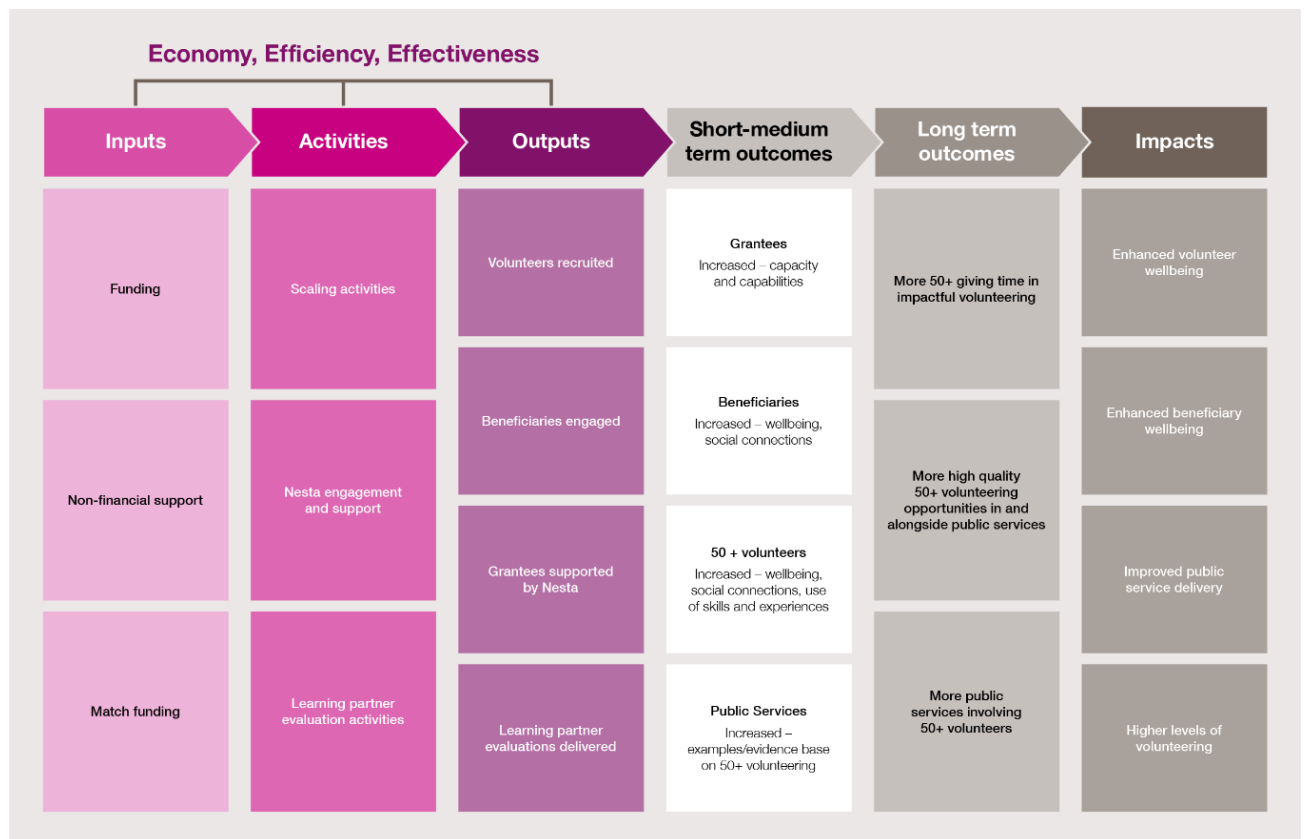
The CfAB's evidence review (Jopling and Jones, 2018) identified six principles for making volunteering opportunities age-friendly and inclusive. Two of these principles were explored in more depth as part of this evaluation as they were most relevant to this programme:

- Flexible and responsive volunteering, in particular lessons from organisations in developing flexible practices that fit around the lives of individuals. This might include, for example, developing roles that have flexible time commitments or roles that enable volunteers to have a choice of activities. Flexible volunteering was a particular area of interest within DCMS and the CfAB.
- Volunteering that makes good use of people's strengths, in particular the extent to which 50+ volunteers use their skills, experiences and knowledge when volunteering and the difference this makes. This was prioritised in the evaluation as harnessing the skills and experiences of 50+ volunteers and was a key focus for the programme.

1.3 Evaluation design

To address the aims of the evaluation the research was carried out in three phases (see figure 2). Underpinning the approach was the development of a logic model for the 50+ volunteering programme. This was based on extensive consultation with DCMS and Nesta staff and describes the theory of change for the programme. It maps out the expected relationship between inputs, activity, outputs and outcomes associated with this programme. The logic model describes how and why a desired change was expected to happen and helped to shape the approach and methods used in the evaluation (see figure 1 below for a simplified version of the logic model and Appendix A for the full logic model). This logic model was developed during the scoping phase of the programme evaluation – rather than as part of the design process for the 50+ volunteering programme.

Figure 1: Logic Model for the 50+ volunteering programme



This evaluation is best seen as a hybrid evaluation combining elements that would normally be associated with meta, programme and project level evaluation studies. It adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of monitoring data with a more qualitative approach that sought to consolidate learning from the design and delivery of the 50+ programme. Evidence to inform the process evaluation was gathered from extensive interviews with stakeholders involved in the programme in addition to in-depth case studies with four projects. The evaluation underwent an ethics approval process from NTU. The key elements of the evaluation are shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: Key elements of the programme evaluation



The evaluation approach included the following key elements:

Phase 1

- Scoping discussions with key stakeholders including staff working with DCMS, Nesta, CfAB and the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), who had been involved in the development and evaluation of one of the 50+ funds: Join In Stay In.
- A review of key grantee documents including their application forms, theories of change and learning logs.
- Development of a draft logic model for the 50+ volunteering programme developed in consultation with DCMS and Nesta (see figure 1 for a summary and Appendix B for the full logic model).

Phase 2

- Interviews with a sample of grantees from two of the four funding streams (n = 26), carried out over the phone within the first year of their grants. These explored the recruitment and engagement of 50+ volunteers, learning from project set up and reflections on working with Nesta. Interviews commonly included more than one staff member involved in delivering the project and

lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. All interviewees completed a consent form to participate following NTU's ethical approval process. Follow up interviews were then carried out with grantees towards the end of their grants. This longitudinal approach enabled the team to capture reflections on impact and learning at two different points in time.

- In-depth case studies with three projects: Compassionate Neighbours (St Joseph's Hospice); Grandmentors (Volunteering Matters); and Kinship (formerly Grandparents Plus). These case studies were selected in collaboration with Nesta. The approach taken to the case studies was developed with the funded projects and typically included at least one on-site visit, interviews with project staff, interviews and focus groups with volunteers and interviews with beneficiaries where possible. Appendix E includes short reports on the findings from the case studies. These have been included in this report with permission from the organisations.
- Descriptive analysis of monitoring data collated by Nesta every quarter for each funded project. This included data on the number of volunteers mobilised and number of beneficiaries supported.

Phase 3

- Follow up interviews with grantees (n = 22) carried out over the phone towards the end of their grants. These explored the impact of the funded work, reflections on working with Nesta and key areas of learning.
- One additional in-depth case study with Blue Lights Brigade (Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire).
- Interviews with Nesta staff (n = 4) to capture reflections on the impact and learning from the different funding streams and the programme overall.
- Meta-analysis of twenty-two evaluation reports which were produced by learning partner evaluators.
- Review and analysis of learning reports and publications from Nesta, CfAB, BIT and the Social Change Agency.
- Further analysis of monitoring data collated by Nesta for each funded project. This included analysis of the numbers of volunteers recruited and beneficiaries supported compared to the targets set at project inception.

- A causal analysis of monitoring data was undertaken in order to explore if there was any causal impact of the 50+ volunteering programme on key outcomes.

This involved the difference-in-differences technique and panel data methods. The difference-in-differences technique is a quasi-experimental approach to impact evaluation. The 50+ volunteers are the treatment group; programme funding was intended specifically for engaging this group of volunteers. The under 50 volunteers are the comparison group; the programme funding should have no effect on this group. Therefore, if any difference is found in the outcomes between 50+ volunteers and under 50 volunteers, it can be attributed to the programme funding.

The difference-in-difference analysis relies on the assumption that the programme funding was used solely for the purposes of increasing engagement among 50+ volunteers. Due to the heterogeneity of projects, this assumption is not fully satisfied in this context. This leads to difficulty in interpreting the results from this analysis. When all projects are examined jointly, there is no evidence of an impact of the programme on the number of 50+ volunteers recruited. However, these results are clouded by the violation of the assumption described above. The assumption above is satisfied for Give More Get More (GMGM) projects as they had a specific focus on recruiting 50+ volunteers. For GMGM organisations, it was found that they effectively achieved this goal.

The causal analysis also uses panel data techniques to examine the impact that the number of 50+ volunteers have on the number of beneficiaries reached. An examination of all projects jointly reveals that an increase in the number of 50+ volunteers results in an increase in the number of beneficiaries on average, subject to the caveats of the panel analysis techniques used.

Full details of the evaluation methodology, including how the qualitative data was analysed, is provided in Appendix B.

1.4 Limitations of the evaluation

The evaluation was commissioned and designed after the 50+ volunteering programme had commenced. Projects funded through one of the innovation funds were well underway and one of the funding streams had already been decommitted. This was a key limitation for the evaluation. Because the evaluation was not built into the programme from the beginning this limited its potential, particularly because data could not be collected across the projects in a consistent way. This particularly limited the evaluation team's ability to use project level volunteer and beneficiary data - beyond that which was aggregated in Nesta's monitoring reports. It was agreed at the scoping stage for the evaluation that it would have overburdened grantees to require them to collect additional data for the evaluation.

A key challenge for an evaluation of this nature is the measurement of impact. The lack of consistent project level data on the characteristics of volunteers and beneficiaries across the projects made this particularly challenging. Consequently, the evaluation relied on the aggregate monitoring data collated by Nesta, the findings from the learning partner evaluation reports and the interviews and focus groups carried out as part of the evaluation. The limitations of this for measuring outcomes and impact of the programme is recognised by the evaluators, in that we cannot ensure its validity. Other activities and events will be happening in people's lives simultaneously alongside volunteering and it is difficult to isolate whether these changes can be attributed to participation in projects and volunteering.

This evaluation aimed to be comprehensive in capturing the views of different stakeholders involved with the 50+ volunteering programme. The evaluation team carried out 48 interviews across two of the funded streams. However, it was not possible for the evaluation team to interview grantees funded through the remaining two - Join In Stay In and Give More Get More. This means the evaluation relied on the monitoring data collected by Nesta, and interviews with Nesta grant managers to capture learning about these funds.

The case studies provided in-depth, rich data on the outcomes of the funding on grantee organisations and volunteers. However, there were few opportunities for the evaluation team to speak directly to beneficiaries, many of whom were vulnerable, because access to them was limited. This means the evidence on the outcomes of the funded work on beneficiaries was less strong and draws more on the findings from the learning partner evaluation reports.

A further challenge for the evaluation was the shifting focus of the programme over the three years. As stated in section 2.1 the original programme was ambitious but shifted its priorities and focus, including a decision to move focus away from the 50+ element during its final year for one of the funding streams and a deemphasis on targets for volunteer recruitment. DCMS started the programme with five key performance indicators¹, however, as the programme priorities evolved, new monitoring processes established these KPIs became less significant and were not used. This, therefore, made it difficult for the evaluation team to draw conclusions about the extent to which the programme met its objectives.

Finally, COVID-19 presented a number of issues for the evaluation. Firstly, a planned fifth case study could not be conducted due to the additional burden this would have placed on grantees during the pandemic, resulting in four rather than five case studies. Secondly, the evaluation involved analysis of the findings and lessons from individual learning partner evaluations commissioned by grantee organisations (referred to throughout this report as learning partner evaluations). One of the 29 evaluations could not be completed due to the pandemic and several were scaled back or changed focus. Evaluation reports were not available for two of the funding streams; Join in Stay In ended early and therefore evaluations were not undertaken and for the five Give More Get More projects, evaluation findings were brought

¹ The KPI 1) award 40-50 grants to high impact social action programmes across a range of thematic areas (of which at least 90% of volunteering roles will be impact volunteering related to public service outcomes) 2) by the end of March 2020, Government to secure privately financed matched funding of at least £2 million 3) support 75% of programmes to secure follow on funding to continue their work 4) support all grantees to improve their evidence of impact 5) engage the sector and key stakeholders to understand the role 50+ volunteers could and do play (Source ITT)

together in one learning report and the individual reports were not available to the evaluation team.

1.5 About this report

This report brings together the findings on the outcomes and learning from the 50+ volunteering programme, structured around the logic model for the programme (see figure 1).

- Section 2 examines the origins and background of the 50+ volunteering programme, its inputs and key activities.
- Section 3 explores the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the programme.
- Section 4 reviews the difference the programme has made to the grantee organisations, the 50+ volunteers, the beneficiaries they work with and wider public service areas.
- Section 5 explores learning at the programme and project level.
- Section 6 brings together the conclusions from the programme evaluation and key recommendations.

This report includes a number of case studies from different projects. These draw on information and data from published evaluation reports or the case studies undertaken for this evaluation which have been approved for use in this report. All names used are pseudonyms.

2. About the 50+ volunteering programme

This section of the report explores:

- The origins, aims and features of the 50+ volunteering programme;
- The programme's inputs;
- The programme's key activities;
- The programme's key outputs;
- The impact of COVID-19

2.1 Origins and aims of the programme

The 50+ volunteering programme builds on the work undertaken through the first phase of the [Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund](#) (CSAIF) between 2013 and 2016 to test and scale social action models and ideas that work alongside and complement public services. The partnership between Nesta and the Office for Civil Society (now known as Civil Society and Youth Directorate) supported 52 organisations over the three years and provided [learning and insights into the scaling of innovations](#). At the foundation of this work was the aim to transform public service delivery; supporting citizens to give their time and skills by growing the most promising models and ideas and spreading them across public services (see Deacon, 2016).

Mobilising people to play a greater role in contributing to public services will, it is argued, help tackle some of the challenges society faces, including the increasing demands for public services and growing expectations for personalised care (Cabinet Office, 2015). For Nesta, people helping people and "*mobilising the energy and contributions of members of the public*" should become a core organising principle for public services (Gabriel, 2014; Sellick, 2016). Harnessing the skills and experiences of older people more effectively is seen as a key part of this mobilisation, particularly within the context of an ageing population. Without this, it is argued that "*communities will continue to miss out on the talents they bring*" (Jopling and Jones, 2018, p8) and individuals will miss out on the benefits of involvement. Volunteering is associated with enhanced wellbeing and increased social connectedness, particularly amongst those who are older. However, some of those

who have the most to gain also experience barriers to getting involved, including those with lower levels of wellbeing (Jopling and Jones, 2018; Stuart et al, 2020).

In 2017 DCMS sought to build on this work in two ways:

1. To continue to accelerate the growth of a small number of pioneering innovations acting alongside public services
2. To seek to increase the number of volunteers in the second half of their lives (50+) giving their time to local communities in the most impactful way.

In response to the above issues, a new programme was developed and launched in 2017 with a specific focus on engaging volunteers aged 50+ in volunteering.

To address 1, DCMS partnered with Nesta again to run five innovation grant funds between 2017 and 2020. This included Click and Connect which tested the efficacy of online tutoring for disadvantaged students and created the evidence base for the £350m National Tutoring Programme after Covid-19. These 4 programmes are not covered in this evaluation as they did not fit into the 50+ programme.

To address 2, the government planned a multi-faceted national programme, including:

- a national marketing campaign with celebrity endorsements, newspaper adverts and daytime TV appearances to promote later life volunteering, signing people up to a national scheme like 'senior corps' in the USA;
- core government funding for mainstream and established charities with good numbers of existing 50+ volunteers giving time in traditional type roles (i.e. weekly volunteering at same time and location) to expand their contribution
- an innovation fund to test pioneering new ideas to attract different types of later life volunteers - for example, retired tradesmen, older volunteers who had never had children but could be 'foster grandparents' and volunteers who would give time in short bursts to fit with 'portfolio careers' and increased family caring responsibilities
- a push from No10 on volunteering, including hosting events to celebrate existing volunteers.

This was not the first time Government has backed programmes and initiatives focused on encouraging older people to volunteer. The Home Office Older Volunteers' Initiative (HOOVI) was launched in 1999 and Experience Corps in 2001, which aimed to recruit 250,000 older volunteers over three years. In recent years, however, more attention has been paid to engaging young people in volunteering, through programmes such as [Vinspired](#), [#iwill](#) and the [National Citizen Service](#). Drawing on the learning from these initiatives and inspired by service programmes in the US such as [Senior Corps](#), Government looked to re-focus efforts to create more volunteering opportunities for 50+ and encourage them to get involved in roles and activities where their impact can be maximised, in and alongside public services.

The 50+ volunteering programme was originally conceived as a large-scale initiative as above. Work began on the innovation funds in partnership with Nesta, who were contributing their own resources towards the programme from their endowment, and research into a national campaign started. However, early in the programme's development ambitions were scaled back in response to Government's shifting priorities and budget constraints. A large-scale national programme and campaign became impossible. Nesta and the government considered carefully how to proceed but mutually agreed to continue the good work started on the innovation grant funds. It was acknowledged at the time that only having one of the original four elements envisaged would make it difficult to deliver on the wider shift expected in 50+ volunteering. But with untapped potential for new ideas, it was agreed to continue with the innovation funds under a slightly different framing. Whilst one lens remained focused on 50+ volunteering, the other was on increasing all forms of volunteering and building the capacity of civil society to innovate. This dual focus meant that whilst 50+ volunteering remained important, it was not the sole purpose of the innovation funds and therefore not the only lens through which to evaluate value and impact.

The 50+ volunteering programme was made up of four innovation funds and substantial non-financial support (see table 1). Nesta described the funding as "*waves of commitments, rather than one large scale programme*", with each fund having its own identity and approach (Nesta, 2020, p15). A key focus of the programme was on providing examples and case studies of social action innovations

for commissioners that could be shared and used to shape how services are planned, commissioned and delivered.

Table 1: Key features of the different funding streams

Project	Dates	Description
<p>Second Half Fund (SHF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 13 projects funded (4 decommitted) ● £2,721,697 committed ● £2,219,922 awarded ● Grants of £83K to £285k and non-financial support from Nesta ● £276k spent on evaluation 	<p>April 2017 to Oct 2019</p>	<p>The Second Half Fund supported the growth of social action models and programmes that complement or work alongside public services to reach more volunteers aged 50+. The four key priority areas for the fund included: children and young people; parents and families; ageing well; and resourceful and resilient places. Funded projects included a mentoring programme supporting young care leavers and a project setting up dance groups and buddying systems for older people.</p>
<p>Connected Communities Innovation Fund (CCIF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 16 organisations funded (1 decommitted) ● £2,597,063 committed ● £2,515,261 awarded ● Grants of 75K to 280K and non-financial support from Nesta ● £350K spent on evaluation 	<p>April 2018 to June 2020</p>	<p>The Connected Communities Innovation Fund supported eight early-stage ideas with small grants and eight more developed ideas to grow with larger grants. The engagement of 50+ volunteers was core to some grants and more peripheral in others. Grants focused on public service priority areas: community resilience in emergencies; community connections and thriving places; and improving our environment.</p>

Project	Dates	Description
<p>Give More Get More (GMGM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Five organisations funded ● £497,659 committed ● £372,257 awarded ● Grants of £49K to 100K and non-financial support from Nesta ● £50k of total budget spent on evaluation ● Four grants reduced 	<p>March 2017 to July 2018</p>	<p>Give More Get More was designed to test the concept of intensive volunteering placements for volunteers aged 50+, with a focus on those approaching retirement.</p> <p>The volunteering opportunities included a minimum of 150 hours of volunteering either full time over weeks/months or part-time over several months. Each innovation was required to have a close alignment to a public service. Placements included volunteering in a hospital accident and emergency department and one-to-one literacy support for children in year 6 at primary school. A learning report was produced (but not published) by the Social Change Agency which brought together the findings from evaluations undertaken for the five projects.</p>
<p>Join In Stay In (JISI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Five organisations funded ● £245,720 committed ● £91,722 awarded ● Grants of £15k to 22k and non-financial support from Nesta ● Zero spent on evaluation by individual projects ● Fund ended early 	<p>March 2017 to Oct 2017</p>	<p>Join In Stay In aimed to test a behavioural science approach to attracting and retaining volunteers aged 50+. The five organisations looked to encourage volunteers to continue to give their time regularly on the back of involvement in a one-off event. Nesta and BIT planned to test the concept through a randomised control trial (RCT), however, the fund ended early due to a lack of available volunteers for the RCT.</p>

2.1.1 Engaging 50+ volunteers

The first wave of funding – JISI, GMGM and SHF - had specific targets focused on increasing the participation of those aged 50+ in volunteering. For the second wave of funding – CCIF – engaging 50+ volunteers were key to some projects and less so for others and this shifted during the grant period. Grantees had targets for recruiting 50+ volunteers which were developed with Nesta during the grant application stage. Some grantees also had targets for recruiting volunteers under 50. Amongst the funded projects, their previous experience with 50+ volunteers varied; from those that had never involved volunteers before to those who were scaling projects that already depended on the involvement of 50+ volunteers.

For most grantees, the importance, and motivations for engaging 50+ volunteers varied from it being integral to the design of projects to it being a peripheral component, where age or experience of the volunteers were not key factors. This operated on a continuum but could broadly be described as arising from one of the motivations described below²:

- **The model/approach is dependent on volunteers aged 50+ to achieve the intended impact;** older volunteers are core to the success of the work. For example, the Eden project was funded to support grandparents and grandchildren (aged 0 to 5), by providing positive and developmentally beneficial experiences where they could explore and learn together. Volunteers aged 50+ could be peer mentors for grandparents and showed older people were a valuable and integral part of the programme.
- There is an **advantage to involving volunteers aged 50+** because of the qualities and characteristics that are needed for the model to work. For example, the Compassionate Neighbours project encourages and equips volunteers to support vulnerable neighbours who are in the last years of life.
- Involving **volunteers aged 50+ is a way of reaching further into communities and unlocking people's potential, particularly where older people are under-represented.** For example, Volunteer It Yourself (VIY)

² This framework for understanding the motivations was developed by Nesta and adapted by the evaluation team.

involves tradespeople as mentors who help support young people to learn a trade and building skills.

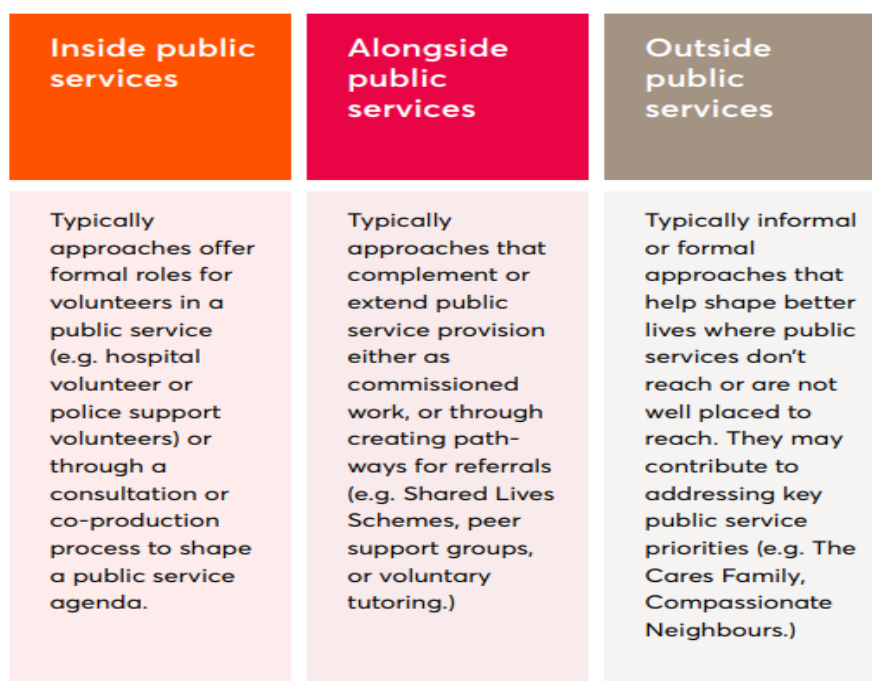
- **Involving 50+ volunteers is an opportunity to adapt a model** that has relied on a different age demographic to see if it can also achieve impact with older volunteers e.g. The Access Project which recruits volunteers to meet disadvantaged school students one-to-one to help lift their grades and prospects.

Interviews with grantees, however, revealed that some organisations felt they had shoehorned the 50+ element into their bids; engaging 50+ was not an important part of their model but they sought the innovation funding for work they wanted to do. Significantly, these projects were some of the organisations that struggled the most with recruiting 50+ volunteers.

2.1.2 Volunteering and public service areas

All projects, in some way, aimed to contribute to public service priority areas. However, the extent to which projects connected with public services varied. Some projects engaged volunteers directly in a public service, for example, a hospital or school. Many were positioned alongside public services and extended or complemented public service provision, for example, peer support groups or mentoring. However, there were also some projects that could be considered to lie outside public services; they contributed to public service priorities or had a link with public service goals but worked in areas not reached by public services, for example, a project looking to improve lives and the environment by affordably lending out useful items and helping neighbours share practical skills (Deacon et al, 2020) (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Volunteering and public services



(Source: adapted from Deacon et al, 2020, p19)

2.2 Programme Inputs

This section of the report reviews the scale and nature of resources committed to the portfolio of projects funded through the 50+ volunteering programme. The descriptive data utilised is drawn from the comprehensive quarterly monitoring data compiled by Nesta throughout the life of the programme. In the view of the evaluation team, the consistency and comprehensiveness of the monitoring data are regarded as a model of good practice and provide a rich source of data to inform this evaluation.

2.2.1 Funding

The total funds allocated to the projects across the four funding streams are shown below (table 2). An overall amount of £6,062,139 was committed to projects out of which £5,199,162 was awarded to the 39 grantee organisations. The SHF had the highest amount of funding while the CCIF had the highest number of grants

awarded. The average fund allocation per project in the SHF was £170,763 whilst the average grant awarded for the CCIF was £157,203.

Table 2: Funds allocated

Funding Stream	Total Funds Committed	Total Funds Awarded	Number of Grants Awarded
Second Half Fund (SHF)	£2,721,697	£2,219,922	13
Connected Communities Innovation Fund (CCIF)	£2,597,063	£2,515,261	16
Give More Get More (GMGM)	£497,659	£372,257	5
Join in Stay In (JISI)	£245,720	£91,722	5
Total	£ 6,062,139	£5,199,162	39

JISI was the smallest of the funding streams and also the shortest – being decommitted when it became clear that it was not viable. The action taken by Nesta to decommission this programme provides evidence of active portfolio management by Nesta and demonstrates a focus on ensuring that these projects offered appropriate value for money.

In total, £675,834 was spent on learning partner evaluations as part of the 50+ volunteering programme. The budget for evaluation for projects varied from £7,500 to £50,000. The majority of these evaluations were commissioned separately by grantees from independent evaluators. Across the CCIF, GMGM and SHF funding streams, 13 percent of the total funding was allocated to evaluation. Consultation with leading public sector evaluation practitioners suggests that this is a high proportion of total programme funding to be allocated to evaluation activity by most public sector funding yardsticks. In the experience of the evaluation team, figures in the 1-5% range are more typical. This may reflect the emphasis on trying new innovations across the three streams and the focus on building grantees evaluation capacities – alongside Nesta’s commitment to systematic evaluation. The level of funding allocated to evaluation at the project level is in fact more typical of the level of investment that might be expected in the context of a formal pilot study. The

programme that most closely resembled a formal pilot study – JISI – was decommitted due to a failure to recruit sufficient participants to enable the planned Randomised Control Trial to proceed.

2.2.2 Non – financial support

Above and beyond the grant funding, substantial non-financial support was received by grantees. This type of approach has variously been described as ‘funding plus’, ‘grants plus’ and ‘high engagement’ funding and describes activities which are *“additional to a grant and the grant-making process”* (Cairns et al, 2011, p5). In this report we use ‘funding plus’ to describe the high engagement approach taken by Nesta to support grantees; namely, there was a high level of contact with, and support for grantees; there was a deep level of knowledge of grantees contexts and work; and additional ‘capacity building’ support was provided to grantees (Buckley and Cairns, 2012). Nesta described this approach as “high support, high challenge”, working closely with grantees with a focus on learning.

Across the 9 funding streams under the umbrella of the Phase 2 CSAIF, more than 3,500 hours of Nesta’s time was spent on supporting grantees. This included monthly coaching calls, project visits and evaluation support. The different activities undertaken as part of this funding plus approach are detailed in section 2.3.1.

2.2.3 Match funding

Grantees were expected to bring or secure match funding to support their innovation fund grant work, with the exception of the early-stage ideas. Table 3 below reports the level of match funding recorded in Nesta’s quarterly monitoring data. The reported match funding generated by the 50+ programme was substantial at £10,369,999.

Table 3: Level of match funding leveraged by grantees³

Programme	Total funds committed	Total match funds leveraged by grantees	Ratio fund:match
Second Half Fund	£2,721,697	£6,727,735	2.5
Give More Get More	£497,659	£194,899	0.4
Join in Stay In	£245,720	£0	N/A
Connected Communities Innovation	£2,597,063	£3,447,365	1.3
Total	£ 6,062,139	£10,369,999	1.7

The level of match funding leveraged by grantees and the programme overall compares well with many publicly funded initiatives. Overall, every pound invested in the programme leveraged an additional 1.7 pounds from project delivery partners or stakeholders.

³ The final monitoring report used for updating the dataset was “Nesta CSAIF2 KPI tracker Q13 All Programmes Data as at end of JUNE 2020” which was accessed on 10/08/2020.

2.3 Key Programme Activities

2.3.1 Nesta engagement and support activities

The activities undertaken by Nesta to support grantees fell into two areas:

- Support during the grant-making process at the application and proposal stage; and
- Funding plus activities beyond the grant and grant-making.

During the grant-making process, Nesta invested time in getting to know organisations and innovations before awarding grants. This included working with them as a ‘critical friend’ in the development of their proposal and carrying out due diligence about operational capacity. In many ways Nesta operated more like an investor rather than a grant-maker, supporting the development of ideas that they believed would make an impact. Grantees attended workshops on application development, evidence planning and developing a theory of change to help them map out what they wanted to achieve through their work.

Once funding was awarded, Nesta adopted a high engagement approach with grantees. This was an integral part of the offer to organisations, rather than an ‘add on’ to grants.

Nesta took a bespoke approach to non-financial support with grantees, with organisations identifying their support needs as part of the application process, as well as during the programme. Sometimes Nesta brokered support from other external organisations and experts. Through a wide range of activities described in figure 4 below, Nesta retained their high engagement approach throughout the process, which they felt enabled them to better understand the journeys, successes, and risks of each project.

Figure 4: Key features of Nesta's funding plus approach

- ***Critical friend and advisor*** - regular contact and support from a Nesta grant manager including advice and coaching support. Nesta grant managers worked closely with a small portfolio of projects providing support as well as managing the accountability for the funding. This included helping organisations scope out their learning partner evaluations and the appointment of an evaluator. Other staff were also involved as advisors, which included for some grantees providing support to senior leaders within funded organisations
- ***Peer connections*** - providing opportunities to connect grantees either one-to-one and/ or through attending grantee cohort events and workshops to share experiences and learning. Nesta also introduced some grantees to other organisations which were not part of the portfolio
- ***Training*** - providing training with the aim of building skills and capacity in specific areas
- ***Consultancy and coaching*** – bespoke consultancy and coaching from external experts, including support on communications and business modelling
- ***Communications/PR and advocacy*** - sharing the work of grantees through blogs, press and other PR as well as attending launch events and co-ordinating press and media work where needed

2.3.2 Growth activities

To test, develop and grow their social action models and approaches, grantees undertook a wide array of activities including partnership working, outreach to different beneficiaries and users, volunteer recruitment, management and support. For most projects, there was a specific focus on engaging volunteers aged 50+ and grantees used a wide variety of ways to recruit them. Learning from grantees on engaging 50+ volunteers is explored in section 5.1.1.

2.3.3 Learning partner evaluation activities

Many grantees appointed their own independent learning partner evaluator to undertake evaluations of their projects. The exceptions were: a) JISI projects which were evaluated by Nesta and BIT; b) the five community ‘resilience in emergencies’ projects which commissioned a joint evaluation and c) two grantees who undertook their own internal evaluations. At the application stage grantees specified the standard of evidence they had collected to date and the standard they wanted to achieve by the end of the grant using Nesta's standards of evidence framework (see figure 5).

Figure 5: The Nesta Standards of Evidence



Source: Puttick and Ludlow (2012)

The approach and design of learning partner evaluations varied, depending on the grantee aims and needs. For example, they aimed to:

- Evidence the impact of projects or models on beneficiaries, volunteers or other stakeholders.
- Assess the design and implementation of projects or models.
- Identify key learning and recommendations for projects.
- Test or develop evaluation frameworks or tools.

2.4 Programme Outputs

2.4.1 Number and type of organisations

The 50+ volunteering programme supported organisations from a wide range of fields, backgrounds and sizes (see full details of projects in Appendix C). These included charities, community interest companies and local authorities. In total 39 projects were funded and supported through the programme.

During the lifetime of the programme, ten grants were decommitted and four had their funding reduced. Innovation by its nature involves risk and as such the project partners, DCMS and Nesta, took risks with the projects funded. This was particularly the case with the new emerging ideas and prototypes that were being tested through the innovation funds (see further discussion in section 6).

2.4.2 Volunteers mobilised and beneficiaries supported

It is clear from the aggregate monitoring data that the reach of the programme was considerable both in terms of volunteers recruited and beneficiaries supported. Collectively, the projects funded under this programme involved 35,381 total volunteers who, in turn, supported over 474,730 new beneficiaries (table 4)⁴. Overall, around one-third of the new volunteers across all the funds were in the 50+ age group. More than 60% of the new 50+ volunteers were mobilised to SHF projects (5,798), and around 30% to the CCIF. Although smaller in number, all of the volunteers recruited under JISI were 50+. These fund level aggregates, however, disguise a lot of variation at the level of individual projects (see section 3 for more detail).

⁴ Some possible minor discrepancies between the calculations of this report and the figures reported by KPI Dashboard is the result of some inconsistent data for some of the projects, different baselines, data cleaning of the final update by NESTA in Quarter 13 report and our focus on “total” number of volunteers and beneficiaries for each program.

Table 4: Number of volunteers mobilised and beneficiaries supported⁵

Funding Stream	Total Volunteers⁶	New Volunteers	Total 50+ Volunteers	New 50+ Volunteers	Total Beneficiaries	New Beneficiaries
Second Half Fund	23,697	16,144	7,010	5,798	943,414	438,032
Connected Communities Innovation	11,351	8,695	4,603	3,076	36,095	26,604
Give More Get More	N/A	148	N/A	148	10,094	10,094
Join in Stay In	333	333	237	237	N/A	N/A
Total	35,381 ⁷	25,320	11,850	9,259	989,603 ⁸	474,730

In the absence of consistent volunteer and beneficiary data collection at the level of individual projects (see discussion in section 5), the evaluation team were unable to explore in more detail the demographic characteristics of volunteers or beneficiaries. From a research perspective, this limitation highlights the importance of establishing consistent project level data capture at the outset for projects and therefore the programme as a whole.

2.4.3 Learning partner evaluations

In total, 29 evaluations were completed as part of the 50+ volunteering programme. Two of these were undertaken internally by the grantee organisations themselves and 27 were carried out with an evaluation learning partner. It is expected that 23

⁵ In several cases, the figures for Quarter 12 and Quarter 13 were missing, so the numbers for Quarter 11 have been used as the final figure to calculate number of volunteers and beneficiaries.

⁶ It should be noted that 3 organisations were dropped from the analysis due to the number of reported volunteers remaining at 0 across all quarters.

⁷ For all the decommitted projects, the last report before stopping the program were used to do calculations.

⁸ We have excluded decommitted programs from all the calculations and these numbers are solely based on the numbers of volunteers and beneficiaries in SHF, CCIF, JISI and GMGM programs.

evaluation reports will be produced from the programme and to date 21 learning partner evaluation reports have been delivered.

Due to COVID-19, one learning partner evaluation could not be completed and seven evaluations were not able to provide full data or had to change their focus. This was because evaluators were not able to collect data to evaluate change or measures were no longer valid in detecting outcomes due to the sudden shift in the approach to service delivery.

Most evaluations aimed to move their project's evidence of impact from Nesta's Level 0 or Level 1 standard of evidence (you can describe why the intervention is needed, what it will aim to achieve, and why this is better than what currently happens) to a Level 2 standard of evidence (you capture data that shows positive change, but you cannot confirm you caused this). Three projects, using quasi-experimental designs in their evaluations, looked to move their evidence to Level 3 (you can demonstrate causality using a control or comparison group). The standard of evidence achieved by projects was not formally assessed by Nesta at the end of the grant funding. This process would have been beneficial to projects and the programme as a whole to help evidence the impact of the investment in learning partner evaluation.

2.5 Impact of COVID-19

Nine of the projects funded through the CCIF grants continued beyond March 2020, and therefore were impacted by COVID-19. The pandemic affected the demand and delivery of their services and projects, funding, staffing and volunteer numbers. Many grantees had volunteers and beneficiaries belonging to vulnerable groups who were shielding. Some follow-on projects were delayed or stopped due to the pandemic. Some evaluation activities were suspended, postponed or changed as evaluators were unable to collect key information, particularly interviews with beneficiaries due to social distancing requirements.

There were examples of grantees transferring to remote services. Church Action on Poverty set up meeting sessions on Zoom and contacted members on WhatsApp

and Facebook. Cities of Service in Barnsley created new telephone befriending pairings. However, projects reported challenges with the digital divide due to the associated costs and older people who did not use digital devices.

Some projects were able to respond to new, unanticipated needs. For instance, Absolutely Cultured in Hull (a CCIF project) engaged their volunteers with emergency responses to COVID-19, and over 50% of Cities of Service volunteers in Plymouth responded to the NHS Responders call.

The pandemic also offered an opportunity to test emerging models such as digital support models and virtual groups. A British Red Cross project funded through CCIF, for example, rapidly responded to the pandemic and helped the local authority pandemic response, using its community asset mapping.

3: Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness

This section of the report examines the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the 50+ volunteering programme. In addressing this aspect of programme performance, it is important to stress that the heterogenous nature of projects supported by the 50+ programme means that crude comparisons between projects and funding streams should be avoided.

3.1 Economy

The application process and how proposals are assessed is central to ensuring that programme inputs are procured with due regard for economy and value for money. It is also a key process of the delivery of any programme that impacts directly on project quality.

Across the nine funding streams managed by Nesta through the phase 2 CSAIF, 871 expressions of interest were submitted from across England. These were assessed by a panel of experts resulting in 64 grants awarded to 56 organisations. Funds were provided to test or scale social action innovations and four of the nine funding streams were part of the 50+ programme.

This represents a ratio of 13.6 applications to every grant awarded. This ratio is indicative of a competitive process. The competitive nature of this process is likely to have contributed both to the quality of projects supported and the value for money that they represented – notwithstanding the innovative nature of some of the activity supported. Success rates for competitive grant funding programmes are notoriously difficult to compile and compare. Nevertheless, in the experience of the evaluation team, a success rate of less than 10% places the 50+ programme at the more competitive end of the spectrum. The NAO report success rates of around one in four (25%) for applicants to the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (administered by UK Research and Innovation)⁹. We cite this as a relevant comparator because of the heterogeneous nature of projects funded and the emphasis placed on project level

⁹ National Audit Office (2021) UK Research and Innovation's management of the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC 1130. Page 25, paragraph 2.7.

innovation. Similar success rates of around 1 in 3 or 4 were achieved by applicants to most rounds of the Regional Growth Fund.¹⁰ These comparators confirm our view that the 50+ Programme can be regarded as representing the more competitive end of the spectrum for challenge funds of this type.

3.2 Efficiency

Efficiency concerns the manner in which programme inputs such as funding, staff and volunteer time and equipment are converted into outputs such as beneficiaries supported, or activities delivered. Programme monitoring data allows us to explore the concept of efficiency through a consideration of unit costs and other related metrics.

Considering the heterogeneity of activities delivered under the 50+ programme it must be stressed that crude comparisons across projects and the funding streams should be avoided. This data is reported here in order to provide a full account of the scale, nature and diversity of the activity delivered.

Nevertheless, comparing the total amount of funding against the number of volunteers and beneficiaries, it is possible to consider in simple terms whether the 'cost effectiveness' of each of these individual projects was in line with that forecast. We therefore compare, on an individual project level, expected unit costs at inception with those actually achieved. It must be kept in mind that the nature of activities, scale of the project and length of time committed by the volunteers in the different projects varies. Also, some projects were 'scaling' and some were testing new models and approaches. Unit costs would be expected to be higher for new ideas - partly as a function of the set-up costs that would be anticipated for new initiatives. The intensity of support offered to beneficiaries also varied considerably across these programmes. As a general rule, the more intensive the support provided to beneficiaries, the higher is likely to be the corresponding unit cost. **Unit costs at the upper end of the ranges reported here should not, therefore, be taken as evidence of poor value for money.** It is for this reason that in the analysis that

¹⁰ Matthew Ward (2016) Regional Growth Fund, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number CBP5874.

follows we do not compare unit costs between projects. We do consider the extent to which project outputs (such as beneficiaries and volunteers) were achieved at unit costs consistent with those anticipated at inception.

3.2.1 Unit Costs

In this section we comment on the extent to which beneficiary and volunteer unit costs were in line with those anticipated at project inception. A table of anonymised project level unit costs per beneficiary supported and per volunteer recruited are included in Appendix D-1.

For **the SHF projects**, if we exclude those projects decommitted, 5 of the 9 remaining projects were delivered at unit costs per beneficiary that were better than those anticipated at project inception. 8 out of 9 projects were delivered at **unit costs per volunteer that were lower than those anticipated at inception**.

In contrast, all 5 projects under the **GMGM** programme were delivered at unit costs per beneficiary and volunteer that **exceeded those anticipated at project inception**. This is likely to reflect the nature of this funding stream where all projects were intended to test or develop new or prototype forms of intensive volunteering. This contrasts with the experience of some prototyping projects in other funding streams within the 50+ programme – suggesting that it was particularly associated with the forms of intensive volunteering placements that were characteristic of these five projects. These placements involved a minimum of 150 hours of volunteering, either full-time over weeks/months or part time over several months and included a project placing volunteers in a hospital accident and emergency department.

Of the **CCIF projects**, excluding the single decommitted project, 5 of these 15 projects were delivered at unit costs per beneficiary that were better than or equal to those anticipated at project inception. 14 of the 15 projects were delivered at **costs per volunteer that were lower than those anticipated** at inception.

In summary, for the 50+ programme as a whole, 10 of the 29 projects (excluding decommitted projects) were delivered at costs per beneficiary better than those

anticipated at inception. 22 of the 29 projects were delivered at costs per volunteer that were lower than those anticipated at inception.

3.2.2 Beneficiaries/Volunteer ratio

An alternative way to consider the diverse nature of projects in the 50+ programme is to examine the ratio of volunteers recruited to beneficiaries.

It is possible to calculate an expected 'beneficiary to volunteer' ratio based on the goals set out by the different projects and the overall programme. A higher number of beneficiaries to volunteer ratio indicates that more individuals benefit from a single volunteer. The ratios for grantees with available data are detailed in Appendix D-2. In interpreting these data it is important to consider both the variability in the intensity of support provided to beneficiaries and again the diverse nature of these projects. Nevertheless, since formal targets were set both for numbers of beneficiaries and volunteers, it is possible to calculate an expected beneficiary to volunteer ratio that was implicit in these targets. In 15 of these 24 projects, more beneficiaries were supported per volunteer recruited than was implied by the targets for beneficiaries and volunteers set at inception. In general, we may conclude from this that many projects found that they could support more beneficiaries than planned through the activity of volunteers recruited. To what extent this represents a positive outcome is open to interpretation. Supporting more beneficiaries per volunteer would not in and of itself be a positive outcome in some circumstances if it came at cost to the quality of interaction between both parties.

3.3 Effectiveness

Effectiveness concerns the 'performance' of projects in meeting their objectives. We address effectiveness here through an analysis of the performance of supported projects in meeting the targets that were agreed at their inception stage.

Two important points to consider in the analysis of the monitoring data is that four different funding streams and funded projects started this programme with different baselines and also some organisations focused primarily on recruiting 50+ volunteers while recruiting 50+ volunteers was not the priority in some projects. It is

for this reason that this descriptive account of effectiveness should be read in conjunction with section 4 of this report.

Table 5 below demonstrates the extent to which different projects in each funding stream met the targets set at inception for the total number of volunteers, total number of beneficiaries and 50+ volunteers.

Table 5: Proportion of projects which met targets

Funding Streams	Total Volunteers	50+ Volunteers	Beneficiaries
CCIF	38%	43%	38%
SHF	50%	38%	31%
GMGM	0%	0%	0%
JISI	25%	0%	0%

Viewed at the programme level, it is clear from this data that the majority of projects did not meet targets set at inception for the recruitment of volunteers, or the number of beneficiaries supported. In some cases, challenges experienced in delivery against targets set at inception led to agreements between individual grantees and Nesta to adjust targets. Some projects funded through CCIF experienced particular difficulties in recruiting 50+ volunteers and agreed with Nesta and DCMS to focus on the quality of delivery and to place less emphasis on the 50+ volunteering aspect of projects. This suggests a degree of optimism bias may have been present at the planning stage in relation to the ease with which 50+ volunteers might be recruited and linked to this the number of beneficiaries who could be supported. Another factor that will have affected the delivery of some CCIF projects in the final months of their funding is the COVID-19 pandemic.

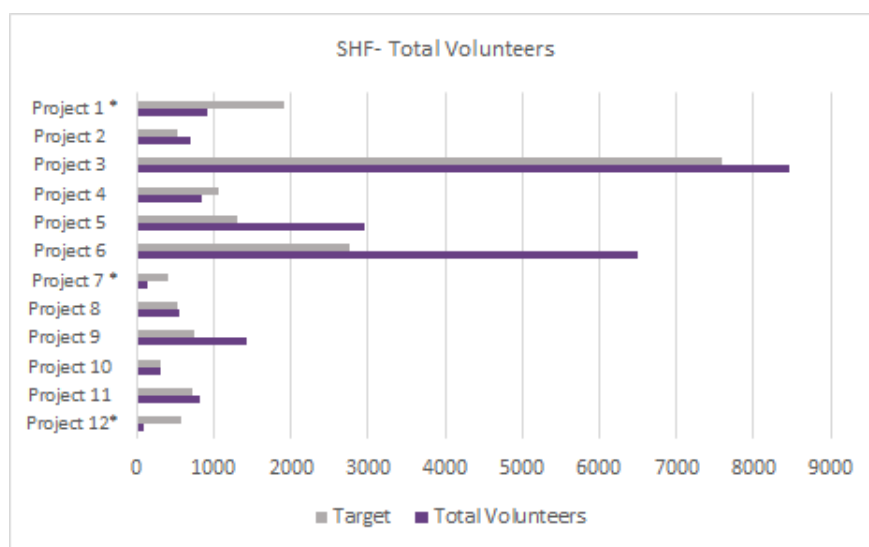
More positively it is clear that when these problems became evident during delivery, Nesta and the grantees took action to revise targets and decommitted projects (such as those on JISI) that had ceased to be viable. In a similar vein, although not decommitted, projects that were part of CCIF reduced targets and funding levels in response to problems experienced in recruiting 50+ volunteers.

However, this programme level analysis disguises a great deal of variation at the level of individual projects. If we look in greater detail at the projects within the two most numerous funding streams – the SHF and CCIF – we find a more nuanced picture of performance.

3.3.1 Volunteer Targets

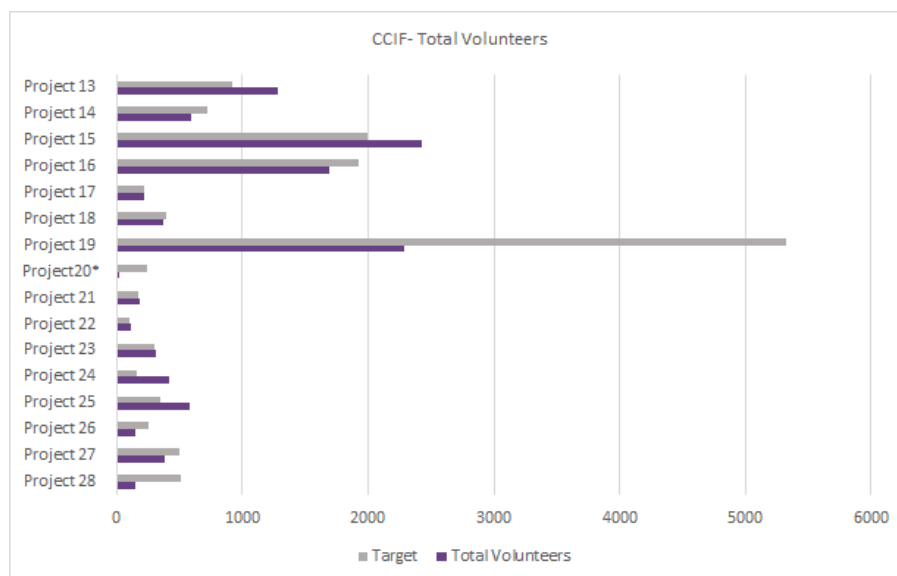
It is clear from Figures 6 and 7 below that while some projects clearly did struggle to recruit volunteers in the volume anticipated, others exceeded their targets by some margin.

Figure 6: Volunteer targets for Second Half Fund projects



*Decommited projects

Figure 7: Volunteer targets for Connected Communities Innovation Fund projects



*Decommited projects

Turning now to the recruitment of volunteers from the 50+ age group specifically (figures 8 and 9), apart from GMGM and JISI which were particularly focused on 50+ volunteers, **SHF reached an average of 44 % in recruitment of 50+ volunteers as part of their workforce involved in their projects while the average for CCIF was 50%.**

Figure 8: Targets for 50+ volunteers for Second Half Fund projects

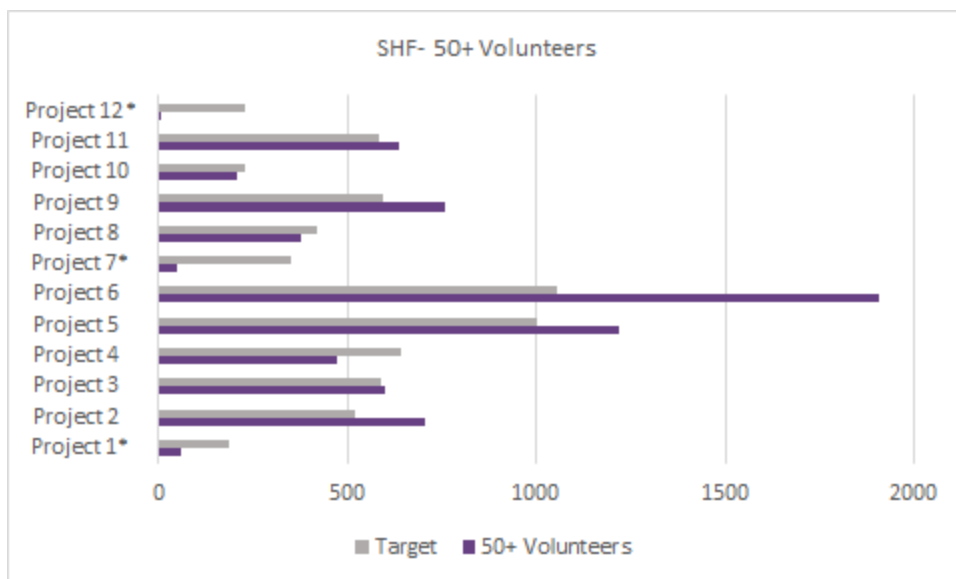
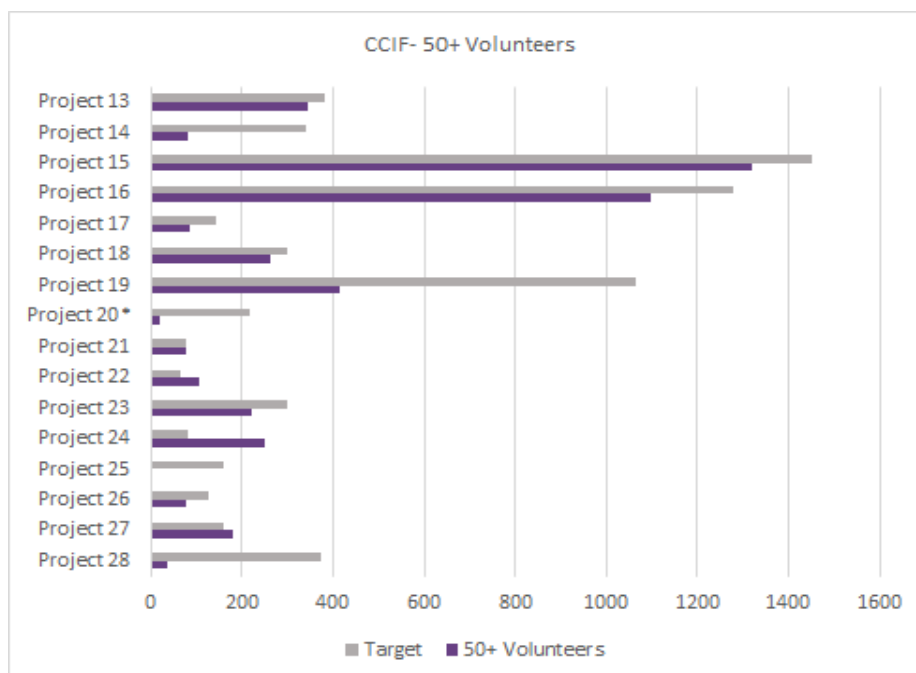


Figure 9: Targets for 50+ volunteers for CCIF

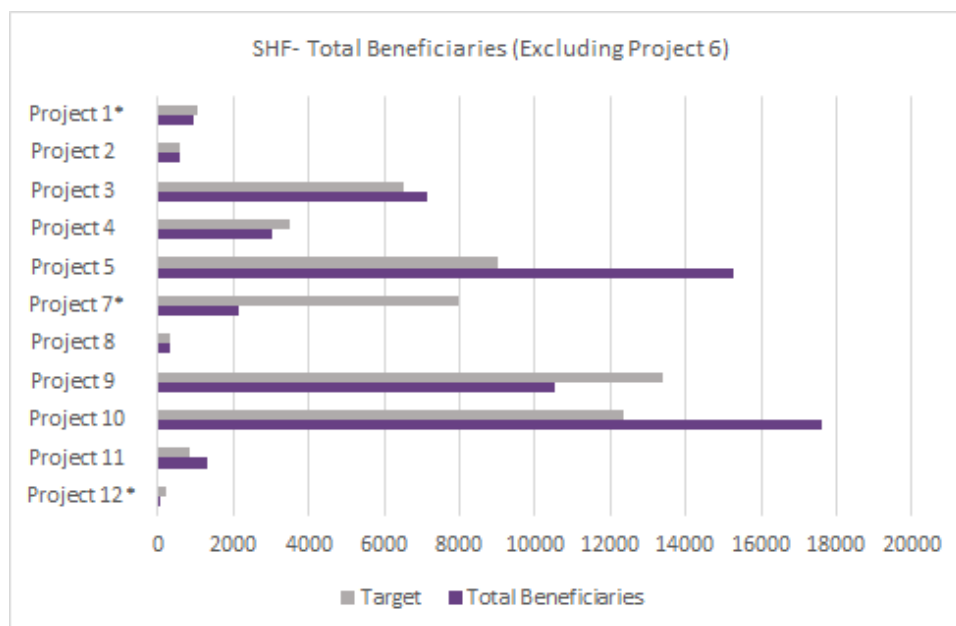


*Decommitted projects

3.3.2 Beneficiary targets

The numbers of beneficiaries supported by projects varied widely. This is a function of the heterogeneity of the projects themselves. One project worked with volunteers to distribute food to charities and community groups. Other projects had a far more limited reach – but were characterised by a much higher intensity of volunteering by individual volunteers and therefore intensity of support to beneficiaries. For example, another project provided work placements, advice and guidance to young people to develop their confidence, knowledge of STEM degrees and key employability skills. These variations in beneficiary targets can also be seen as a product of the different operating models, such as those working in a network with other charities and voluntary organisations, through to organisations working independently. It is interesting to note from figure 10 and 11 below that the projects which exceeded their targets for beneficiaries supported were not necessarily the same projects that exceeded targets for volunteer recruitment. This gives further support to the view that some projects found that they could support more beneficiaries than originally anticipated.

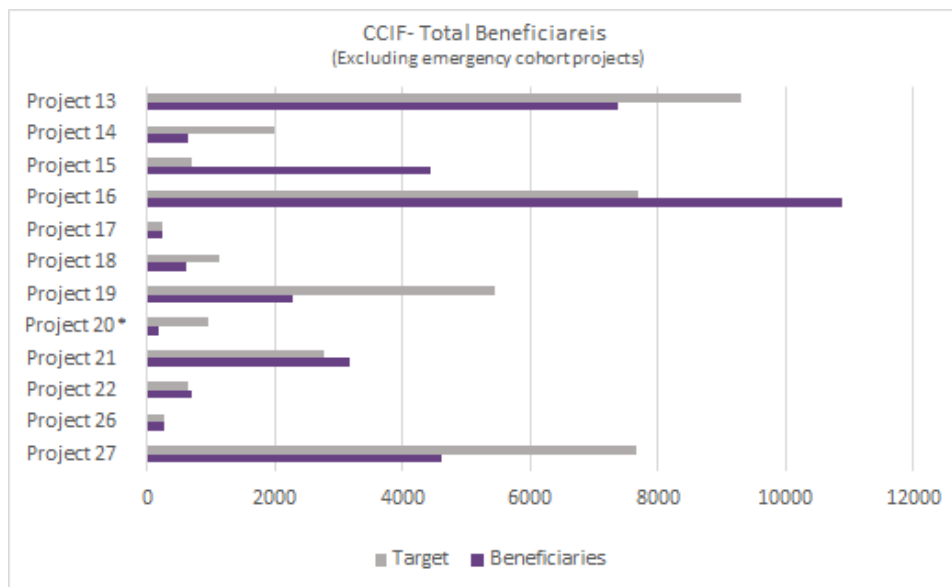
Figure 10: Beneficiaries targets for Second Half Fund projects



*Decommitted projects

Project 6 is excluded from this chart as an extreme outlier

Figure 11: Beneficiaries targets for Connected Communities Innovation Fund projects



*Decommitted projects

Reflections on economy, efficiency and effectiveness

The competitive nature of the application process for grants under the 50+ programme is likely to have contributed both to the quality of projects supported and the value for money that they represented – notwithstanding the innovative nature of some of the activity supported. This assessment is further reinforced by the nature of the funding plus model of support provided to grantees by Nesta.

Efficiency concerns the manner in which programme inputs such as funding, staff and volunteer time and equipment are converted into outputs such as beneficiaries supported or activities delivered. In light of the essential heterogeneity of activities delivered under the 50+ programme it must be stressed that crude comparisons across projects and programmes should be avoided. Comparing the total amount of funding against the number of volunteers and beneficiaries achieved, it is possible to comment on the extent to which volunteer and beneficiary unit costs were in line with those anticipated at project inception. In general, the majority of projects for which we have data were delivered at unit costs per volunteer and beneficiary close to those anticipated at inception. The exceptions tended to be projects that sought to trial new intensive forms of social action.

Effectiveness measured in terms of performance against targets for volunteer and 50+ volunteer recruitment and for beneficiaries supported again varied hugely. There were notable exceptions, but many projects struggled to recruit volunteers at levels embodied in targets set at inception. More positively, projects found that they could support more beneficiaries per volunteer than was anticipated at the start of the programme.

4. Outcomes of the 50+ volunteering programme

This section of the report examines the difference the 50+ volunteering programme has made. It focuses on the following key areas:

- Outcomes for grantee organisations, including their reach, ways of working and sustainability;
- Outcomes for beneficiaries including social connections and wellbeing;
- Outcomes for 50+ volunteers, including use of skills and experiences; and
- Outcomes for public service areas

4.1 Outcomes for grantee organisations

This section of the report draws on the qualitative data from the grantee interviews in exploring the difference the 50+ programme funding and non-financial support made to grantee organisations with a focus on:

- Reach and capacity
- Organisational culture and ways of working
- Developing volunteering
- Developing and expanding collaboration and partnerships
- Strategy, planning and sustainability
- Grantees working relationship with Nesta

4.1.1 Reach and capacity

“It’s been really quite transformative for us as an organisation. From an impact, programmatic point of view, we’ve doubled our reach in the region. More groups, more people, and more volunteers. In terms of organisational impact, that’s a huge achievement.” (Grantee interview)

The 50+ volunteering programme enabled organisations across the funding streams to expand their reach and capacity. This enabled them to:

- expand the work they were doing
- recruit and train more volunteers
- reach and engage more beneficiaries and service users

- and in doing so, make greater impacts on their local communities and wider society.

4.1.1.1 Expanding work

“it’s been able to give us the resources that we needed to really expand the programme to new regions of the UK and to really sort of test that and have the space and room to trial it.” (Grantee interview)

There were a variety of ways in which projects expanded their work, including reaching wider or new geographical areas. Key factors included: **funding for two years** rather than the single year of funding that many funding streams award. Grantees reported that this made a big difference in their ability to look to the future, plan, and embed their projects within the communities in which they were working. Closely related to this was **the recruitment of new members of staff**. Expanding their team meant that grantee projects had dedicated members of staff to deal with different aspects of the project delivery and development, and this in turn impacted on the speed at which they were able to get new initiatives up and running.

Development of project infrastructure was reported as an important outcome of funding with restructures of organisations and development of technologies and resources for delivery cited. Alongside this, this capacity to **collaborate with outside agencies** such as local authorities and public services was an important factor in projects working towards future sustainability.

A combination of these factors meant that projects were able to develop their reach and capacity to **raise awareness of their organisations** and begin to **embed their work** into the communities they were working in and in some cases within wider society. As a result of this, learning was able to be embedded into the future delivery of programmes (see section 5.1 for more on learning at project level).

4.1.1.2 Recruiting more volunteers

Developing capacity within organisations through a combination of factors (discussed above) gave organisations the ability to focus on recruiting and training larger numbers of volunteers, and in some cases more diverse volunteers. For some organisations, this meant they were able to further expand their capacity, for others this was about being able to reach a wider number of beneficiaries.

4.1.1.3 Reaching more beneficiaries

Through the grants, organisations were able to expand their reach to include more beneficiaries. Between them, projects reached over 474,730 new beneficiaries. For some organisations, this was through developing a larger presence in the communities they worked with either through having the capacity to set up more groups and therefore reaching more beneficiaries or through developing an awareness of existing groups and therefore experiencing a wider uptake of the services they offered. In addition to this, some projects also reported that they had seen larger numbers from hard-to-reach groups which in turn had positive outcomes on loneliness and social isolation (see section 4.2).

4.1.1.4 Challenges

While projects saw their reach and/or their capacity expand over the course of the funding, this was not without challenges. In total, ten projects were decommitted. Table 6 (below) details the numbers of projects from each fund which were decommitted. The experimental *Join In Stay In* programme ended early due to a lack of available volunteers, meaning that the Randomised Control Trial (RCT) could not proceed as planned, with all five projects being decommitted. Four projects from the Second Half Fund and one from the Connected Communities Innovation Fund were decommitted for a variety of reasons including challenges in recruiting 50+ volunteers, realisation that the original project model did not work and resultant concerns about value for money if the projects continued.

Table 6: Projects decommitted for each fund¹¹

Fund	Projects initially funded	Projects decommitted	Remaining projects
Join In Stay In	5	5	0
Give More Get More	5	0	5
Second Half Fund	13	4	9
Connected Communities Innovation Fund	16	1	15
Totals	39	10	29

In the early days of the funding, some projects faced challenges with the fast pace of growth. Where venues needed to be booked and groups needed to be advertised there was often little capacity left to focus on recruiting volunteers so for some projects this came later in the process. Others, that were operating in multiple areas of the country, discovered that setting up their services varied from place to place with some areas having no shortage of volunteers and beneficiaries whereas in other areas the process of recruiting volunteers and raising awareness of services was more of a challenging process. Section 5.1 discusses further the specific challenges grantees faced with volunteer recruitment, project growth and evaluation.

4.1.2 Organisational culture and ways of working

“We are an old organisation and I liken us to a big ship, it is really hard to turn it and it takes a while to turn it but having a project like this has given us a little bit more fuel in our tank which has allowed us to turn it a little bit quicker... One of the challenges has been developing a new process for lighter touch opportunities and that’s what this 50+ work falls within.” (Grantee interview)

¹¹ It is worth noting here that tracking documents from Nesta and DCMS show different numbers for projects decommitted. Some funds reduced grants for some of the projects within them, whereas others terminated projects. Therefore the evaluation team have included projects where grants were reduced but completed and went on to produce individual evaluation reports.

For some of the organisations receiving this grant meant a significant shift in the size and scale of the work that they could do, and consequently their structure and culture.

Organisations reported cultural changes during the lifetime of their grants and included shifting mindsets within the organisation and the embedding of new ideas. The grant and non-financial support from Nesta gave organisations the capacity to focus on developing their culture and identifying more clearly their vision and what they wanted to achieve.

“what this grant has done has it’s totally flipped the organisation on its head and put volunteers at the heart of a lot of things that we do”.
(Grantee interview)

For some organisations receiving the grant meant they had to recruit more people, leading to a restructuring. This brought positive outcomes, such as new people, but also challenges, particularly at the outset as it meant that some of the people who were initially involved in the project design, or even attended the initial Nesta workshops, were not involved later in the project. Consequently, there were challenges in project memory, as the learning between people involved in the projects was not always passed on. For those projects that were rapidly growing, this produced many organisational challenges, which some organisations were not prepared for. Whilst the funding plus approach provided significant opportunities for organisational development and capacity building, the potential to make use of this opportunity was sometimes limited by the restructuring organisations went through, and therefore some of the wider organisational learning was lost.

4.1.3 Developing volunteering

The 50+ volunteering programme enabled grantees to develop volunteering within their organisations in a wide range of ways. Organisations reported **working differently with volunteers** which included exploring different ways of managing and supporting volunteers (see section 5.1.1), developing training for volunteers, and changing roles so volunteering opportunities could be flexible. Further to this, grantees discussed better **embedding volunteering into their organisations**. A

common experience was the grant allowing them the time and focus for volunteering to be brought more to the centre of organisations. As a result of this, **learning what worked well with volunteer recruitment** was a key part of the organisations' experiences of the grant, although the nature of this learning varied widely from project to project. For some organisations, 50+ was a natural fit and they had to change little of what they were already doing in order to expand their volunteer base. For others, this was a much more difficult process but organisations reported that using direct and personal strategies, including community outreach activities and directly asking people to get involved were the most successful in reaching 50+ volunteers (see section 5.1.1 for further discussion).

Grantees also explored ways of reaching more diverse volunteers, using different methods and messages (see 5.1.1):

“If we want to recruit people who are not traditionally attracted to [the organisation] we probably need to do something different. This has really helped us challenge the internal narrative and to really put a focus on...we need to do things differently if we want to reach different people” (Grantee interview)

4.1.4 Collaboration and partnerships

The nature of collaboration varied from formalised partnerships with other organisations to deliver initiatives, to fewer formal collaborations with other organisations who supported the project. The innovation funding and non-financial support gave organisations the capacity and opportunity to strengthen existing partnerships or develop new ones. Collaborators came from a range of different organisations including: community organisations, local authorities, social enterprises, businesses and other stakeholders. For some, partnerships were with a single organisation whereas for others they were multiagency. Grantees noted the importance of these connections both to their grant-funded work and to their future sustainability as an organisation.

“it has re-emphasised the importance of partnership working to get initiatives like this off the ground” (Grantee interview)

“I think it's starting to help give us a footing in the local communities. Um, so yeah, it's been really useful not just for being able to deliver this phase but also hopefully give us a grounding for further development” (Grantee interview)

Collaborators also played a vital role for some projects as match funders or as 'buyers' of a service. Kinship, for example, developed multiple partnerships with local authority childrens' services including adoption and fostering teams, or special guardian teams who referred families to the programme. As these relationships developed, local authority teams and Kinship worked together to identify pathways for referrals and key barriers (see [Kinship Connected learning partner evaluation](#) (Starks and Whitley, 2020)). There were also examples of organisations collaborating with businesses, including, for example, Grandmentors, a mentoring programme supporting care leavers. In some areas, project coordinators built strong relationships with local businesses who referred their 50+ staff for volunteering opportunities and hosted matching events between volunteer mentors and young people.

However, for some organisations, building and developing collaborations was more complex. One project discovered that their work didn't fit within the aims of their local authority. Another found they needed to compromise too much of their project in order to work with other organisations. Further learning on collaborating when growing social action models is discussed in section 5.1.1.

4.1.5 Strategy/planning/sustainability

The two- or three-year nature of the grants presented a real opportunity for organisations to look towards the future, plan, strategize, develop and trial ways of becoming sustainable in the future. But sustainability was not just about funding; figure 12 below highlights factors that contribute towards organisational sustainability. At the end of the funding, some of the projects were unable to continue, whereas others had gained follow on or other sources of funding. Some projects had evolved into a new form or had developed external partnerships which meant the work was able to continue.

Figure 12: Contributors to organisational sustainability



Source: Ockenden et al, 2017 p21

Organisations reported developments in these areas as a result of both their funding and the non-financial support they received from Nesta including: **adaptability and resilience, clear mission aims, and a strong reputation and legitimacy**. For some the grant had led the organisation to make wider changes:

“We’ve been using the learning from this project to really inform our business plan and our organisational strategy. That work’s not done yet, but ... for example, we’ve restructured part of the business as a result of it. We’ve developed a 5-year plan as a result of it. The impact is really broad-ranging” (Grantee interview)

For others, the grant helped articulate their ambition and acted as a catalyst in enabling them to progress with their plans, in one example it helped speed up organisational plans to shift towards a community-led operating model. For other projects, this was about piloting and testing new ideas, and for others, this was about changing the perception of the organisation in the wider community:

“I think it's cultural. I think it's removed the ivory tower and the city hall barriers. I think it's brought us closer to our communities in the sense that it's something we all do together now” (Grantee interview)

4.1.6 Working with Nesta

The high engagement, tailored support provided to grantees by Nesta was an integral part of the grants and many of the outcomes discussed above reflect not only the positive effects of the funding but also the support they received. Through the research, grantees shared their experiences with this high engagement approach, and this is explored here, including:

- What was valuable to grantees
- What was less useful to grantees
- Areas for development on support provided

4.1.6.1 Application process

While grantees reported that the initial funding application process was challenging and time-consuming, they were appreciative of the level of guidance that they (Nesta) gave from the initial expression of interest to the submission of the bid. One grantee described the application process as ‘transparent’ and this sentiment was echoed by others. Grantees received support in a range of areas including: understanding how to answer questions on the form, shaping proposals so they were realistic and deliverable, and developing a theory of change. As a result, by the time projects were granted funding there were clear aims for what they intended to achieve.

4.1.6.2 Learning from cohort/workshops and events/networking

Grantees particularly valued the opportunity to attend events and network with other organisations in their cohort. This was a chance to share ideas, resources, and challenges and allowed grantees to reflect on the progress they had made. Networking also provided reassurance that other organisations were experiencing the development of their projects in similar ways. Interviewees benefited from the support they gained with evaluation throughout these workshops and the recognition that although the projects were working in very different areas, they had the shared aim of developing volunteering amongst the over 50s.

“We’ve had lots of introductions to other organisations, so being part of the cohort has been really fantastic in terms of learning. The

insights, ideas and challenges that we've shared between the organisations being supported" (Grantee interview)

However, interviewees also reported that attending workshops was time-consuming and kept them away from the day to day running of the project. This was particularly the case for projects that were not based close to London, where many of the events occurred. This also meant that fewer staff from the project were able to attend, which in some organisations had the knock-on effect of the learning being less widely shared throughout the organisation. One project reported that a member of staff who regularly attended the workshops had left and as a result that learning had gone with her. Some grantees suggested that events and workshops would be more accessible if they were rotated in different places around the country or were held virtually.

The workshops provided excellent opportunities for organisational learning, but more attention could be given to how this learning is disseminated and embedded within the organisations. Grantees also commented on how different the projects involved in the 50+ programme were in terms of their fields and focus which they felt constrained opportunities for synergy and sharing between projects.

4.1.6.3 Networking with Nesta's contacts

Grantees valued the expertise of external organisations, including UsCreates¹² and the signposting Nesta provided to external contacts. However, some would have welcomed more opportunities to link up with other organisations and a better understanding of Nesta's scope and reach in terms of who they could be connected to. One grantee noted:

"Doing this project for the first time and knowing the connections that Nesta has, quite often they would say 'let us know who you want to be connected to, we know loads of people' but what I really needed was for them to say I know Bob at this place I am going to connect him to you. I didn't know who I needed to be connected to because it is the first time I have done this...when I finally found out who I

¹² UsCreates is a service design consultancy.

needed to be connected to the connection never came” (Grantee interview)

4.1.6.4 Support with sustainability

Grantees valued the support Nesta gave them with planning for sustainability. Again, this support varied depending on project aims and the way they were run but included supporting projects in finding and applying for alternative streams of funding and in business planning. However, some grantees indicated that they would have welcomed more support in helping them think through the long-term sustainability of their projects or would have preferred this support to have come earlier in their funding.

4.1.6.5 One-to-one coaching and advice from Nesta

Throughout the grant, grantees were assigned a one-to-one contact at Nesta with whom they had regular conversations, meetings and support, including areas such as monitoring and evaluation. Grantees reported developing a good working relationship with their grant manager who became a ‘critical friend’ to discuss ideas with. Nesta’s knowledge, skills and “*genuine expertise and focus*” were highlighted by many of the grantees, particularly in areas such as segmenting and marketing; business planning; evaluation; and the process of scaling. Grantees noted:

“Nesta opened the door for us in terms of our thinking, Also their experience and knowledge about how to expand a national programme or how to make a local programme national has been really invaluable and that has been one of the key things for [our organisation] is how we do that and they have literally walked us through that process” (Grantee interview)

“I think I feel very lucky that we've have been successful in this grant because Nesta have been, a completely different funder to work with. That is so inspiring the way that they approach their work with grantees” (Grantee interview)

Grantees commented on how Nesta understood their work, challenges and wider contexts. Their advice and support sometimes went beyond the delivery of projects to support the wider organisation or senior leaders:

“unlike any other funder they [Nesta] do seem to be very hands on with their projects” (Grantee interview)

However, in some projects, grant managers were changed part of the way through the funding and for those grantees, the relationship was more difficult. Building a relationship with their new grant manager was challenging with these grantees expressing that their new grant manager had less of an understanding of their project than their predecessor.

4.1.6.6 Supportive and flexible approach

Interviewees discussed how their project had benefited from Nesta’s flexible approach. This included Nesta discussing the challenges with the original targets with DCMS and agreeing on a proposition for a revision that was more realistic and with a renewed focus on the quality of programme delivery. Nesta provided support with a range of organisational issues:

“because we were going through a transition as a charity we were changing things and they weren’t working...and they were really patient and supportive of us. They offered a lot of support inside of [the organisation] and outside of [the organisation] so were willing to come and talk to our SMT” (Grantee interview)

4.1.6.7 Key areas for development

The funding plus approach adopted as part of the 50+ volunteering programme meant that both Nesta and grantees spent considerable time on support activities and engaging with one another. While, on the whole, grantees widely valued these opportunities, some felt the non-financial support commitments were time-consuming and reduced the time they could spend on project delivery. This highlights the importance of a balanced approach to high engagement funding. Grantees commented that they felt that discussions with Nesta were sometimes less clear than they could have been due to issues around the terminology they used. One

interviewee discussed the 'tensions' their project had felt between theory and practice around developing a theory of change. Ultimately the result was useful but they felt that the process was more convoluted than it could have been. Other grantees felt that while the networking events were valuable, there was too much information delivered in the course of the day to be able to absorb. In addition to this, some perceived the information delivered to be too theoretical to be of any practical use.

Networking was also raised as an area for further development. Grantees commented that the networking with other organisations could be more developed, some suggested that working in smaller groups with organisations they shared more common ground with would be more beneficial whereas others felt that encouraging networking outside of the events would benefit them.

Reflections on the outcomes for organisations

- Organisations expanded their reach and capacity as part of their funding but the ways in which they did this varied from project to project, including reaching more service users, piloting new ideas, and recruiting more volunteers.
- Organisations experienced challenges with fast-paced growth and the associated changes they needed to make in their organisations as a result of this.
- Organisations felt that the funding and non-financial support helped strengthen their organisations, whether through stronger collaborations, cultural change or in supporting more sustainable organisations.
- Grantees developed good working relationships with Nesta and this support was seen to be important to growing projects and ideas. The support offered varied because it was tailored to the needs of individual projects and this was key to the success of the approach. There were projects who reported more challenging relationships with Nesta but this was often down to changes in their contact part of the way through their funding.

4.2 Outcomes for beneficiaries

The 50+ volunteering programme supported a wide range of different beneficiaries, working across different fields. In some of the funded projects volunteers worked directly with beneficiaries, for example, mentoring or providing personal support. Other projects worked in different ways where volunteering activities benefited a local neighbourhood or the environment. In this section of the report, the focus is on the outcomes for beneficiaries i.e. the person or people for whom the project is designed to make a difference.

The distinction between volunteers and beneficiaries was not clear cut for every project. In some, volunteers were 'members' or 'participants', for example, with community-led models, such as self-reliant groups, where the volunteers are the beneficiaries of the groups. The focus for this evaluation is therefore on the outcomes for those who either considered themselves to be beneficiaries or were defined by staff working on projects as beneficiaries.

The relationship between 50+ volunteers and the outcomes for beneficiaries is complex. For some projects, the outcomes reported by beneficiaries through the learning partner evaluations were reported to be from their participation in the project itself rather than specifically the 50+ volunteers. For other projects, 50+ volunteers were integral to what beneficiaries gained from the project. Those projects which reported specifically benefitting from 50+ volunteers included:

- Mentoring projects which aimed to develop intergenerational relationships between young people and 50+ volunteers. In this context, the life experience and the ability to provide guidance which volunteers aged 50+ brought was important to the relationships they developed with their mentees.
- Projects where beneficiaries themselves were aged 50+. These projects varied and included health and fitness, wellbeing, and relationship building but shared the common theme of beneficiaries seeing themselves and their age group represented in the volunteers. This helped to develop their confidence in their own abilities and ensured that they were more likely to continue their engagement with the project.

- Community building projects. 50+ volunteers were more likely to have wider community connections, and while it was not always possible to directly link the value that 50+ volunteers brought to beneficiaries it was clear that grantees valued their wealth of life experience and perceived their skills and connections as providing a foundation for projects to succeed in supporting beneficiaries. For grantees, 50+ volunteers offered distinct strengths and qualities that other age groups would have been less likely to bring.

“there’s a wisdom [that] comes from a whole lot of years of experience of not just working but living, which gives older people a sense of, I think solidity and perspective, which in terms of them as mentors really brings something incredibly valued. So, to be able to be with a young person and go, “Just talk to me about it,” there’s something which comes from all of those years of experience which is of undeniable value”

Staff working with funded projects particularly highlighted the following qualities of 50+ volunteers:

- **Ability to identify with and inspire older people.** The value of 50+ volunteers acting as role models, inspiring and connecting with an older cohort of people.
- **Ability to work with young people.** This was particularly discussed in relation to using and sharing life experiences, for example, in mentoring roles.
- **Provide valuable skills, knowledge and experiences.** This was frequently mentioned in interviews; skills from their professional careers and life experiences were seen as an invaluable resource for projects to tap into.
- **Provide strong connections to the community.** Interviewees pointed to the ways that 50+ volunteers often had strong connections and involvement in their local communities which meant that their projects were able to more easily connect with these communities.
- **Commitment to volunteering.** Some grantees remarked on how committed and dedicated 50+ volunteers were to their role or project.

Across the projects, there was a wide range of outcomes for beneficiaries, which are detailed below. This draws primarily on the findings from the learning partner

evaluations (many of which involved interviews, surveys or workshops directly with beneficiaries) and the case studies (two case studies involved interviews or discussions with beneficiaries). Grantees also provided useful reflections on the impacts of projects on beneficiaries. Due to the heterogeneity of projects, these outcomes are quite disparate, and it was difficult for the evaluation to draw comparisons and conclusions about the effects of different types of projects or attribute change directly to volunteers.

4.2.1 Increased networks and connections

The learning partner evaluations and case studies found that beneficiaries had grown their networks, social connections and friendships in a variety of ways including attending a group or service weekly, developing a support network they could go to if they were facing challenges (and in turn supporting others in the network with challenges), developing greater connections in their local communities, and developing meaningful relationships. As a result of this, beneficiaries reported positive impacts on their personal wellbeing (see case study below) and their feelings of social isolation and loneliness.

4.2.1.1 Skills development and employability

The development of skills was a key reported outcome for beneficiaries. The nature and extent of skills gained were wide-ranging, depending on the aims of the project. While the development of these were reported across projects and age groups, projects working with young people saw the additional outcome of improved employability. This was especially the case in projects where young people were assigned mentors within a particular field or where raising career prospects was a key focus of projects.

4.2.1.2 Personal development

Another important outcome for beneficiaries reported in the learning partner evaluations was the personal development beneficiaries experienced through involvement with projects, particularly the development of confidence. A key part of this was attributed to the skills and knowledge they developed but other important factors included: engaging in new experiences, developing a support network, being

listened to by others, having a better understanding of who to approach with worries or concerns, and feeling a sense of belonging. In2Science's initiative, funded through CCIF, is one example of where young people developed confidence and skills through their involvement in a social action project. The project focused on developing the 'science capital' of young people from low-income backgrounds so they can progress to university or pursue a STEM career. Through work placements, mentoring and other activities with local scientists, engineers, and technology and maths professionals, the learning partner evaluation by ZK Analytics reported young people taking part in the project felt more confident in their abilities and in engaging with scientists. The project also helped to increase participants' STEM-related knowledge ([In2Science learning partner evaluation](#) ZK Analytics, 2020).

4.2.1.3 Improved wellbeing

A strong theme from the learning partner evaluations was the difference that projects made to the wellbeing of beneficiaries. Wellbeing is defined, measured and understood in different ways (see Diener et al, 2009) and this was also true with the funded projects and their evaluations. Positive changes for beneficiaries were reported by beneficiaries themselves and also the grantees that worked with them, in terms of sense of purpose, meaning in life, 'mood', satisfaction with life, happiness, levels of anxiety and mental health (see case study below). Often these changes were linked to the opportunities that projects gave for emotional support, the development of improved social connections and confidence. The Reader's Shared Reading evaluation, for example, identified enhanced wellbeing as a key outcome of their project. With funding through the Second Half Fund, the Reader set up 115 new shared reading groups with volunteers recruited to run the sessions. The evaluation found that 91% of community members thought that the reading sessions made them 'feel better' and 84%¹³ said they made new friends through the groups ([The Reader evaluation](#), 2020).

The learning partner evaluation of B:friend; a befriending scheme and one of the four Cities of Service funded programmes, also reported positive wellbeing outcomes on beneficiaries involved in the project. B:friend provides 1:1 matching with a volunteer

¹³ Based on a sample of 1407 respondents

and social club for socially isolated older 'neighbours' and reported it played an important role in contributing to the emotional, social and mental wellbeing of befriending 'neighbours' (Woods, 2020). The evaluation identified some of the key mechanisms linking the experiences with the project to improved wellbeing, including positive and enjoyable engagement; feeling supported and encouraged to try new things; and feeling listened to and respected ([B:friend Evaluation Report](#)).

It is notable, that some of the findings of the learning partner evaluations that measured changes in the wellbeing of beneficiaries over time were inconclusive. One mentoring project found that over half of mentees experienced progress with their wellbeing while around a third experienced a decline over time. This may in part reflect the complexity of the lives of the beneficiaries and that some individuals were better suited to the programme than others.

Case study: Compassionate Neighbours¹

Compassionate Neighbours aims to reduce loneliness and isolation by matching trained volunteers with local community members. The programme evaluation team spoke to local community members and volunteers about their experiences with the project. One such volunteer is Sam who visits Tony twice a week in his home for one to two hours. After living a very active life Tony developed a chronic illness and was matched by their local hospice with Sam. He spoke of the difference his relationship with Tony has made to his life and his own personal wellbeing:

“It’s benefitted me an awful lot, you know because I find that you become very depressed, especially if you were very, very active which I was..... and then all of a sudden you get this and I’m not doing anything, I’m sitting around the house, which is very, very depressing, believe me and he is getting me out a bit now, he’s bringing me out a bit, it’s slowly but surely, he’s a good ear to bend”

Tony also spoke of the friendship he and Sam had built up over the nine months period and how trusted and reliable this relationship was:

“I know if I needed him I would call on him, I know I could... I was going to say, the thing that is good about it is that he will tell me whereas the family will sugar coat it. So he will tell me the truth which is good, which I might not like it but it’s better when I sit back and think about it, yeah, he’s right so it does calm me down that way”

4.2.1.4 Community engagement and awareness of issues

Awareness of issues both locally and nationally amongst beneficiaries were reported in a number of the grantee interviews and learning partner evaluations. These were linked to beneficiaries learning new skills, taking part in community activities, or volunteering in projects that directly benefitted their local community or engaged with wider national/global issues. Southampton Collective's community clean air project, for example, looked to engage with citizens in volunteering and behaviour change around air pollution. The learning partner evaluation found that the project created opportunities and encouraged engagement in community action and "*there was some evidence that local residents' activity had started to increase as a result of the project*" ([Breathing Spaces Learning Partner Evaluation](#) Jones, 2020 p5).

Case study – Kinship Connected

Kinship Connected was set up by Kinship (formerly Grandparents Plus) to provide support, information, and advice to kinship carers. Kinship carers are relatives or friends who raise a child or children full-time, usually because their parents are not able to care for them, often due to parental substance misuse, death or imprisonment. With funding from the 50+ volunteering programme, Kinship looked to consolidate the work they had already undertaken in the North East of England and London, as well as expanding to new areas of West Yorkshire and Milton Keynes. Between May 2019 and June 2020, thirty-five new peer to peer support groups were established.

This project is one example of where there is a blurring between ‘beneficiary’ and ‘volunteer’. Those who help to run the support groups are also kinship carers and ‘beneficiaries’ of the groups. Through interviews, they commented on the impact of the groups on their own lives as well as others. Key to this was the peer-to-peer element and the shared lived experiences of the kinship carers. Kinship carers felt that support groups provided a non-judgemental space where you could be honest about how you are feeling and where people understand what you are going through because they have been through it themselves:

“It’s being with people who just know sometimes without even saying the words how you’re feeling. That you’re saying that about your own child but then you’re feeling guilty about it at the same time, it doesn’t need explaining because every one of us have been in either that or a similar position. And you can’t even get that from professionals because although to a point they know what you’re talking about, they don’t know the feeling” (Kinship carer)

“You all kind of put on this mask, this care mask, where you're the rock in the family and you're doing all this but it's a kind of self-realisation, self-reflection, which sometimes makes you break down and I think it's really important to have that because it's not something that kinship carers in general do on a daily basis because you're there for the children” (Kinship carer)

For some volunteers the groups had been ‘life changing’ and a ‘lifeline’ in their own lives, helping them to get through challenging times and situations:

“Well, it was a life-saver because at the end of the day, I had no-one. And having this child with these outbursts I was finding it hard because although I brought up [my] children and not one of them was anything like that and I just thought my god, you know, this is really hard, no-one to talk to. But when you went to the group, because you're not the only person who may have a problem” (Kinship carer)

Reflections on outcomes for beneficiaries

- A wide range of positive outcomes were reported for beneficiaries including increased networks and connections, increased confidence and skills and increased wellbeing. These were often interconnected but the extent to which beneficiaries benefitted in each of these areas varied depending on the aims of different projects.
- Due to the heterogeneity of projects these outcomes are not distinct to this programme, which says more about the variety of types of projects and activities than anything specific about having 50+ volunteers. That said, projects which sought to use the particular skills and capacities of 50+ volunteers, such as mentoring projects, did highlight their specific contribution to this work. However, these projects also reported that these skills were not exclusive to 50+ volunteers.
- It should be noted that the findings presented above were drawn from learning partner evaluation reports, as well as the evaluation interviews with grantees and case studies. The evidence is likely to have a predisposition towards positive outcomes rather than neutral or negative effects of participation in projects.
- The monitoring and evaluation processes did not lend themselves to explore the impact on beneficiaries in a consistent way. Evaluation frameworks that were developed at the programme level and then adapted to the circumstances of individual projects could have enabled more consistent data to have been collected and then used to analyse the relative outcomes on beneficiaries.
- A wide range of outcomes for beneficiaries were reported including increased networks and connections, increased confidence and skills and increased wellbeing. These were often interconnected but the extent to which beneficiaries benefitted in each of these areas varied depending on the aims of different projects.

4.3 Outcomes for 50+ volunteers

This section of the report brings together the findings on the outcomes of participation in volunteering for 50+ volunteers. A key aim of the 50+ volunteering programme was to engage more 50+ volunteers in impactful roles that make a difference not only to beneficiaries but to volunteers as well.

The findings draw primarily on the qualitative research from the four case studies and the learning partner evaluations. Projects were encouraged by Nesta to focus on evaluating outcomes for beneficiaries rather than benefits to volunteers due to the wealth of published evidence in this area. Therefore only nine of the 21 evaluation reports focused specifically on volunteers themselves. The findings below are therefore a snapshot of some of the perceived outcomes for 50+ volunteers. While the focus here is on 50+ volunteers, those under 50 were also involved in the programme and some of these outcomes are likely to be relevant to them as well.

4.3.1 Using strengths, skills and experiences

A key focus of the 50+ volunteering programme was on how organisations and public services can better tap into the skills and experiences of 50+ volunteers. Research on the volunteer experience based on a sample of over 10,000 volunteers found that half of volunteers (50%) use their existing professional skills and experiences when volunteering, with those aged 55 and over more likely than younger volunteers to say this. A similar proportion (52%) use other non-professional skills in their volunteering (McGarvey et al, 2019). Other research has found that while some volunteers aged 50+ value opportunities to develop new skills, making good use of pre-existing skills and experiences was more important (Jopling and Jones, 2018).

To explore this more fully, the programme evaluation captured the views of 50+ volunteers and grantees on how volunteering enabled volunteers to use their skills and experiences and the difference this made to them.

Volunteers felt they were able to bring their existing skills, knowledge, and experience to their volunteering roles. Across the programme 50+ volunteers used skills and knowledge from their current or previous professions which included: teaching, nursing, care work, and emergency services. For some, their roles resonated with other things they had done or areas that interested them in their professional lives. One volunteer talked about their previous teaching experience supporting their role as a volunteer mentor:

“In a previous life I was a school teacher, no longer. But I think that’s really helped me to engage with my mentee. And, because the sort of things we are doing is picking a location, going to a museum or something like that, where I spend a lot of time talking and explaining things to him... for me, that’s kind of what I was wanting to do really, to teach and share knowledge. So, you know, it’s an extension of that” (Volunteer interview)

Both staff and 50+ volunteers commented on how engagement in volunteering helped volunteers to feel they were putting their skills to ‘good use’ and how they didn’t want to waste those experiences. For some, these came from the lived experiences of being a parent or a carer, from specific circumstances or life events. 50+ volunteers commented on how they wanted to use these experiences in a positive way or wanted to ensure that other people did not experience what they themselves had been through. The value of shared lived experience was particularly highlighted here. Commenting on this, staff involved with the Kinship Connected programme, which provides support, information and advice to kinship carers, noted that:

“I would say the majority of our carers have a plethora of skills and experience, whether that be work-based experience, volunteering, just life experience bringing up families. So, the skills that they can bring to the support groups that they are within is just immense. And I’ve seen those skills also being, you know, adopted by other members of the support groups as well” (Grantee interview)

“But actually it really helps, being in the care sector, understanding mental health, understanding you know, the impact that mental health can have on you” (Volunteer interview)

Volunteers felt that their age and the wealth of their experiences they had built up enabled them to pass on knowledge or better support others both practically and emotionally.

“In giving them life skills and helping them to face the challenges and sort of guiding them, I think the age definitely helps, because we’ve had them experiences, we’ve done that” (Volunteer interview)

The inter-generational aspect of this was also commented on by volunteers and staff; how through volunteering, skills and knowledge could be passed onto different generations and how this was mutually beneficial. One staff member noted:

“There's a real sense of passing on skills through generations and that's been really interesting because a lot of our beneficiaries are young families with children and it's almost that sense of connectivity between generations which has been good” (Grantee interview)

Case study – Grandmentors

The Grandmentors programme (co-created and run by Volunteering Matters) provides practical and emotional support to young people transitioning from care. Trained volunteer mentors (most of whom are aged 50 and over) are matched with a young person, typically aged 16 to 24. They meet regularly on a one-to-one basis for at least 6 months. With funding through the Second Half Fund, the Grandmentors model was replicated in 5 new local authority areas reaching 275 new mentees.

Through the case study research, the evaluation explored the impact of volunteering on mentors aged 50+. Mentors commonly spoke of how rewarding it was to be a mentor, to help others and to see first-hand the positive changes in young people and their lives. The programme has helped them feel that they have something valuable to offer young people, giving them an important sense of purpose.

“And I think maintaining a link with a teenager and being helpful to them at the same time, for me is really rewarding because it just kind of makes me feel I’ve got something to offer rather than just doing my own thing, you know, for my own benefit” (Mentor focus group)

Mentors spoke of how they felt that through volunteering they were using their experiences and skill sets, drawing on other experiences in their lives. Mentoring helped them use and build on their experiences or continue to pursue their interests, including engaging with young people. For some, their previous experiences (for example of volunteering as a scout leader or as a social worker) has helped to shape how they are working with their mentee:

“Having that non-judgemental approach and saying, I really am not judging here, you know, things are as they are. But in order for you to cope with it, we have to understand it and work through it. But this isn’t a judgement... But actually it really helps, being in the care sector, understanding mental health, understanding, you know, the impact mental health can have on you” (Mentor interview)

4.3.2 Social connections

The effects that involvement in volunteering can have on the number, strength and nature of volunteers' social connections was a key theme arising from the research. This is consistent with other studies which have shown how volunteering increases the quality and scope of social connections and networks amongst volunteers (DeWit, 2015; Jones et al, 2016) and this in turn has been linked to improved wellbeing amongst volunteers in later years of life (Pilkington, 2012; Stuart, 2020).

The research with 50+ volunteers and findings from the learning partner evaluations, highlighted the connections that volunteers made with other volunteers and the beneficiaries they supported. Volunteers spoke of the new friendships they developed with their peers and how volunteering helped them feel like part of a 'team' or community. Feeling connected through new and shared experiences with other volunteers and the mutual support these networks provided was particularly highlighted.

Volunteers also noted the connections they made with those they supported or helped and how this brought new and different people into their lives. Some volunteers talked about the strength of these relationships, the difference this made to them personally and how the experience connected them to the wider community. For some, volunteering acted as a 'gateway' to a new or extended community. In one of the mentoring projects volunteers felt the intergenerational matching meant they were making connections with people they wouldn't normally meet or engage with and helped some mentors to feel more connected with young people, "*part of society*" and part of a community:

"I used to be in youth work for a long time, and then that finished about five or six years ago. And the thought of losing contact with young people and just growing old frightened me a bit, because I don't like the idea of being disconnected from the younger generation" (Volunteer interview)

While the research brought together for this evaluation points to the development of expanded social interactions and stronger ties for 50+ volunteers, it is unclear

whether those with fewer social connections, experiencing loneliness or isolation benefit more from being involved in volunteering compared to others.

The learning partner evaluation for Tempo's Time Credits project (Apteligen, 2020) found that over two in three volunteers who thought loneliness and isolation were relevant to them said they felt less isolated and lonely since getting involved in Time Credits. This project enables volunteers to earn Time Credits through volunteering which they can then spend on accessing activities such as leisure activities and local attractions. The evaluation found that amongst volunteers, new experiences were more commonly associated with feeling connected, rather than new friendships. The evaluators highlighted the need to use more direct measures of loneliness for future research on Time Credits to be able to draw more reliable conclusions about whether those experiencing isolation or loneliness might benefit more from involvement¹⁴ ([Tempo Time Credits Learning Partner Evaluation](#), Apteligen, 2020).

¹⁴ Loneliness harmonised standard – GSS (civilservice.gov.uk)

Case Study - Compassionate Neighbours

The Compassionate Neighbours programme provides community-led support to those who have a life limiting illness or those experiencing loneliness and social isolation. Compassionate Neighbours are volunteers, predominantly 50+ who offer friendship, emotional support and a listening ear to their matched community member through regular face-to-face visits. Funding through the Second Half Fund enabled the Compassionate Neighbours model to be rolled out into seven new hospice communities across Greater London and nearby counties.

Bringing together the research from the case study with the project and the findings from the learning partner evaluation undertaken by McPin (Compassionate Neighbours learning partner evaluation, Thompson, 2019), one of the key areas of impact for the Compassionate Neighbours is the sense of connectedness developed amongst the volunteers. Volunteers highlighted how they had many opportunities to meet and connect with other Compassionate Neighbour volunteers, including through training, coffee mornings, meetings and WhatsApp support groups. The learning partner evaluation found that most Compassionate Neighbours (88%) who responded to their survey reported making at least one or more new connections with other Compassionate Neighbours, with some reporting over 20 new connections (Thompson et al, 2019).

Compassionate Neighbours felt that these connections provided a supportive network that provided practical and emotional support in their roles but also beyond it. The value of these support networks was highlighted in the case study research by the Compassionate Neighbour volunteers, some of whom were experiencing isolation and loneliness themselves:

“As a group we will support each other through bereavements,
through difficult times” (Volunteer)

Compassionate Neighbour volunteers spoke of a 'ripple effect' as social connections naturally flow and grow through Compassionate Neighbours communities:

“Well, my life, as it was before, with going to church coffee mornings, and just seeing people an hour or two at these meetings, and at first it was difficult to make friends, and then when I went onto this I found I gained more confidence and I'm going around and talking to different people. So, I've got confidence to sit next to them or something and say hello”
(Volunteer)

The Compassionate Neighbours model is designed to allow friendships between those who have been matched to develop in organic and intuitive ways over time. The strength of the connection and the reciprocal nature of this relationship was repeatedly highlighted by Compassionate Neighbours. The ways 50+ volunteers were able to bring their personal lived experiences, often of loss and grief, was particularly highlighted as valuable in these matched relationships. Some Compassionate Neighbours spoke of the enjoyment and personal rewards of the contact they had with community members.

4.3.3 Wellbeing

Volunteer wellbeing was discussed across the projects with 50+ volunteers feeling that their involvement in volunteering made a positive difference to their personal wellbeing. A strong theme arising from the evaluation was volunteers' enhanced sense of purpose; involvement helped volunteers feel like they were doing something worthwhile. This connects to the learning from grantees about the need to create meaningful roles for 50+ volunteers.

“It does give you something because you're getting that satisfaction...You know, I'm actually doing something; I'm helping that person that's got some issues. And you know, okay I might not think it's a big deal, but you know, they feel it's a big deal” (Volunteer interview)

“I started doing the group, going to the group then I started sort of getting a little bit more involved, especially when we started doing

fundraising, I thought I'll come along because I felt there was a purpose, you know, you're choosing to bring everyone in the same boat together and to me, that's what it was all about" (Volunteer interview)

There were a number of volunteers who experienced feelings of isolation, depression or anxiety who felt they benefited substantially from being involved in volunteering:

"It's changed my life. I'd retired and I didn't know what to do and I walked in here and I knew what I wanted to do. The atmosphere - I wanted to be involved with it as much as possible. All the people you meet, it's so lovely! It's humbling for us. We've all been humbled by something to bring us here. And that humbling is a beautiful quality" (Volunteer interview)

For 50+ volunteers, especially those that were experiencing changing life situations, such as retirement, or the loss of a partner, volunteering was a particularly important activity for their wellbeing. Volunteers spoke about how rewarding being involved in volunteering was; the sense of satisfaction they got from helping others, making a difference and 'giving back'. They spoke passionately about how those they worked with *needed* their support.

"I obviously get pleasure from seeing people develop and grow... You know, you can help somebody be in a better position, so I get a benefit from doing that. I do feel I am in a very privileged position, and that it's only fair that you know, that I should support others that aren't" (Volunteer interview)

Volunteers also credited positive improvements to their wellbeing on the social connections and ties they had made, including with other volunteers. Wider research has similarly found social connectedness to be a key ingredient linking volunteering to positive changes in wellbeing (Brown et al, 2012). One 50+ volunteer said:

"I think it seems to me to be a sort of, win, win, all round. I think from our point of view our own wellbeing has improved, because in some respects we feel we've got a support network as well, and also, I

think, you know, we're hopefully improving the wellbeing of those community users" (Volunteer interview)

Volunteer roles, however, could also be challenging and emotionally demanding. Those who worked directly with vulnerable older people and young people with particular support needs highlighted how the intensity of these relationships could be emotionally challenging on a personal level.

4.3.4 Personal development and growth

A recurrent theme amongst 50+ volunteers was how involvement in volunteering helped their own personal development, particularly in terms of self-confidence. Improved self-confidence was also reported as an outcome in the Give More Get More learning report which reported on the development of self-esteem and self-confidence amongst volunteers involved in intensive volunteering roles (Social Change Agency, 2018).

Through the research as part of the programme evaluation, some staff members and volunteers described these positive changes in personal growth and confidence as '*transformational*'. Commenting on this, one volunteer said:

"I started volunteering at quite a low time... so you can only go up really and the more you learn or the more you try to help other people the more your confidence grows, which usually means you are going to do a better job with the kids anyway, because you are more confident about what you are doing" (Volunteer interview)

Others remarked on how through volunteering they got involved in different and new activities and experiences:

“My confidence is a lot more. I wouldn’t say I wasn’t a confident person but I’ve done things through this volunteering and everything that I never thought I would have done” (Volunteer interview)

Volunteers spoke of how volunteering, and in some cases, the training they were given, helped to raise their social awareness, ‘*opened their eyes*’ to the issues and challenges facing other people and helped to ground them. This was noted by volunteers involved in roles that supported marginalised beneficiary groups. For some, the emotions they encountered in their role could be challenging but volunteers felt these experiences could provide an opportunity for growth, or new understanding. The reciprocal nature of volunteering relationships was highlighted; both the volunteers and those they are supporting learn and develop as the relationship progresses:

“I mean you do learn from them as well you know, it’s not just a one way, it’s not just a one-way thing. You know, they’ll teach you things as well. You know in terms of emotions, and personalities... so there’s also things that you get from them”

Staff and volunteers also commented on how involvement in the projects helped give volunteers the confidence to get involved in other community activities or opened up other opportunities to them. They spoke of how volunteering acted as a ‘*catalyst*’ for wider community participation and community connections. One staff member involved in delivering the Compassionate Neighbour programme said:

“I am witnessing... this next layer of connection with people who have done the Compassionate Neighbours training with others and are starting to get involved in another layer of community participation beyond the hospice. It is growing another layer of connection” (Volunteer interview)

However, it is important to note that the volunteering roles that have opportunities for personal growth (and enhancement to wellbeing) may require significant levels of

support from the grantee. Project coordinators described the work they often needed to do to support 50+ volunteers, particularly those transitioning to retirement, some of whom experienced a loss of confidence and purpose as they left full-time employment. Some volunteers needed more personalised and responsive support which could be challenging as projects grew (see section 5.1.2 for further discussion).

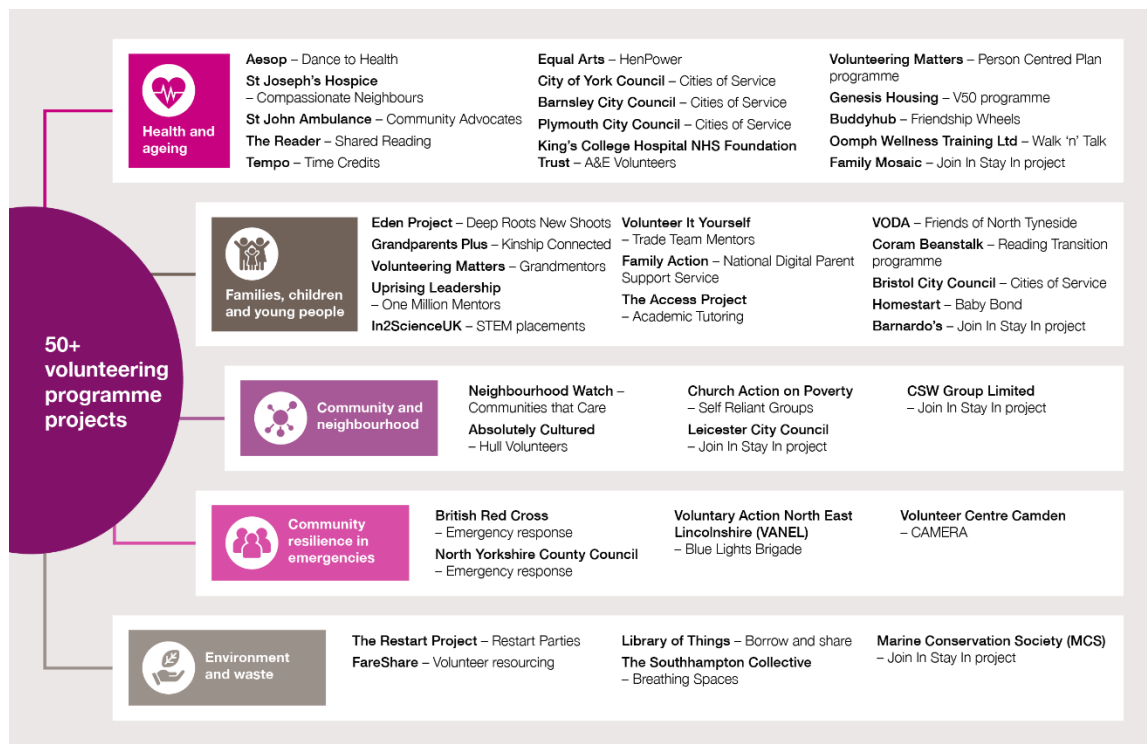
Reflections on outcomes for volunteers

- Volunteers and grantees identified a wide range of outcomes for volunteers including increased social connectedness, personal growth and personal wellbeing. The discussions with volunteers as well as wider research points to the interconnectedness of these factors, with increased social connections acting as a mechanism for improved wellbeing through volunteering (see Stuart et al 2020).
- Volunteering gave 50+ volunteers the opportunity to use their strengths, skills and experiences. This is linked to the importance volunteers attached to roles and activities that are meaningful and make a difference to others.
- The mutual benefits and reciprocity of volunteering were highlighted by volunteers and grantees.
- The interviews highlighted the importance of supporting and recognising volunteers to promote positive volunteer experiences and help volunteers maximise the benefits of volunteering. Some 50+ volunteers needed more personalised support which could be challenging when scaling projects.

4.4 Outcomes for public service areas

This section of the report examines the contribution that funded projects made to different public service areas. The projects were highly diverse, linking to, and cutting across, a wide range of public service priorities and areas (see figure 13).

Figure 13: How projects link to different public service areas



(Source: figure adapted from Deacon and Holman, 2020)

The ways in which different projects contributed to these public service areas are explored below. This draws on the findings from published learning partner evaluation reports, monitoring data collated by Nesta and the grantee interviews. The data presented below on the number of volunteers and beneficiaries excludes the data from the Cities of Service projects (these operated across four sites but the monitoring data was reported together). It is not intended that the descriptive data below is compared across the different public service areas, however, it provides an indication of the contribution of projects to the different areas.

The discussion in sections 4.2 and 4.3 on the outcomes of participation in projects for 50+ volunteers and beneficiaries, also shows the potential contribution of projects to other cross-cutting public service priorities including reducing loneliness.

Increasing social connections was a core element of many of the funded projects and while the sense of loneliness was not measured specifically (see wider research from Age UK, 2017 and Carr, 2018), in the majority of learning partner evaluations, increased social connectedness through volunteering was highlighted as a key theme in many of the learning evaluation reports and the research with 50+ volunteers and beneficiaries.

4.4.1 Health and Ageing

Fifteen 'health and ageing' projects focused on growing or testing social action models that promote ageing well or improving health and wellbeing, often amongst marginalised groups. These projects included three of the four Cities of Service sites including Grow, Share, Cook (Cities of Service, Plymouth) which aimed to improve the health of local communities through access to healthy food. Bringing together Nesta's monitoring data, across twelve of the 'health and ageing' projects (which excludes Cities of Service), a total of 10,500 volunteers were involved in these projects (5,758 of these were 50+ volunteers) and 59,343 beneficiaries were supported.

Case study: Dance to Health (AESOP)

About: Dance to Health is run by AESOP (Arts Enterprise with a Social Purpose) and is a falls prevention dance programme for older people. The dance sessions provide exercise and opportunities for creativity and connecting with others. Volunteers support the project across a number of roles, including as peer motivators and dance support volunteers. With funding and support through SHF, Dance to Health was scaled with the formation of 28 new groups. The programme aims for groups to transition to become sustainable constituted community led groups and by the end of the grant 18 of the 34 groups were independent with support from AESOP.

Impact: This project links to a number of public service priority areas including health, wellbeing and loneliness. The learning partner evaluation findings pointed to positive changes in physical health and mental wellbeing amongst older participants. This included a 58 percent reduction in falls and 96% of participants saying Dance to Health improved their mental wellbeing. Statistically significant improvements were reported for participants in the first phase of involvement including feeling confident; feeling a reduced sense of loneliness and isolation and feeling an increased sense of independence. The evaluation included a social return of investment analysis which found that Dance to Health has a potential return on investment of £2.89 for every £1. Further analysis found there is a potential cost saving of over £196m over two years (£158m of which is a potential cost saving for the NHS). The evaluation concludes that “Dance to Health offers the health system an effective and cost-effective means to address the issue of older people’s falls” (Sheffield Hallam, 2020, p.37).

Dance to Health learning partner evaluation (Sport Industry Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam University, 2020)

4.4.2 Families, Children and Young People

A variety of projects, thirteen in total, focused on improving outcomes for families, children and young people. Initiatives included One Million Mentors, a mentoring programme for young people and Reading Transition, a one-to-one reading programme for children in primary schools.

Across twelve of the ‘families, children and young people’ projects (which excludes Cities of Service), 10,652 volunteers were involved (921 of these were 50+ volunteers) and 11,138 beneficiaries were supported. The figures for volunteers are particularly high for this public service area because one of the projects, which involves the mentoring of young people, also included the mentees as volunteers in their data as the young people were also volunteering within the community.

Case study: STEM placements (In2ScienceUK)

About: The STEM placements In2scienceUK programme primarily aimed to increase students’ confidence in their abilities, improve their understanding of career routes into STEM and provide them with contacts that could offer them advice in the university application process.

Impact: The learning partner evaluation for the project found that participation increased students’ STEM-related knowledge and exposed them to different forms of STEM learning and environments, most notably through work placements in which they met and worked alongside scientists or engineers. Students reported that this strengthened their networks, but also altered their perceptions as to what scientists are like – describing them as more approachable, relatable and ‘like me’ than they had expected. Through work placements and discussion with mentors, students felt that they had developed a more sophisticated understanding of a range of different types of STEM roles. For some students, learning about alternative pathways increased their commitment to pursuing their career goals and made these aspirations seem more attainable. Students highlighted that their confidence in relation to their capabilities in STEM, higher education and career plans had grown as a result of participating in In2scienceUK.

In2Science learning partner evaluation (ZK Analytics, 2020)

4.4.3 Community and Neighbourhood

Five projects were focused on improving local neighbourhoods and communities.

These included Church Action on Poverty’s project to support individuals from low-income communities to develop Self Reliant Groups.

By the end of Quarter 13, a total number of 2,423 volunteers (1,363 were 50+ volunteers) participated in the five 'community and neighbourhood' projects by supporting a total number of 4,445 beneficiaries.

Case Study: Communities that Care (Neighbourhood Watch)

About: The Communities that Care project was an early stage idea which looked to increase fraud resilience amongst older people aged 65 and over. The project explored how volunteers, most of whom were 50 and over, could help people access advice and support about fraud prevention.

Impact: The learning partner evaluation found that the project has been particularly successful in raising awareness and knowledge about fraud amongst elderly residents and as a result increasing the confidence of these residents to recognise and report fraud. Flexible delivery ensured that particularly vulnerable residents were identified for support. The programme reportedly successfully engaged and trained volunteers to deliver the work and has effectively worked with stakeholders and partner organisations.

Communities that Care learning partner evaluation (Lewis, et al, 2020)

4.4.4 Community Resilience in Emergencies

Five projects funded through the 50+ volunteer programme focused on helping communities prepare for and respond to emergencies. Projects included Ready for Anything which looked to recruit, train and retain volunteers to work alongside public sector responders during an emergency. Across the five 'community resilience in emergencies' projects, 1,451 new volunteers were recruited (504 of these were 50+ volunteers). With their focus on preparing for and responding to emergencies, these projects did not have 'beneficiaries' in the same way as many of the other projects funded through the 50+ volunteering programme.

Case study: Blue Lights Brigade (Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire)

About: Blue Lights Brigade offers volunteering opportunities for ex Emergency Services and ex Force personnel to use their skills to provide Community Emergency Responses Teams (CERT) to the Humber Region. The project was run by Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire (VANEL) and has now, post the funded period) been spun out as a separate Community Interest Company (CIC). The project was developed in response to the challenges that one of the founders saw for individuals who had retired from the emergency services and found difficulty adjusting to retirement. The core concept was that these individuals would bring 'hands-on experiences' from their occupations that would be helpful in responding to emergency situations. Through funding from the Connected Communities Innovation Fund they recruited 309 new volunteers, 221 were 50+.

Impact: During the funding period the response team did not have to respond to any emergency situations and therefore they did not have the opportunity to address the core concept of their capacity to deal with these situations. However, during Covid-19 (which occurred after funding ended) they have been able to provide volunteers to respond to many of the local authority needs. Volunteers have also been involved in many social action community projects, such as river clean ups and safe and well checks, a 'little lifesavers' project which teaches beach and swim safety to children, and assisting the wider voluntary sector to develop community emergency plans. The project has been building stronger links with local authority partners to enable them to become a key part in the community resilience responses.

4.4.5 Environment and waste

Five projects focused on the environment and developing approaches to recycling and reducing waste. Projects included The Restart project involving volunteers in repairing electronics and training others on how to repair electronics and Fareshare's Volunteer Resourcing project focused on distributing surplus food from the food and drink industry to community groups and charities.

For the five 'environment and waste' projects, a total number of 7,394 volunteers were mobilised (2,333 of these were 50+ volunteers) and a total number of 892,652 beneficiaries were supported in these projects. The very high number of beneficiaries reflects the high number of people Fareshare reaches via community groups and charities with more than 884,615 using food redistribution services.

Case study: Breathing Spaces (Southampton Collective)

About: Breathing Spaces aimed to tackle air pollution and associated public health issues in the city of Southampton. The project, run by the Southampton Collective, was focused on encouraging conversations about clean air and liveable neighbourhoods, and promoting collective action around clean air. This social action project recruited volunteers to develop plans and pledges, supported local citizens in testing community approaches for cleaner air and installed sensors to develop a local evidence base on air quality.

Impact: This project links to the key public service priority area of improved air quality. The learning partner evaluation found that the Breathing Spaces project was helping to educate the local community about air quality issues; in a survey of local residents which ran in the later part of 2019, over two thirds of respondents thought that Breathing Spaces had been effective in encouraging the community to think about cleaner air and healthier streets (Jones, 2020). The evaluation found that the project influenced community action by creating opportunities for action to take place, and by encouraging engagement with community action within local communities. A key impact for the project beyond the lifetime of the grant and evaluation has been Southampton City Council choosing the neighbourhood which was the focus for the Breathing Spaces project as its pilot low-traffic neighbourhood for the city. This was chosen out of 85 neighbourhoods in the city due to issues such as air quality and congestion, but also reportedly due to the strong community engagement demonstrated by Breathing Spaces. Breathing Spaces learning partner evaluation (Jones, 2020)

5. Lessons learned from the 50+ Volunteering Programme

5.1 Learning from social action projects

This section of the report identifies key lessons from grantees delivering social action projects as part of the 50+ volunteering programme. This learning draws primarily on the interviews with grantees, the case studies and the learning partner evaluations.

These lessons provide insights for organisations, as well as funders and commissioners that support social action and volunteering projects. The key areas of learning are brought together under the following key themes:

- Engaging 50+ volunteers
- Growing social action models and approaches
- Evaluating the impact of social action projects

5.1.1 Engaging 50+ volunteers

A key focus of the 50+ volunteering programme was on creating more volunteering opportunities for those aged 50+ and mobilising them to take part. Projects used a variety of different avenues and methods to recruit 50+ volunteers. A broad-brush approach was often taken, including word of mouth, social media, local community events, local newspapers and printed materials such as leaflets and posters. The success grantees had at attracting 50+ volunteers varied; whilst some found it relatively easy, others faced considerable challenges, with the majority not able to meet their recruitment targets for 50+ volunteers (see section 3.3). Projects which were scaling existing models, had prior experience with engaging 50+ audiences and addressed issues that naturally attracted or chimed with an older cohort of people, for example, support of vulnerable older adults, typically found it easier to engage 50+ volunteers compared to early-stage ideas that were looking to reach new 50+ audiences. Some projects that were pro-actively looking to engage a broader and more diverse range of volunteers typically found recruitment more challenging. Those recruiting for intensive volunteering roles through the GMGM fund experienced particular challenges with finding enough people to commit to the hours required for intensive roles (a minimum of 150 hours of volunteering either part time or full time or part time over several months)

Through these experiences, grantees identified lessons for engaging those aged 50+ in volunteering. These resonate with Nesta’s learning report on their 50+ work [The Age of Inclusion](#) (Deacon and Holman, 2020) and the CfABs work on creating a more [inclusive age-friendly approach to involving over 50s \(CfAB, 2020\)](#). The findings from this evaluation on engaging 50+ volunteers build on the framework developed by the CfAB.

5.1.1.1 Connect and listen

In the early stages of their projects, grantees looked to better understand the motivations of 50+ volunteers and what they would value from taking part in volunteering. Projects learnt from listening to their existing service users and 50+ volunteers and went directly into their communities to understand how they could best develop their offer for 50+ volunteers. Grantees highlighted the importance of creating opportunities that enable 50+ to have a sense of connection with others, that is purposeful and meaningful and help volunteers feel that their contribution is appreciated:

“Making sure that we are being as appreciative as we can be, of offering some kind of recognition, of emphasizing the kind of connections that people can get through our programme. So, for me that sense of understanding more about what older people need, what they’re looking for in terms of volunteering opportunities has definitely shaped my thinking in terms of our offer” (Grantee interview)

It was widely acknowledged by grantees, however, that the over 50s are a highly diverse group. They learnt from their own experiences that a uniform approach to recruitment could be inappropriate and ineffective. Volunteer recruitment methods and approaches needed to reflect this diversity; the needs and circumstances of those age 50 and over vary and are highly diverse:

“So what has been really interesting for us is to really consider this age group and consider what strategies we need to try and pick up people across that spectrum. What we have realised is that we can’t

just go, “let’s have a strategy for the over 50s”... this is not a uniform group with anything like uniform needs” (Grantee interview)

Grantees learnt that specifically targeting 50+ volunteers and differentiating too much could be off-putting and marginalise those they were trying to engage. Grantees looked to more inclusive approaches which didn’t single out the over 50s or make explicit calls to action, instead, using subtle messaging and language which was more relevant and inclusive of those aged 50+. This included:

- Using more imagery and more positive imagery of 50+ volunteers (See [CfAB resources on using imagery of older people](#))
- Emphasising the value of life experiences and skills in volunteering roles.
- Highlighting the reciprocity of involvement; how volunteering makes a difference to others and can be personally beneficial, particularly in terms of meeting people and making new connections.
- Connecting volunteering activities with a town or neighbourhood to make it more relevant and appeal to an individual’s emotional attachment to a particular place or cause. This included the use of local imagery:

“Reflect it to what is relevant to them and what they want to do. They don’t want to help across the nation, they want to help their neighbour, it’s about imagery and it’s about language and it’s about being there in the moment and making it accessible”

(Grantee interview)

Using different language when inviting people to take part in volunteering, such as ‘helping out’ rather than ‘volunteering’ or encouraging people to get involved as ‘friends’ or ‘neighbours’ rather than ‘volunteers’ was also highlighted as a key area of learning:

“We didn’t want to evoke a doing role, we wanted it to be a being role. We have put quite lot of emphasis on them not being volunteers but elaborating on the language of neighbours”

(Grantee interview)

Grantees found success when reaching out directly to 50+ individuals and communities; going to “where they are rather than just hoping it will happen”. This included connecting with local organisations such as Men’s Sheds, rotary clubs and community centres and local classes and groups such as dance and fitness classes. However, grantees also learnt the importance of broader engagement and approaching a wider range of groups and networks such as faith groups, sports clubs, housing associations, job centres and local councils. Some thought that this helped to attract volunteers who weren’t their traditional volunteer base. There were also examples of projects successfully involving 50+ volunteers as ambassadors, promoting projects and inviting people to get involved.

“I think one thing that was a big piece of learning for me ... is initially I was seeing quite a lot of organisations that specifically said, ‘we work with older people or 50+ people. But one thing I learnt was not just to go to those organisations but actually approach a wide range of groups..... so actually, having a broad range of organisations, with a broad range of options is really important” (Grantee interview)

Grantees learnt that directly asking people to get involved, through face-to-face personal invitations and personalised communications were particularly effective recruitment approaches, including personalised emails and Facebook feeds. These findings resonate with wider research that points to the effectiveness of directly asking people to get involved and personal invitations (Brookfield et al, 2014). However, this approach might also act to limit the diversity of volunteers including those who are less connected to social networks and generally more isolated.

“It did seem from talking to our volunteers that we had a much more direct impact where it felt like we were communicating directly with them. With fliers and posters, it is a very passive sort of engagement and it worked much better when we were actively talking to them so when something popped up in their mailbox or their Facebook feed they felt it was for them” (Grantee interview)

Case study: Kinship Connected (Kinship)

Kinship wanted to reduce barriers and open-up opportunities for kinship carers to get involved as volunteers in leading and supporting peer-to-peer groups. Staff found that changing the terminology they used made a significant difference to engagement amongst kinship carers. While reluctant to register as ‘volunteers’ because they didn’t feel they had the time, kinship carers were more open to registering as a ‘friend’. When the roles were broken down, kinship carers recognised that they were already doing many of those voluntary activities within the groups. Commenting on this staff members said:

“We came to the terminology of registering as a friend, a friend of [kinship] and a friend to other carers and really fitting in with that social action ideology and that made such a difference. We saw such a change in the number of people registering to be part of that and they would then become part of the kinship community”

“When you’re approaching people and saying will you volunteer, most of the carers will say – no way, I’ve got too much on. But if you say are you willing to belong to this group, it might be bringing tea and coffee or biscuits or just setting up the room most people will say – oh yeah, that’s fine. So, then it’s talking about it and saying well actually that is volunteering, it’s not asking for very much, it’s just asking a little bit of your time and then for me, you get much more of an uptake”

Offering role flexibility is also seen as important in helping break down the barriers to volunteering. Kinship carers often have complex lives and the volunteering opportunities developed need to recognise and reflect their needs and personal circumstances. A key element of this for Kinship is the development of self-initiated roles and activities, with kinship carers identifying what they would like to do and what they are able to do as volunteers. For some groups this might mean breaking down the key roles of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer into smaller manageable activities and tasks.

Once recruited, grantees highlighted the importance of connecting with 50+ volunteers; understanding not only why they want to get involved and the experiences they bring, but also their individual, family and wider circumstances and contexts; “*working with them to find out what works for them*”. This personalised approach, however, became more challenging as projects grew and the numbers of volunteers increased. There was less time to spend with each individual volunteer and projects had to adapt the ways they engaged with volunteers (see 5.1.2). There were examples of projects involving volunteers in leadership roles, helping to onboard and support new volunteers. Peer to peer support was also important, providing opportunities to support one another and share experiences.

5.1.1.2 Focus on what matters to people

The importance of taking part in volunteering activities that are purposeful and meaningful to volunteers came through strongly in the evaluation. 50+ volunteers spoke of how involvement helped them feel they were making a difference, gave them a sense of purpose and enabled them to ‘give back’ (see section 4.3).

“People like it being really purposeful so we have always been really clear about our ambitions to deliver really high-quality activities so it is purposeful and it’s meaningful” (Grantee interview)

These findings resonate with wider research that highlights the importance of creating meaningful opportunities for 50+ volunteers (Jopling and Jones, 2018; Sellon, 2014). The CfAB review, for example, identified that “people wanted to feel they were contributing to something that had personal meaning to them – whether by dint of addressing issues about which they felt strongly, linking to personal values, or supporting groups with whom they felt particular empathy” (Jopling and Jones, 2018, p63).

There were examples of funded projects that co-created the design and delivery of volunteering activities and roles *with* volunteers. Grantees felt that this not only helped to ensure roles meaningfully connected with the interests, passions and values of volunteers but also gave them autonomy. This approach recognised and

valued volunteers' lived experiences and knowledge of the communities they were part of:

“I want to get them to come up with it and initiate it. I mean we've got different approaches for different areas, but it's better for them to say what they'd like to do rather than us trying to tell them what to do”
(Grantee interview)

This approach, however, was not suited to all projects and as they scaled rapidly, grantees were more limited in their capacity to take these personalised approaches. Grantees reported creating roles that had a clear purpose for volunteers and sharing with them the difference they made.

5.1.1.3 Play to people's strengths

Grantees spoke of the wealth of skills, experiences and knowledge that 50+ volunteers bring from their lives and how making good use of these strengths in volunteering can be beneficial for all involved:

“It's all about people using the skills and experience that they have and I think that's a really, really important thing for us that we can do is to help older people see that the life experience, the work experience that they have, really can be of value to young people. You can really make that kind of bridge between older people and young people” (Grantee interview)

Volunteers involved in the evaluation felt that they were able to use their pre-existing skills and experiences in their volunteering roles, drawing on their family, caring and work lives (see section 4.3). In some cases, grantees facilitated this by inviting volunteers to share information about their prior experiences as part of the recruitment process and matching volunteers to roles, developing roles and activities around the skills that individuals brought or co-creating roles with volunteers.

“We have the ability to target our volunteer opportunities, at someone's skills sets, by ensuring that when we share our opportunities if it requires a specific skill that those people are the first ones to get offered it” (Grantee interview)

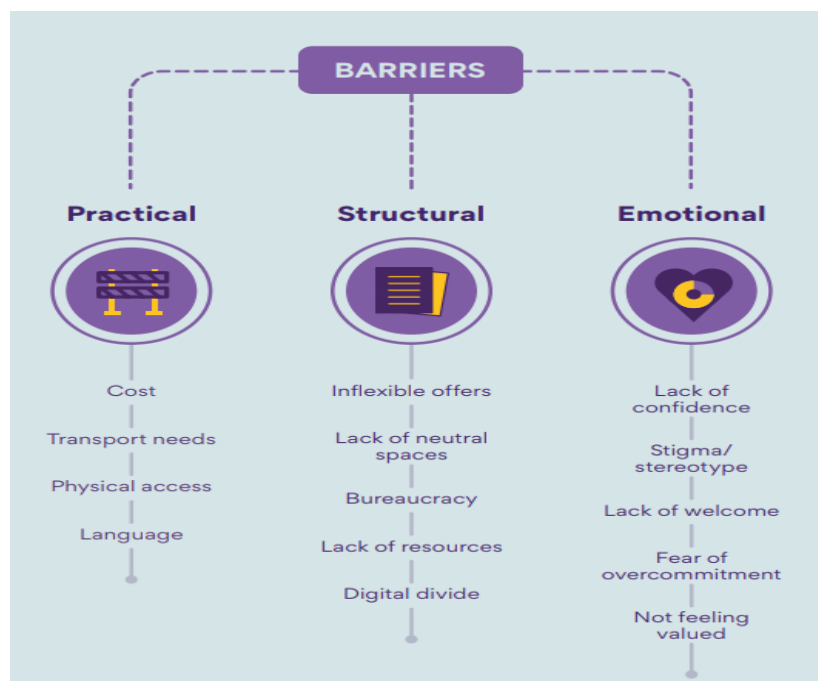
However, grantees also learnt not to make assumptions that all 50+ volunteers want to use and build on their existing skills; some intentionally opted for volunteering roles which were unrelated to other areas of their life.

At times, projects also needed to support and work with 50+ volunteers to help them fully understand and recognise the skills and experiences they offered. Grantees reported that some 50+ volunteers lacked the confidence to take on new roles, in particular those involving leading others. Helping volunteers to build the confidence to take on these roles could take time and was a challenge highlighted by projects scaling at pace. Organisations learnt how useful it was to create 'pathways' so that volunteers could progress into different roles, for example, from being an advocate to leading a group (see also Deacon and Holman, 2020)

5.1.1.4 Remove barriers

Wider research identifies a series of practical, emotional and structural barriers to those aged 50+ taking part in volunteering (Jopling and Jones, 2018, McGarvey, 2019) (see figure 14).

Figure 14: Barriers to volunteering



Source: Centre for Ageing Better, 2020, p 5

Grantees highlighted key areas of learning from their efforts to overcome some of these barriers to make their volunteering opportunities more accessible, open and inclusive to those aged 50+.

Emotional barriers to involvement were widely acknowledged by grantees. Projects, in particular, highlighted the importance of recognising the contribution of volunteers to ensure they feel valued and challenging ageing stereotypes and assumptions.

A common assumption early on was that 50+ volunteers would have significant free time available to get involved in volunteering. It was the experience of grantees that this was not always the case and that, like other age groups, 50+ volunteers experience considerable demands on their time including work, family, caring responsibilities and other community commitments. Grantees talked about the importance of recognising these constraints on volunteers aged 50+ and providing flexible opportunities where possible, which volunteers could fit around their other commitments (see further discussion below). Seasonality was a particular issue highlighted by staff working in grantee organisations:

“I think the time of year you start the project is really important. It was a real struggle starting it over the autumn going into the winter. Really it felt like that project picked up in the spring”

Assumptions and stereotypes were also challenged about the experiences of 50+ volunteers with technology and social media. Grantees reflected on how tech-savvy many 50+ volunteers were and how their assumptions of what they could and couldn't do were 'thrown out'. However, others, including those that had a core digital element to their projects struggled to engage 50+ volunteers with new technology. Grantees felt that this in part was due to a lack of confidence and people's perceptions of their own abilities. This resonates with wider research on the barriers experienced by older people to using digital and getting online (CfAB, 2020b).

Levels of success with recruiting volunteers via platforms such as Facebook were mixed amongst projects; whilst some were able to attract volunteers in this way, others struggled to market their opportunities successfully. Again, some

organisations learnt that when it came to using social media to recruit volunteers it was important not to think about the over 50s as one homogenous group. Use of the internet and social media declines with age and those who are not online are more likely to be less wealthy, in worse health and have lower levels of education (ONS, 2019).

To help reduce some of the structural barriers to taking part, grantees also learnt that they needed to make it easier for 50+ volunteers to get involved by simplifying and streamlining their systems and processes. As highlighted by Nesta, the “*most successful organisations made it easy to join in*” (Deacon and Holman, 2020). Grantees reflected on how their on-boarding processes took too long or were overly bureaucratic and how this could act as a barrier to taking part. To make it easier for volunteers to get involved, grantees adapted their systems, processes and practices including:

- Simplifying online application processes to make them more accessible.
- Making onboarding processes less formal e.g., having a ‘chat’ rather than a formal interview with volunteers and asking for a verbal reference rather than a written one.
- Group interviews rather than individual interviews.
- Simplified induction packs and processes.
- A quicker process for matching volunteers to roles/activities/beneficiaries.

“What the volunteers now see... is a new, clean streamlined process which means people aren’t being put off basically by our application form and application process... Having the more streamlined recruitment, new materials, just a better interface with the potential volunteer has shown us in a different light” (Grantee interview)

Case study – Time Credits (Tempo)

Tempo Time Credits is a charity which aims to enable more individuals and more diverse groups to volunteer in communities. Through the Time Credits model, volunteers can earn credit through volunteering their time which they spend to access events, training and leisure activities. A key role of Tempo is to work in partnership with a network of community organisations that offer Time Credits and local and national recognition partners.

Through the Second Half Fund, Tempo developed and extended their work with those aged 50+ with a focus on those at risk of isolation and long-term health conditions. One of the key findings from the learning partner evaluation ([Tempo Time Credits learning partner evaluation](#), Apteligen, 2020) was that Time Credits was successful in attracting people new to volunteering and those from lower socio-economic groups; 45% of people responding to their survey (586 respondents) had either never or rarely volunteered before and most volunteers had a household income of less than £20,000 per annum. The evaluation suggests that Time Credits help to reduce barriers to volunteering by providing incentives and recognition for volunteers' contribution; "this is likely to be the result of the spend component of the Time Credits model, which creates opportunities for those on lower incomes to access leisure activities that they would otherwise not be able to afford" (p48)

5.1.1.5 Be Flexible

Grantees recognised that volunteers aged 50+ (like other volunteers) need to balance involvement in volunteering with other commitments in their lives. The evaluation supports the findings from wider research that people want ways of contributing that are flexible which they can fit around other demands and commitments (Jopling and Jones, 2018; McGarvey et al, 2019):

“Yes, I think people very much look for flexibility in volunteering. And in fact, we have made a shift from talking about ‘this is the volunteer role’, ‘this is a committee member’, ‘this is a group secretary’ or whatever to breaking it down more into tasks. So we've started talking about volunteering opportunities where people could do part of it” (Grantee interview)

“We use an online platform to support and manage our volunteers, which gives the individual autonomy to decide what they would like to do and when... which I think lots of volunteers prefer as it gives them the control to fit that around their work or the grandparent duties or you know, other volunteering that they may do, so the structure is decided by them. And I think that works really well with the older volunteer age range” (Grantee interview)

Offering flexibility wasn't always possible within the projects and depended on the nature of the volunteer role. Grantees spoke of getting the right balance between offering volunteers flexibility but also making sure their roles are meaningful and purposeful and that they feel connected to the project or wider organisation.

Grantees shared a number of different ways they learned to make their opportunities more flexible to better suit the needs and circumstances of volunteers which focused on three key areas:

- When, where and how much volunteering;
- Type of role and activity; and
- Processes and systems.

Figure 15: How grantees learnt to make their offer to volunteers more flexible

Flexibility... When, where and how much	Flexibility... Role and activity	Flexibility... Systems and processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enabling volunteers to choose how much time they want to commit ● Developing roles that can be carried out remotely ● Offering short-term volunteering 'placements' rather than long term commitments ● Offering micro volunteering opportunities ● Offering evening volunteering opportunities ● 'Buddying up' in case a volunteer can't make a certain date or time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing a choice of roles and activities for volunteers ● Self-initiated or co-created roles and activities ● Breaking down roles into tasks to make them more manageable ● Supporting volunteers to share roles between them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing online booking so volunteers can choose what they want to do and when ● Offering taster or trial sessions ● Providing opportunities for volunteers to review their commitment and step back if they want to ● Creating pathways for volunteers to move between roles ● Using different language to talk about volunteering and social action e.g. 'helping out' instead of 'volunteering'

Key reflections on engaging 50+ volunteers

The findings from this evaluation point to the importance of creating meaningful volunteering roles, flexible ways of taking part and opportunities for 50+ volunteers to use prior skills and experiences. Grantees developed and adapted their approaches to recruiting volunteers with variable levels of success. There was no one size fits all approach to successfully recruiting 50+ volunteers, although consistent with other research, reaching out directly to 50+ and asking them directly to get involved seemed particularly effective. Grantees learnt lessons about reducing barriers to participation and making their offer more inclusive and relevant to 50+ volunteers.

While it was recognised by grantees that the 50+ cohort is not one homogenous group, this was often discussed in relation to age – 50 year olds are different from 70 years olds and therefore may need to be recruited in different ways – rather than in relation to factors that might determine their involvement such as health or financial resources. Age was the defining focus for engaging volunteers, not surprising given the nature of the 50+ innovation funds and their targets for recruiting 50+ volunteers. There were examples of projects proactively reaching out to a broader range of volunteers who might face particular barriers to involvement, including those experiencing lower levels of health and low incomes. However, it is unclear from the evaluation the extent to which projects mobilised 50+ individuals who might gain the most from involvement, for example those with lower levels of wellbeing or whether the volunteers, both 50+ and under, were already engaged in volunteering.

5.1.2 Growing social action projects

The key lessons for growing social action projects involving 50+ volunteers are identified below. These draw primarily on the interviews with grantees and the findings from the learning partner evaluations and builds on the learning from previous social innovation scaling programmes (see Deacon, 2016; Gabriel, 2014).

5.1.2.1 Collaboration and partnership

Collaboration with organisations and agencies was an important element of project's

growth plans and activities. The extent, nature and depth of collaborations varied from projects that scaled their delivery directly through partners to collaborations with local organisations to recruit 50+ volunteers. Collaborations with local organisations and agencies played an important role in enabling projects to reach beneficiaries and recruit volunteers (see 4.1.1).

As highlighted by other scaling programmes (Deacon, 2016), and wider research on the voluntary sector (Baker and Cairns, 2011), collaboration can be complex and challenging. Grantees identified key lessons from their experiences of collaborating when growing their social action projects and these are explored below.

- **Active management of collaboration;** building into plans sufficient time to develop and strengthen relationships with organisations and agencies. Amongst grantees, the most pressing challenge to effective collaboration was having the staff time to engage with other organisations when growing. This seemed particularly challenging for projects replicating in new areas as there was perceived to be insufficient capacity at the local level to connect with other organisations. This included building relationships with referral partners to ensure a pipeline of beneficiaries and local organisations to reach and recruit 50+ volunteers. Grantees felt they needed to be more realistic about the time it took to build new collaborations during growth.
- **Developing trust and a shared understanding between organisations;** clarifying the purpose and value of collaboration and the benefits of working together. Grantees gave examples of how they developed relationships through emphasising the mutual benefits of collaboration, not just the benefits for their own project or organisation. As projects progressed, grantees learnt the importance of collaborating at different levels of organisations to strengthen relationships and buy-in. Grantees gave examples of how collaborations with local authorities depended on individual relationships which created challenges when individuals moved on. A small number of projects were able to locate staff together with local authority teams which helped to strengthen relationships and collaboration. There were also examples of grantees with more formal arrangements that developed

memorandums of understanding with their partners which they felt helped bring clarity about partners' roles and responsibilities.

- **Being proactive with collaboration;** seeking new organisations and agencies to collaborate with and allowing flexibility to 'test out' different types of collaboration. There were many examples of grantees reaching out to different organisations including local authorities, voluntary and community organisations and local businesses. This included connecting with different organisations to recruit 50+ volunteers. There were also examples of projects using incentives to promote collaboration and find new 'buyers' for their project, such as reduced rates for purchasing services for local authorities.

5.1.2.2 Managing growth

Overall, the plans and targets for project growth, which were put forward by grantees and developed by Nesta alongside DCMS, were ambitious, leading to a rapid rate of growth over a relatively short period. There were projects, for example, that were looking to grow their number of volunteers ten-fold. This inevitably led to challenges for the organisations.

The high targets affected their approach to volunteer engagement. In order to meet their targets, some organisations mobilised those in the community who were easier to engage rather than those who were more difficult to reach. The efforts required to recruit volunteers also focused attention away from other areas of work. There were examples of grantees spending their time and effort setting up new groups to meet their targets rather than focusing on existing groups that needed their support. Grantees identified key areas of learning on managing the growth of social action projects which are discussed below.

- **Preparing for instability;** recognising and anticipating that scaling can lead to challenges and change within organisations. The process of scaling can create instability within organisations and this was experienced by some of the grantees, resulting in organisational or team restructures. Staff leaving organisations also presented challenges for organisations as they rapidly grew. Leadership buy-into projects helped, or in some cases would have

helped, to ensure that projects stayed on track in the face of instability, particularly when priorities shifted within organisations. Projects funded beyond March 2020 were also affected by COVID-19 (see further discussion in 2.5).

- **Building into project planning sufficient development time**; ensuring effective systems and processes are in place before scaling at pace. Grantees learnt that these were important precursors to recruiting volunteers or initiating new collaborations. Grantees frequently commented on this in relation to volunteering and ensuring the right systems and infrastructure were in place for the recruitment, onboarding, support and management of volunteers. Grantees talked of “*rushing to keep up with themselves*” and not having the capacity to develop processes and systems first.

“If I did it again I would like more development time. We have scaled up at such a rate that we haven’t got all the backroom stuff to go to it, we haven’t completed all our policies and procedures. In terms of volunteering, we have those very broad volunteer roles but I would like to be more prepared” (Grantee interview)

- **Planning for how best to manage rapid growth**; aligning different elements of projects to help with growth and expansion. As projects progressed, a common experience was for grantees to feel their resources were being over stretched as they reached more beneficiaries and recruited more volunteers. It was challenging for grantees to have the capacity to grow both elements at the same time which meant some projects early on engaged new beneficiaries but had insufficient numbers of volunteers or vice versa.

“The volunteering was almost kind of left a bit till later because, you know, we couldn’t start a group without a venue. We couldn’t start a group obviously without any participants. And so the volunteering was pushed down the order of priorities a little bit” (Grantee interview)

Grantees learnt that they needed to adapt their models or streamline their processes to speed up their recruitment, selection and onboarding of large numbers of volunteers.

Consistent with the findings from Nesta's CSAIF learning report (Deacon, 2016) grantees who recognised early on that they needed additional staff capacity or skills, for example, a volunteer coordinator, generally fared better when scaling. For models replicating to new areas, regularly bringing together project leads across areas to share learning was identified as one way to help address scaling challenges.

- **Providing sufficient support to delivery staff;** ensuring they have the capacity and support to deliver projects and meet the needs of beneficiaries and volunteers. Growth can be challenging for staff on the ground, and staff highlighted the pressures and challenges they faced in managing their workloads. They reflected on the large number of relationships they managed with the volunteers, beneficiaries and other stakeholders, alongside many other responsibilities. Collaborating and sharing learning with colleagues across different areas and other grantees from the 50+ volunteering programme was identified as important, particularly for those in more isolated roles. Grantees also explored different approaches to develop more capacity for delivery, for example, volunteer leader roles to boost support for volunteers and increase the capacity of project coordinators.
- **Addressing the 'what next' question early on;** thinking about the future plan for projects early in the growth process. Some grantees felt that they should have started the process of business planning or sustainability planning earlier on in their growth journey. While all grantees were required to specify how they planned to sustain their work beyond the lifetime of the grant as part of the application process, grantees felt there was not enough capacity to develop their plans as their projects grew. Grantees recognised that their projects would have benefited from a stronger focus early on concerning how best to sustain the work beyond the funding period.

5.1.2.3 Engaging with volunteers

A key focus for projects as they grew was the mobilisation of new volunteers, in some cases those under 50 as well as the over 50s. Recruiting, onboarding, managing and supporting volunteers presented challenges as projects rapidly scaled. Key areas of learning for engaging volunteers, specifically when scaling, are discussed below.

- **Planning how best to coordinate and support a growing pool of volunteers;** ensuring new and existing volunteers are supported as projects grew. This was a key challenge for projects as they rapidly scaled, particularly those replicating across different geographical areas. Approaches previously taken to supporting volunteers were often deemed incompatible as projects did not have the staff capacity for personal and 'hands on' models of volunteer support as projects scaled. Challenges were also experienced with ensuring consistency of support between areas. Grantees highlighted the need to plan a balanced approach between digital support and personal contact with staff, peer support opportunities and 'open' channels of communication between volunteers and staff. Some projects employed a volunteer co-ordinator or made a member of staff responsible for ensuring consistency of support and volunteer experience across different areas.
- **Focusing on existing volunteers as well as new volunteers;** being mindful that the ambitions to recruit new volunteers should not have negative consequences for those already involved. Grantees highlighted the need to focus on the volunteer experience and support existing volunteers as well as recruiting new ones. They felt that they needed to manage volunteer expectations and recognise how the influx of new volunteers might affect their experience. One learning partner evaluation found that the volunteers who had been with the organisation the longest felt less supported with the growth of the project. They suggest that this might be because volunteers felt less connected to each other and project staff as the project grew. Grantees' responses to this included supporting volunteers to take on new roles including leading and managing other volunteers and regular communication about the ongoing developments and changes.
- **Creating a sense of community amongst volunteers;** enabling volunteers to build relationships and connections and support one another. This was more

challenging for projects that were geographically spread and became more of an issue as they rapidly scaled, and projects expanded. Lessons included creating opportunities for volunteers to meet one another more frequently, for example, by supporting volunteers to develop peer support groups.

- **Keeping volunteers engaged as projects grew.** This was particularly challenging when projects grew rapidly, and volunteers couldn't be matched quickly with beneficiaries or had to wait to complete training. Ways of keeping these volunteers engaged became a key area of learning for projects, including for the emergency response projects who had to ensure they kept volunteers onboard in case they needed to be mobilised during an emergency. Ways of keeping grantees connected and engaged included:
 - Regular updates, phone calls or personalised emails to keep in touch with volunteers.
 - Developing a network or community of volunteers, for example, through the use of Facebook or WhatsApp groups.
 - Organising regular training sessions for volunteers.
 - Offering a variety of different roles including micro-volunteering opportunities for volunteers to get involved with.
 - Empowering volunteers to initiate their own projects and activities in the community.
 - Providing opportunities for volunteers to get involved in other community activities and events

Key reflections on growing social action projects

The process of growing social action projects was complex and challenging for grantees. Collaboration was key to enabling projects to grow and grantees learnt that building these multiple relationships takes time and needs to be actively managed. Lessons were learnt about the need to build in sufficient time and capacity for collaboration into growth plans. To help manage growth, grantees highlighted the importance of the development phase of projects to allow systems, processes and ways of working to be developed and bedded in. This included the processes of recruiting, onboarding and supporting volunteers.

How best to engage and support a growing number of volunteers was a key area of learning for projects as they scaled rapidly. Some grantees learnt that the models of training and support they wanted to provide to volunteers were incompatible with the high numbers that needed to be engaged. They adapted the ways they engaged with volunteers, developing a blended approach involving digital support, opportunities for personal contact with staff and peer to peer support for volunteers where possible.

5.1.3 Evaluation and evidencing impact

Across the funded projects, the focus and approach of the learning partner evaluations varied, using different frameworks, methodologies and evaluation tools (see 2.3.3). Overall, these evaluations moved grantees along in their evaluation journeys, either in terms of developing larger or better datasets, improved evidence of impact, enhanced data collection processes or developed their approach to measurement frameworks. While grantees recognised the value of the evaluation work, there was a general feeling amongst grantees that the evaluation process required considerable time and energy placing additional burdens on them. There were also examples of projects that were disappointed with the outcomes of their evaluations, primarily because the findings did not demonstrate the impact of projects as strongly as organisations hoped they would. In part, this reflects the extensive challenges experienced by grantees and learning partner evaluators in carrying out evaluation activities. These include the following:

- Low sample sizes from surveys and patchy data coverage. Ad hoc attendance patterns of project participants and high attrition rates for follow up surveys were challenges particularly noted by grantees and evaluators. This limited the ability of evaluations to compare change over time and to evidence the impact of projects.
- Attributing impact directly to projects and volunteers. Learning partner evaluators recognised the limitations of their evaluations in being able to objectively attribute impact directly to projects. There were examples of evaluations that used a counterfactual to understand what would have happened if the project did not take place, for example, using artificial comparison groups. However, these evaluations faced methodological and logistical challenges with this approach.
- Staff capacity to undertake evaluation activities. Some evaluations depended on members of project staff to carry out data collection activities and it could be challenging to give evaluation priority alongside project delivery. This was particularly highlighted as an issue with collecting data from individuals at different periods and recording the progressions of beneficiaries. For some organisations, new approaches to data collection and evaluation were an additional point of innovation for projects, requiring new learning and capacity building within the organisation.
- Barriers to volunteers collecting data for evaluation. There were also examples of projects that relied on volunteers to collect data from project participants and this presented particular challenges. Grantees and learning partner evaluations reported that volunteers could feel uncomfortable asking beneficiaries questions or didn't fully understand or recognise the value of the data collection activities. There were also challenges around consistency in approach with volunteers in different areas collecting data in different ways.

Through these experiences grantees and evaluators identified key areas of learning for evaluating social action projects which are discussed below:

- **Embedding evaluation early on** - with support from Nesta, grantees developed theories of change for their projects in the early stages of their plans and on the whole reflected positively on the value of this as a process. Grantees used

these theories of change to shape their approach to evaluation and to identify key areas of focus. Grantees learnt that embedding evaluation into their project activities and processes early on was important in helping smooth data collection processes and ensuring the purpose and value of evaluation was identified and recognised by different stakeholders. There were examples of projects, for instance, that incorporated evaluation activities into the role descriptions of project staff which helped to ensure the responsibilities for data collection were clear. This became particularly important as projects grew rapidly and data collection took place across multiple different geographical areas. This highlights again the importance of building in sufficient development time for projects to establish effective processes and systems, including for evaluation.

- **Understanding barriers to data collection** - evaluators and grantees faced considerable barriers to collecting data as part of their evaluation activities. This was particularly the case for community delivered models which needed to test and develop approaches for evaluation to be led and delivered by volunteers. Some evaluators and projects seemed to underestimate the challenges and barriers volunteers might face in collecting data, including a lack of understanding about why evaluation was important, low levels of confidence in using the evaluation tools or simply not feeling comfortable asking people to get involved. Practical challenges were also reported including the difficulties volunteers had in printing surveys and engaging participants with low levels of literacy. Commenting on these challenges, one grantee said:

“We have learnt from our mistakes in not collecting more data about our volunteers early on. Similarly, to be clear from the outset about the part that our volunteers will play in the evaluation through their own data collection and make this part of the volunteer role”

(Grantee interview)

Alongside building data collection into volunteer roles, evaluators noted the value of simplifying evaluation tools so that volunteers were able to use them consistently

and accurately. They also highlighted the need to consider how best to 'frame' evaluation activities to ensure volunteers understand why they are important. Some challenges were also experienced with collecting data from beneficiaries, often because projects were reluctant to refer them for interviews or surveys, particularly if they were vulnerable. There were examples of projects which adapted their approach, training and supporting volunteers to become evaluators of a project to collect data from beneficiaries they already had a relationship with.

- **Being proportionate and flexible** - due to the challenges evaluators and grantees faced, they needed to be flexible and adapt their approach to data collection as they progressed. There were examples of evaluations that chose to move away from pre and post surveys to the use of more qualitative interviews. There were also projects that brought in additional skills and capacity by inviting students as well as volunteers to get involved in data collection activities and data analysis. At times, this meant projects and programme partners needed to change their expectations of what evaluations could achieve and gave evaluators and grantees useful lessons for improving data collection frameworks and processes for the future. This includes recommendations for grantees to use proportionate tools that do not overburden individuals and collect a small amount of well-focused data on key outcomes; using technology and digital tools to engage different groups and streamline processes and drawing on external evidence to link to longer term outcomes.

Key reflections on evaluation and evidencing impact

This evaluation has identified key challenges and lessons for evaluating social action projects. Many of these challenges reflect the difficulties organisations experienced as they transitioned to collecting data at scale as they grew. Being clear on the outcomes to focus on and being proportionate in the approach to evaluation are key.

Grantees and evaluators tried and tested different approaches to evaluation including involving volunteers in leading data collection activities. This pointed to the need for complex data collection tools and processes to be simplified and communicating with volunteers and other stakeholders the value and benefits of evaluation from the outset.

It is unclear the extent to which the learning from the partner evaluations will be embedded within the grantee organisations and the extent to which this work will strengthen their capacities and capabilities to carry out evaluation in the future. In many ways the most valuable element of the evaluations were the measurement frameworks and tools which were tested as part of the evaluation and potentially built into grantee's approaches to monitoring and evaluation.

5.2 Learning at the programme-level

This section of the report identifies lessons from the design and implementation of the 50+ volunteering programme. It reviews what worked well and less well and identifies key learning for future programmes. Recommendations for volunteer-involving organisations, funders, policymakers and commissioners are explored in section 6.

5.2.1 Programme design

The 50+ volunteering programme aimed to explore how more organisations and public services can better tap into the skills and experiences of volunteers aged 50+. It aimed to do this through four innovation funds and an evidence review, bringing

together views and evidence on 50+ volunteering. Core features of the design of the programme included:

- Finding, testing and growing innovations that harness the time and talents of volunteers aged 50+
- Funding and substantial non-financial support for grantees
- Commissioning of learning partner evaluations to build evidence on impact and develop the evaluation capacity of grantee organisations.

The evaluation identified some key areas of learning regarding the design of the 50+ volunteering programme which are explored below.

5.2.1.1 Developing a coherent programme with a clear rationale

The 50+ volunteering programme was part of the Phase 2 Centre for Social Action Innovation Fund with four of the nine funding streams focused on engaging those aged 50+ in volunteering. The 50+ programme was significantly scaled back from earlier ambitions with a focus on the four innovation funds - Join In Stay In, Give More Get More, Second Half Fund and Connected Communities Innovation Fund - each with their own aims.

There are parallels with previous programmes focused on promoting volunteering amongst older people, including the Home Office Older Volunteers' Initiative (HOOVI) and Experience Corps. One of the key lessons from HOOVI, was that the programme was “not clearly designed and systematically developed to meet a coherent series of aims and objectives”; the programme funded different organisations with different interests and agendas (Rochester et al, 2002, p50). The same limitation can be levelled at the 50+ volunteering programme. Each of the four funding streams deliberately had their own identity and aims, although a focus on involving 50+ volunteers ran through them all. A wide range of different organisations were funded, spanning different sectors, sizes, beneficiary groups and contributing to different public service outcomes. This had the advantage of opening up opportunities for different kinds of projects and producing a variety of different examples of models involving 50+ volunteers, but the heterogeneity of projects meant that there was a lack of coherence to the programme. This made it more

difficult to bring together and transfer learning across the funding streams and the diversity of projects made it challenging to draw conclusions about the impact of the programme as a whole and on priority public service outcomes.

In 2016, a theory of change was developed for the 50+ volunteering programme (then called the 'Older Volunteers Programme'). The evaluation team revisited the theory of change in early 2018 and developed a logic model in collaboration with DCMS and Nesta to help identify the objectives of the programme as a whole and how it was expected to bring about change (see Appendix A). Together with the scoping discussions with stakeholders, this process revealed challenges in identifying the core objectives of the 50+ programme and what it was looking to achieve.

The original programme was ambitious but shifted in scale and focus due to changing DCMS priorities and some concerns raised about the limited success of previous similar programmes (see section 2.1 for an overview). As a result, the original plan was reduced to four funds with a broad focus on 50+ volunteering, and some key elements of the wider programme, such as a nationwide TV campaign were removed. In making these changes the overall number of 50+ volunteers that were aimed to be recruited was nearly halved but the wider set of aims of the programme was broadened. These changes led to a lack of clarity about the objectives of the programme. Circumstances and policy priorities can change over the life of a programme and consequently objectives may need to be revised. This is why ongoing monitoring and review of programmes is important (HMT Green Book 2020a, 3.11). In the case of the 50+ programme, the problem was not only that policy priorities and circumstances for delivery had changed, as this is common from programmes of this nature, but also the programme level KPIs and wider strategic aims were not formally revised in the light of these changing priorities and circumstances. These problems may have been exacerbated by a lack of clarity in relation to the strategic rationale after the adjustment for the revised programme, particularly as the focus on 50+ volunteering, whilst still important, became diluted over the life of the programme. This made it particularly challenging for the evaluation to assess the success of the programme and whether its objectives were met.

5.2.1.2 Building in, and learning from, evidence reviews early on

The [CfAB's evidence review](#) (Jopling and Jones, 2018) brought together views and evidence on 50+ volunteering. From the outset, it was identified as a key component of the programme. This was a high-quality review that included principles for 'age-friendly and inclusive' volunteering and recommendations for volunteer-involving organisations, local government, funders and other stakeholders. Amongst its many findings, the review concluded that "*separate older people's volunteering programmes can exacerbate emotional barriers related to ageist attitudes*" (Jopling and Jones, 2018, p8). It recommended that rather than age-specific initiatives, volunteering opportunities need to be age-friendly and inclusive.

This review was published in October 2018, over a year and a half after the first innovation funds were allocated. The evidence review could have helped to inform and shape the design of the 50+ volunteering programme if it had been planned and carried out prior to the programme being developed. As it was, the evidence review still informed the programme, in particular the shift in language from '50+ volunteering' to 'age friendly and inclusive volunteering', but it could have had a more significant impact if it was undertaken earlier. Indeed, had this occurred, it would have gone some way to addressing both the need for systematic feedback from prior practice to inform programme design, but also the need for greater clarity in relation to the strategic rationale for the programme noted above.

5.2.1.3 Embedding the 'mainstreaming' of social action models

The 50+ volunteering programme provided numerous examples of different social action models involving 50+ volunteers in and alongside public services. Some projects were able to robustly evidence the impact of their work on beneficiaries, volunteers and wider stakeholders through the learning partner evaluations. Nesta shared and promoted the most successful of these examples extensively through, for example, blogs, learning reports and events. However, it is unclear whether awareness raising and creating demand for these social action models amongst public service commissioners and other stakeholders were considered a core part of the 50+ volunteering programme's design within the Government. Embedding this as

a fundamental element in the design of the programme and identifying this as a priority amongst all programme partners may have helped to promote the take up of social action models in and alongside public services and created a stronger legacy from the programme. It is too early to tell whether this programme has shifted the dial in the demand and take-up of social action models in and alongside public services, however, more of a focus on mainstreaming these in the programme's design would have made this more likely.

5.2.1.4 Embedding evaluation into programme and project design

The Green Book (HMT, 2020a) and Magenta Book (HMT, 2020b) highlights the importance of considering monitoring and evaluation at the design stage of programmes and projects. It is clear from the resources devoted to learning partner evaluation and the nature of support to develop project level evaluation plans through Nesta's funding plus model, that this did indeed occur at the project level. This was not the case at the programme level. In light of the scale of the investment in project level evaluation, it is perhaps surprising that no equivalent provision was made for programme level evaluation at the inception of the funding streams. NTU was commissioned to undertake the programme evaluation when the 50+ programme was well underway. JISI had already been decommitted and GMGM grantees were mid-way through their delivery. This meant that the evaluation was not embedded into the design of the programme from the outset.

The absence of planning for programme evaluation at the programme design stage had consequences both for this evaluation study and for maximising the value that could be realised from the extensive investment in learning partner evaluation. A programme level evaluation framework and plan established prior to implementation would usefully have informed the design of learning partner evaluation. It would thereby have both enhanced the design of learning partner evaluations themselves and laid the foundations for aggregation to programme level and facilitated intra programme and inter project comparisons of impact. One such example of this is the use of Social Return on Investment (SROI), which featured in three of the evaluation studies but was not consistent across the programme. This demonstrates the variability in focus and approach across the

evaluations that were conducted, meaning that cross-project learning was less useful. Whilst such an approach may not have been possible for all projects, a more consistent framework would have enabled more effective learning between projects and increased the collective value of the evaluations. Any such framework would have had to be sensitive to the heterogeneity of projects within the programme but would still have laid the foundations for more consistent beneficiary and volunteer data collection from the outset. This would have improved the range of analytical techniques that could be utilised by programme level evaluators.

5.2.1.5 Multi-year funding with investment in organisations

Learning reports from earlier scaling programmes highlight the importance of multi-year agreements and full cost recovery in the successful scaling of social action innovations (Deacon, 2016). This evaluation supports this finding; scaling can take years and it was challenging for organisations to achieve what they wanted to even within the two or three years of funding. The same can also be said for the new emerging ideas funded through GMGM and CCIF which needed considerable upfront time and resources to prototype models, establish new partnerships and recruit volunteers.

The grants and non-financial support also invested in central capacity and capability, including infrastructure such as Customer Relationship Management software and in upskilling staff, for example, in evaluation. Some of the legacy of this funding is likely to be in the way it has enabled organisations to grow their capacity centrally, particularly important during the challenges faced with the COVID-19. There were a number of examples where organisations were able to pivot more quickly in the early stages of the pandemic because of what they had already built through the 50+ volunteering programme funding and support (see section 2.5).

5.2.1.6 Non-financial support from the start makes a critical difference

Substantial non-financial support was built into the design of the 50+ volunteering programme and was a key area of success. Nesta worked closely with the grantees from the beginning, developing relationships and trust with a focus on innovating and learning. As part of their 'high contact, high challenge' approach, Nesta staff spent

time with organisations before awarding the grants, helping grantees shape their approach and spending time to get to know them and their work (see the following section on lessons from implementation).

5.2.1.7 Taking a realistic and collaborative approach to setting and achieving targets

Grantees set ambitious targets for volunteer recruitment and reaching beneficiaries. Nesta worked collaboratively with organisations during the grant-making process, reviewing the targets they were setting themselves and encouraged some to reduce their targets to make them more achievable. However, the fact that a high proportion of projects were unable to meet their targets for recruiting volunteers and reaching beneficiaries suggests that there was some level of optimism bias on the part of the organisations and programme partners, DCMS and Nesta; they overemphasized what the projects could achieve and underestimated some of the challenges they might face. This again points to the value of reviewing previously funded programmes, as well learning from the evidence review early on to better understand the key barriers and challenges to 50+ volunteering.

Some grantees faced particular challenges in meeting their targets for recruiting 50+ volunteers and welcomed Nesta's approach of working with them collaboratively to adapt their approach and if needed adjust their targets accordingly. This was particularly important with the onset of COVID-19 when some grantees needed to dramatically shift their focus and service delivery approaches.

While there was some level of flexibility, some grantees did not feel that their targets were realistic. This is likely to have undermined the projects' capacity to maximise the impact of the work. For instance, there were examples of grantees recruiting 50+ volunteers that were easy to engage rather than those who were more vulnerable or would have benefited most from getting involved. There were also examples of grantees spending their time and effort setting up new groups to meet their targets rather than focusing on existing groups that needed their support.

These findings highlight the need for the design of future programmes to work collaboratively with grantees to identify realistic and achievable targets that identify and reflect potential challenges and risks alongside building in flexibility to ensure projects are able to adapt their models and approaches to make the biggest impact.

5.2.1.8 Recognising that inclusive volunteering can involve additional costs of time and resources

The 50+ volunteering programme involved a number of organisations developing innovative and flexible forms of volunteering designed to engage with and encourage a variety of different volunteers, sometimes with different backgrounds and experiences. Those organisations that sought to engage a wider range of volunteers, particularly those who were experiencing a number of personal challenges, for instance due to changing life circumstances through early retirement or bereavement, found that such volunteers required additional levels of support. This required increased levels of resources, both in terms of staff time and also length of time to get volunteers mobilised. Lack of time and resources to support different groups of volunteers as well as capacity to make changes at the organisational level, have been cited as barriers to inclusion and diversity in volunteering (Donahue et al, 2021). This may include changes to internal culture as well as practices, for example, recognising the contribution beneficiaries and those with lived experiences make as volunteers. Embedding inclusion within culture and practice will require additional investment in time and resources. However research also highlights that there are cost effective actions that organisations can take to help embed a more inclusive approach to volunteering (see NCVO report on [Diversity and Volunteering](#)). Funders and grantees need to recognise that inclusive forms of volunteering might bring with it additional costs, and also reworking of organisational cultures and practices to be effective, which might require additional costs.

5.2.2 Programme Implementation

5.2.2.1 Taking risks and managing them effectively

Innovation by its nature involves risk and as such the programme partners took risks with the projects they funded and supported through the 50+ volunteering programme. This was particularly the case with the new emerging ideas and prototypes that were being tested through the innovation funds. The high

engagement approach meant that Nesta was close to the projects and the problems they faced. Ten grants were decommitted and four had their funding reduced over the course of the programme. In many ways, this points to the programme working as it should have done. Nesta worked with grantees closely on the challenges they faced, however, when it was clear that models or projects were no longer viable, decisions were taken not to continue funding them. This points to the portfolio of projects for the 50+ volunteering programme being effectively monitored and managed.

Learning was captured by Nesta including through their monitoring tracking information. However, it is unclear the extent to which this learning was embedded within the organisations themselves or more widely in Nesta and DCMS. One decommitted project, for example, focused on developing a virtual telephone service was not able to get traction, however, they may have taken their learning from this into developing their service during COVID-19 where this form of virtual telephone service might have been successful.

5.2.2.2 Providing bespoke, high-quality engagement and support

The non-financial support provided to organisations made a critical difference to the delivery of projects and the 50+ programme as a whole. Nesta's high engagement approach meant that there was an ongoing high level of contact with grantees and that Nesta had a deep understanding of grantees projects and organisations. Grantees were highly positive about the difference this engagement and support made to their work and how this helped to build their capacities and capabilities as organisations. Grantees reflected particularly positively on the expertise and knowledge of Nesta staff, the 'critical friend' role they played, the flexible approach they had when things didn't go as planned and the deep understanding Nesta had of their organisations and their contexts. As has been found in other studies of funding plus models (Cairns et al, 2011) the personal relationship between the grant manager and grantee were key. One key area of development which could be taken into future programmes is the need to ensure the sustainability of models is a focus for projects and embedded from the outset, recognising that sustainability isn't necessarily about money. Grantees were focused on the delivery of their projects

with less time built in and fewer opportunities to focus efforts on sustainability, particularly during the early stages of projects.

5.2.2.3 Promoting opportunities for peer-to-peer learning

Grantees highly valued the peer-to-peer opportunities they received through the 50+ volunteering programme, which helped them to connect with other organisations, share experiences and learn from each other. This typically took place through cohort events and workshops and from one-to-one introductions from Nesta. The benefits of peer learning and support have similarly been highlighted in other voluntary sector programme evaluations which note the cost-effectiveness of facilitating support in this way (Ockenden and Evison, 2018). While grantees were positive about peer learning opportunities, it was felt that these opportunities would have been of more value if the cohort projects were more similar and less diverse, particularly in terms of the fields and beneficiaries they supported.

5.2.2.4 Recognising the challenges of delivering multiple points of innovation

Within the context of this programme, innovation was understood as “*something new to an organisation, local area or field*”. As such, many projects were simultaneously delivering multiple points of innovation. As well as rapidly growing, some also were recruiting 50+ volunteers, testing new processes or technologies and also managing (and in some cases undertaking) evaluation activities for the first time. Delivering these multiple points of innovation was challenging for some organisations, often within the context of complex environments. There were also issues with attributing change and outcomes to innovations as there were so many new approaches and practices happening at the same time. A key area of learning for the future implementation of similar programmes is the need to examine the number and complexity of different points of innovation and the challenges that organisations might face in delivering these simultaneously.

6: Conclusions and Recommendations

This final section of the report draws together the key conclusions from the evaluation of the 50+ volunteering programme and identifies recommendations for volunteer-involving organisations, policymakers, funders and commissioners.

6.1 Conclusions

The findings on what the 50+ volunteering programme achieved and the difference it made reveals a mixed picture. In terms of successes, the programme enabled a wide range of organisations to test new ideas and grow social action projects to reach new areas, more beneficiaries and volunteers. Overall, the 39 projects mobilised over 25,320 new volunteers who, in turn, supported over 474,730 new beneficiaries. The programme enabled organisations to test different ideas and models for involving 50+ volunteers, from projects focused on building community action around clean air issues to those setting up repair parties to reduce waste and promote social connectedness. The programme has resulted in different examples of projects involving volunteers across different public service areas. The learning partner evaluations provide evidence on the outcomes of the different models and key areas of learning.

In some ways, the 50+ volunteering programme was an example of good grant-making; Nesta spent time with the organisations getting to know them and their work and supported them with their proposal and plans, including support with developing a theory of change for their projects during the grant-making phase. Building on this, the funding plus approach to working with grantees taken by Nesta was a key area of success for the programme. Nesta had a high level of engagement with grantees, knowledge and understanding of organisations and provided bespoke support which was highly valued by organisations. Opportunities were provided for peer support and learning. Grantees spoke positively about the difference this made, together with the funding, to the delivery of projects and also in the strengthening of their organisations. This included building the capacity of organisations as well as supporting grantees to improve their ways of working. Many grantees developed how

they recruited and involved volunteers and learnt lessons specifically regarding the engagement of 50+ volunteers.

More widely, the learning partner evaluations and the research through the evaluation point to some key outcomes for volunteers and beneficiaries. These included increased social connections and networks, enhanced wellbeing and the development of confidence and skills. The projects worked with different beneficiary groups, focusing their efforts on different outcomes, measuring the effects of projects in different ways. Consequently, it is difficult for the evaluation to draw concrete comparisons and conclusions regarding the effectiveness of different types of models or approaches and their relative effects on beneficiaries. It is equally challenging to objectively draw conclusions about the specific impacts of 50+ volunteers. However, grantees shared their reflections on what 50+ volunteers have to offer and the added value of involving older volunteers, including the life skills and experiences they bring to their roles, their commitment and their ability to engage, inspire and identify with beneficiaries.

While some key achievements can clearly be highlighted from the programme, at the same time there were some considerable limitations to the programme. The programme looked to create volunteering opportunities for 50+ volunteers and to mobilise them to get involved. However, while the experiences of organisations were mixed, many struggled to engage 50+ volunteers and the majority of projects did not meet targets set at inception for the recruitment of volunteers, or the number of beneficiaries supported.

The targets for projects and the programme more widely on volunteer recruitment were ambitious and for some unrealistic. For some projects, this diverted attention away from what mattered most, positive outcomes for beneficiaries, and laying the foundations for sustainable models for the future. Nesta, as programme managers, in conjunction with DCMS, became aware of this issue and consequently repositioned the programme away from targets towards a focus on quality and lessons learnt. Grantees acknowledged the benefits of this for the development and progress of individual projects. This highlights the flexibility of the programme management.

6.1.1 Reflections on the evaluation findings and COVID-19

Since the commissioning of this evaluation, the volunteering landscape has shifted considerably. While COVID-19 has led to an upsurge in informal neighbourly help and the emergence of thousands of mutual aid groups, many people also had to pause or stop their volunteering during the pandemic (see DCMS, 2020; Kaye and Tiratelli, 2020). Some of these were 50+ volunteers who were shielding or whose roles were paused or changed. Findings from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) sub-study found that amongst 50+ participants who volunteered before COVID-19, 18% reduced their activity and 43% stopped completely during the early stages of the pandemic (Chatzi et al, 2020).

While this evaluation draws on research findings prior to the pandemic, there are lessons from the 50+ volunteering programme which are useful to reflect on for pandemic recovery planning.

The evaluation identified learning from organisations that engaged those aged 50+ in volunteering. This included lessons on reducing barriers to volunteering, providing flexibility and ensuring roles are meaningful. As organisations look to re-engage their volunteers or recruit new ones during recovery from COVID-19, these lessons will be useful in efforts to ensure volunteering is age-friendly and inclusive. This is particularly pertinent for engaging groups of 50+ volunteers who would benefit the most from volunteering, including those who are less well off and those with long term health conditions (see Stuart et al, 2020). Research suggests that these are some of the groups whose well-being have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic (Public Health England, 2021).

COVID-19 has also led to a wide range of new practices and collaborations between community groups, the voluntary sector and the public sector to respond to the needs of local communities (Kaye and Tiratelli, 2020). This has resulted in some local authorities taking different approaches and embedding new ways of working to support community participation in public services (see Kaye and Morgan, 2020). As argued by Nesta in their report *The People Powered Shift* (2020), COVID-19 has opened up new opportunities to recognise and encourage community participation

and volunteering as part of the new operating model for public services. The 50+ volunteering programme funded a wide range of social action projects and ideas in and alongside public services, some of which could be particularly pertinent during COVID-19 recovery. These include the projects that aimed to promote wellbeing and reduce isolation and loneliness. However, it is unclear the extent to which the learning from these models and projects is being used by stakeholders as they design and embed new ways of working in key public service areas.

Finally, grantees involved in the 50+ programme reflected that the funding and non-financial support helped to grow and strengthen their projects and, in some cases, their organisations. There were examples of projects that were able to pivot their services more quickly during the early stages of COVID-19 because of the infrastructure or planning they had already put in place through the 50+ programme, as well as examples of organisations that were able to draw on the partnerships and collaborations they had established through the programme. However, it is unclear the extent to which the programme as a whole has helped grantees through the COVID-19 crisis and which elements of the funding plus model, in particular, have helped to make them more resilient.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Volunteer-involving organisations

This evaluation identified a series of recommendations for volunteer-involving organisations looking to test or grow social action models involving 50+ volunteers. These are explored below:

6.2.1.1 Making volunteering age-friendly and inclusive

The CfAB review (Jopling and Jones, 2018) identifies a series of principles for age-friendly and inclusive volunteering which resonate with the findings from this evaluation. Using these principles, volunteer-involving organisations should look to reflect on their current volunteering opportunities and processes for involving, managing and supporting volunteers and adapt them where needed to ensure that opportunities are open and inclusive to all, including those who are 50+. This includes:

- Providing flexibility and being responsive to the changing needs and circumstances of volunteers
- Ensuring volunteers feel well supported
- Creating and enabling opportunities for volunteers to connect with others
- Valuing and appreciating the efforts and contribution of volunteers
- Developing opportunities that are meaningful and purposeful to volunteers
- Developing opportunities that make good use of people's strengths, skills and experiences

Alongside the evidence review, CfAB has also produced a [practical guide](#) for organisations working with volunteers to engage the over 50s and widen participation among different types of people (CfAB, 2020) and Nesta have published a [learning report](#) on involving 50+ volunteers (Deacon and Holman, 2020) which organisations could use as a resource in the development of their volunteering programmes. These could be useful as organisations look to re-engage volunteers during COVID-19 recovery.

6.2.1.2 Recognising that growing social action projects require time and results in change

Growing social action projects requires considerable development time, and plans need to build in sufficient resources for developing new partnerships to reach new beneficiaries and volunteers and to put in place systems and processes to support the growth process. This may include developing new models and processes for not only recruiting volunteers but also supporting and recognising a larger number of volunteers. Attention also needs to be paid to the wider potential implications of scaling on organisations and how best to manage this change whilst scaling social action models and approaches.

6.2.1.3 Thinking about evaluation from the beginning

Building evaluation into the design of projects from the outset will help to ensure projects have clear aims and objectives and that evaluation activities bring optimal value to projects. Organisations should look to identify some of the challenges they might face with data collection early on and how to best address these, for example, by building data collection activities into staff or volunteer role descriptions. When part of a funded programme, grantee organisations need to understand how their project evaluations should feed into evaluation at the programme level. Existing advice and guidance on evaluation developed for the sector could be drawn on including Nesta's learning on evaluating [social action projects \(Mcloughlin et al, 2020\)](#) and resources from [Inspiring impact](#).

6.2.2 Policymakers, funders and commissioners

The evaluation identified a series of recommendations for the design and implementation of social action programmes and projects for policymakers, funders and commissioners. These are explored below.

6.2.2.1 Being clear about the aims and goals of a programme

From the outset, the purpose of a programme needs to be clear and explicit, with a shared understanding amongst programme partners. This is key to assessing what a programme has achieved and measuring success. A systematic process should be in place so that if priorities change and objectives need to be revised this is agreed

collaboratively with key stakeholders and is reflected in ongoing delivery and associated data collection. At all times there needs to be a clear rationale for the programme that is understood and shared with programme stakeholders.

6.2.2.2 Embedding evaluation from the start

Evaluation should be built into the design stage of programmes and projects from the beginning (HMT 2020a). This not only helps to ensure programmes get full value from evaluation activities but can help to shape and clarify the objectives and aims of a programme from the outset. If a programme has an overarching evaluation and a series of project evaluations, as with the 50+ volunteering programme, a coherent programme evaluation framework early on can enhance the design of project evaluations and facilitate aggregation to programme level. Project evaluation must be shaped by the specific aims of organisations and what they are seeking to learn or evidence from evaluation. However, having in place a common framework to collect data on a minimal number of key metrics, for example, can enable information from across projects to be aggregated and compared and provides a better assessment of the impact and success of a programme overall.

6.2.2.3 Recognising the benefits of bespoke, high grantee engagement support

Adopting an approach to grant making and funding which integrates high engagement and support as part of the funding offer to organisations can make a critical difference to organisations and the outcomes of grants. Bespoke support, attuned to the needs of projects, the wider organisation, their contexts and specific challenges is important. Programme managers in the design phase should have clarity on the purpose of a high engagement model and, where feasible, work with grantees to develop a bespoke approach that not only supports the delivery of their project but helps to strengthen their organisation. This requires a balanced approach which responds to the needs of the organisation but is not overly burdensome. As highlighted in wider research on funding plus, grantees need to be clear on what support there is available to them (Buckley et al, 2011). With programmes focused on scaling social action models, attention needs to be given to how funders will support grantees to plan for the long-term sustainability of models and how grantees

can best prepare for the organisational changes that may result from the fast pace of growth.

6.2.2.4 Recognising that growing social action projects require time

Programmes focused on growing or testing out new social action models need multi-year grants that recognise the time it takes for projects to grow in an impactful way. As highlighted by Nesta, funders cannot expect to observe impacts on the ground immediately (Deacon, 2016). Funded organisations need to spend time getting the foundations right first including ensuring they have the right skills and capacity as well as processes and systems in place. Scaling social action models that involve volunteers means building new partnerships and testing out new ways to reach and engage volunteers which can be challenging and take time, particularly for projects replicating into new areas. Funders need to recognise these challenges by providing as long a timescale as is feasible for grants.

Scaling projects often also leads to organisational growth and reorganisation. Funding can result in the recruitment of new staff or growth of activities that require the development of new systems and changes to organisational structures, which potentially have repercussions beyond the project for the wider organisation. This can have an initially disruptive impact on organisations as they adapt to this growth, with implications for project management and organisational learning. An organisation's ability to make use of the learning and capacity building through the funding plus model can sometimes be limited by these organisational transformations, as there may not always be consistency of staff. Recognising these potential changes and working with grantees to develop plans that consider these organisational impacts is important to enable scaling of volunteer projects to be successful. Recognising the potential for and making plans to manage this growth could enable better utilisation of the learning available through participating in programmes, and particularly the support available via the funding plus model.

The programme evaluation has also identified a series of wider recommendations for policymakers, funders and commissioners:

- Focusing on inclusive volunteering - this evaluation supports the findings from the CfAB review (Jopling and Jones, 2018) that the focus of attention needs to be on age-friendly and inclusive approaches to volunteer involvement rather than separate volunteer programmes for 50+ or older people. This should focus on addressing inequalities and reducing barriers to enable inclusive involvement for all across the life course.
- Investing in volunteer management and support - enabling inclusive volunteering needs investment in the management and support of volunteers. This requires organisational time and resources that should be built into funding criteria. This applies not only to the more formal models of volunteering but also models of reciprocal and mutual support that also require support and advice.
- Taking the next step to 'mainstream' innovations - the 50+ volunteering programme has identified and supported a wide range of different volunteering models and projects. There is potential for Government, Nesta and other stakeholders to share the ideas and learning from the 50+ programme more widely to help move the more successful models and ideas from the periphery to the mainstream. COVID-19 has opened up opportunities to potentially speed up this process as local authorities and other stakeholders adapt their ways of working and adopt new operating models.

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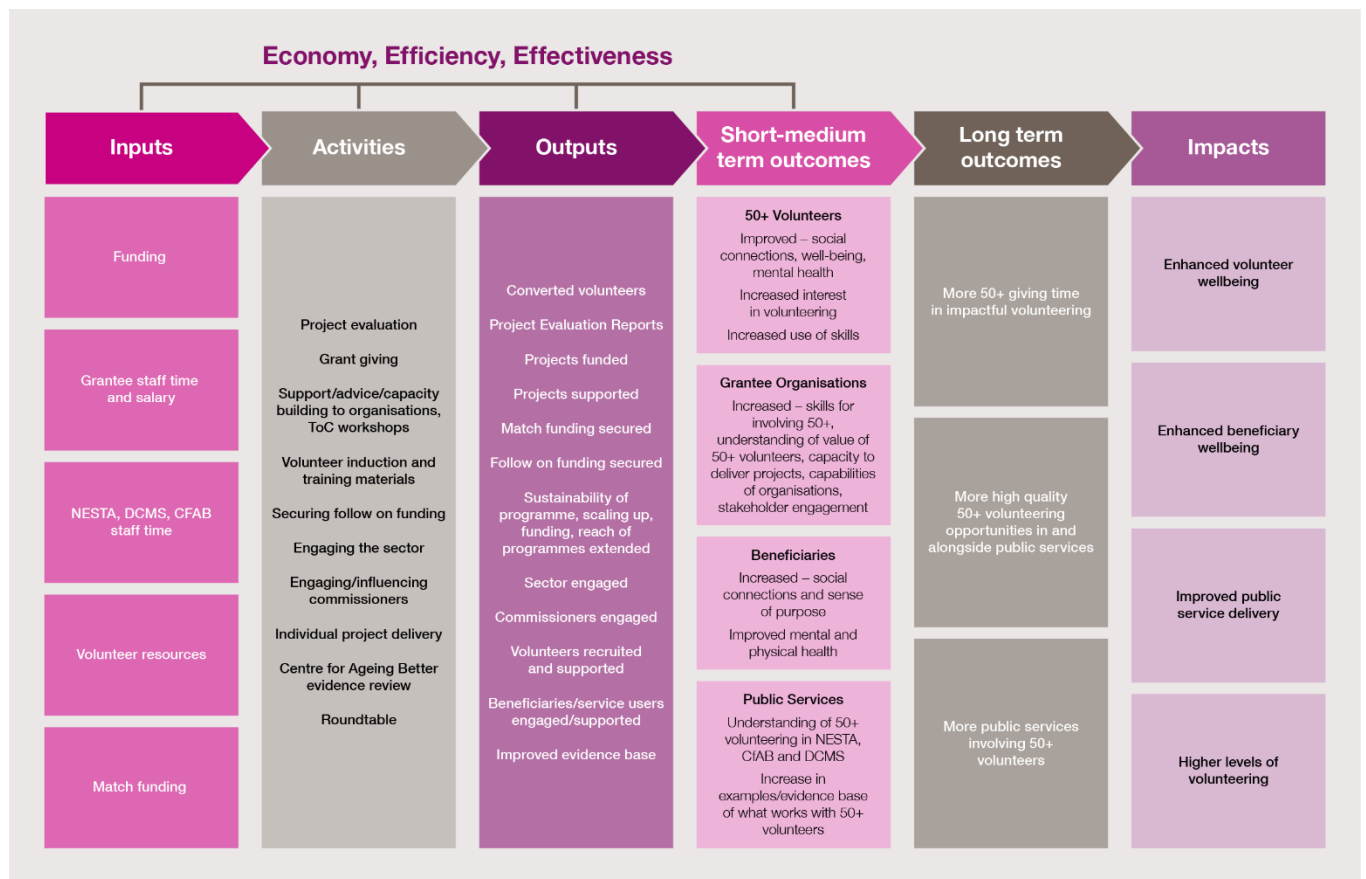
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Appendices

Appendix A: Logic model for the 50+ volunteering programme



Appendix B: Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation drew on a mixed methods approach. It combined quantitative insights, drawn from analysis of the individual project monitoring data collated by Nesta and qualitative insights from interviews with grantees and key stakeholders, and in-depth case studies with four projects.

An overview of the methodology for the three phases of the evaluation is provided below.

Phase 1: Evaluation scoping and logic model development (December 2017 – April 2018)

Scoping discussions were held with five key stakeholders involved in funding and delivering the 50+ volunteering programme, including senior staff working with DCMS, Nesta, CfAB and the Behavioural Insights Team. These helped the evaluation team to understand the different partners' aims for the programme and provided background information about its development.

These scoping discussions informed the development of a **logic model** for the 50+ volunteering programme which was developed by the evaluation team in consultation with DCMS and Nesta. A theory of change for the programme was previously developed in 2017, however, this reflected the aims and activities before the programme was scaled back, and the evaluation team wanted to revisit this to ensure the logic model was fit for purpose.

The logic model maps out the changes the 50+ volunteering programme aimed to bring about and how this was expected to happen (see figure A1). The logic model was used to shape the approach and tools for the evaluation.

It should be noted that the aims and focus of the programme pivoted during its three years and as such the methodology was regularly reviewed and the approach the team took to the evaluation necessarily shifted (see section 1 for further discussion). The logic model was used during the course of the evaluation, but it was not revised as part of the evaluation activities.

Key documents relating to the funded projects were reviewed in phase one of the evaluation. These were collated by Nesta and included the grantee's application

forms and theories of change. As projects progressed learning logs completed by the grantees were also reviewed. These were submitted to Nesta each quarter.

Interview schedules for the interviews and case studies were developed and both DCMS and Nesta fed into the development of these documents. The schedules, together with a consent form for those participating in the research, followed NTU's ethical approval processes.

Phase 2: Fieldwork (May 2018 – October 2019)

Interviews were conducted with 26 organisations funded through the Second Half Fund (SHF) and Connected Communities Innovation Fund (CCIF) in phase 2 of the evaluation. These were carried out within the first year of their grants with a follow up in phase 3. This longitudinal approach looked to capture reflections on impact and learning from the grantees at two different stages of their projects. The interviews were 45 minutes to an hour in duration and were conducted using video conferencing or over the phone. Interviews commonly included more than one staff member involved in delivering the project and typically included the project manager and/or project workers/volunteer co-ordinators. All interviewees completed a consent form before being interviewed and this data collection had been approved via the NTU ethical approval process. Interviews were digitally recorded with consent from the interviewee.

The phase 2 grantee interviews explored the recruitment of volunteers, learning from the set up and delivery of projects, initial reflections on the impact of grants and the views of grantees on working with Nesta. The evaluation team were not able to interview grantees that received funding through Give More Get More (GMGM) and Join In Stay In (JISI) as both funds had closed and it was not felt to be appropriate to approach organisations that were no longer receiving the grant to get involved in evaluation interviews. Table B1 below shows the achieved sample of interviews for the phase 2 interviews.

Table B1: Achieved sample for phase 2 grantee interviews

	Second Half Fund	Connected Communities Innovation Fund
Number of projects	12	16
Achieved sample (number of projects)	11	15

The transcripts and notes from interviews were analysed using NVivo, a data analysis software package. After the first stage of familiarisation, key themes from the interviews were identified and codes were created. Data from each interview was then assigned to the different codes, allowing the evaluators to review data from across interviews for each theme. This coding framework was added to and revised as the evaluation progressed.

In-depth case studies were carried out with three projects in phase 2 (Compassionate Neighbours, Grandmentors and Kinship Connected) and one project in phase 3 (Blue Lights Brigade). These aimed to capture in more detail the impact of the grants on volunteers themselves, beneficiaries (if possible), organisations and the wider public services. At inception, the evaluation looked to carry out five case studies, however, the final one was not conducted due to the added burden this would have placed on grantees during the early stages of Covid-19.

The case studies were purposively sampled in collaboration with Nesta. Two were identified from the SHF and two from CCIF. The evaluation team looked to conduct case studies from across different public service areas; two were ‘families, children and young people’ projects, one was a ‘health and ageing’ project and one was a ‘community resilience in emergencies’ project.

Projects which were deemed by Nesta to have sufficient capacity to get involved in the evaluation were more likely to be invited to participate as case studies and this is recognised as a limitation of the evaluation.

The approach taken with each case study was developed in collaboration with the case study organisations and is described below:

- Compassionate Neighbours (St Joseph's Hospice) - research was conducted between March and July 2019 and included interviews with the rollout project manager and local project leads in six of the hospice communities and visits to two of the community hub settings. These visits included observations, informal focus groups and in-depth interviews with Compassionate Neighbour volunteers and one-to-one interviews with two community members.
- Grandmentors (Volunteering Matters) - research was carried out between July and September 2019 and included interviews with six Volunteer Managers/Co-ordinators and visits to two Grandmentors projects. These visits included observations at matching events, focus groups and in-depth interviews with volunteer mentors and informal discussions with mentees.
- Kinship Connected (Kinship) - research was conducted between May 2019 and June 2020 and included one site visit, interviews with four staff members responsible for the delivery of the programme at the national level and local level in the North East and London, interviews with three kinship carer volunteers (aged 50 and over) and a focus group with fourteen volunteers, most of whom were aged 50+.

Participants involved in the research were asked to complete a consent form and, where possible, interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded with consent from participants. Interviews and focus groups were either fully transcribed or notes taken and then coded and analysed using the NVivo framework.

Appendix F includes short reports on the findings from the case studies. These have been included in this report with permission from the organisations.

Descriptive analysis of project monitoring data. Data was collated by Nesta quarterly from each project and this was analysed by the evaluation team on an ongoing basis. In general, the data collected for project monitoring purposes across the 50+ programme was of a very high standard. The aggregate quarterly monitoring

spreadsheet was compiled in a very consistent and comprehensive manner. This combined quantitative output measures (principally volunteer/50+ volunteer and beneficiary numbers) associated with projects in addition to qualitative narrative feedback on the progress of projects. This material was compiled by Nesta staff based on their regular conversations with grantees. Analysis of these data did identify some data anomalies. The research team attribute these anomalies to changes of staff and/or minor inconsistencies in data collection practice within grantee organisations – but it should be stressed that this is not an uncommon issue that affects monitoring data for many programmes and it did not undermine the generally high quality of the monitoring data.

A report on the interim findings from the evaluation were shared and discussed with DCMS and Nesta in February 2019. This was an internal report and not published.

Phase 3: Follow on fieldwork, analysis and reporting (November 2019 – December 2020)

Follow up interviews with CCIF and SHF grantees were carried out over the phone towards the end of their grants. Twenty-two were conducted in total and explored the perceived impact of the funded work on grantee organisations, volunteers, beneficiaries and wider public service, reflections on working with Nesta and key areas of learning. In the most part these were carried out with at least one of the individuals who participated in the phase two interviews. Table B2 below shows the achieved sample of interviews for the phase 3 interviews. The number of projects differs from phase 1 because some projects were decommitted mid-way through their grants.

B2: Achieved sample for phase 3 grantee interviews

	Second Half Fund	Connected Communities Innovation Fund
Number of projects	10	15
Achieved sample (number of projects)	10	12

One further in-depth case study with Blue Lights Brigade (Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire) was conducted between October 2019 and December 2020. This consisted of four interviews with Volunteer Managers/Co-ordinators, tracking data for the project and eleven short case studies of volunteers involved in the Blue Lights Brigade project, the majority of whom were 50+.

Four **in-depth interviews** were undertaken with Nesta staff during phase 2 and 3 of the research. Two of these were paired interviews. Staff interviewed included the Head of Social Action Innovation, a Programme Manager and Senior Programme Manager. These interviews captured interviewees' reflections on the learning from the delivery of the different funding streams and the programme overall.

Meta-analysis of twenty-two evaluation reports produced by learning partner evaluators for CCIF and SHF projects was carried out. This included all of the evaluation reports that were available to the evaluation team. Not all projects produced learning partner evaluation reports for the following reasons:

- Projects were decommitted
- Evaluations were undertaken internally
- One evaluation report was not produced due to the challenges of delivering evaluation activities due to Covid-19 (see section 1 of the report)
- Two evaluation reports are expected to be finalised after the completion of this report.

The learning partner reports were coded and analysed using the NVivo software with a framework developed for the interviews and case studies. The meta-analysis of the learning partner evaluation reports specifically focused on:

- Outcomes for beneficiaries
- Outcomes for volunteers
- Outcomes for grantee organisations
- Learning from project delivery
- Learning from evaluation activities

Review and analysis of relevant learning reports and publications. Key reports relevant to the 50+ volunteering programme were reviewed for the evaluation and these included:

- Learning report for Give More Get More (unpublished, Social Change Agency) - this summarised the findings and learning from the five GMGM evaluations
- Insights report for Join In Stay In (unpublished, Behavioural Insights Team) - this summarised the thinking around the barriers and interventions developed for each organisation involved in the JISI funding stream
- [Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering: review of community contributions in later life](#) (CfAB)
- [Helping Out: taking an inclusive approach to engaging older volunteers](#) (CfAB)
- [The Age of Inclusion: Lessons from social action innovations developed age-inclusive and age-friendly practice](#) (Nesta)

Analysis of project monitoring data collated by Nesta every quarter for each funded project (see above). By the end of the programme the evaluation team had access to thirteen quarters of data. This data enabled the team to analyse the number of volunteers mobilised and beneficiaries supported in relation to the targets set at inception as well as the costs of projects per volunteer and beneficiary.

Causal analysis of monitoring data using difference-in-differences and panel data techniques to look for evidence of impacts associated with the programme. This was used to identify the causal impact of the 50+ volunteering programme on key outcomes (see Appendix D for the technical annex).

The **reporting** in phase 3 of the evaluation included an interim report submitted to DCMS in March 2020 and this final report. The final stage of the evaluation involved two rounds of detailed feedback from DCMS on the draft report.

Limitations of the evaluation design

The approach to the evaluation had a number of limitations. These included:

- The qualitative research elements which included the interviews and case studies were limited to the CCIF and SHF projects. The evaluation team were not able to interview GMGM and JISI grantees as these grants had already closed. Internal learning documents were available for these two funds, however, the evaluation team were not able to collect primary data on the impact of the programme across the full portfolio of projects.
- The case studies for the evaluation were selected in collaboration with Nesta. This approach was taken to help ensure grantees were not over-burdened and that the evaluation did not duplicate existing learning partner evaluation activities. However, this approach may also have biased the sampling in favour of projects that had more positive experiences with the programme. Organisations that had more capacity to get involved in the evaluation were also more likely to be invited to get involved. To help address some of these limitations, the evaluation team looked to interview a wide range of staff members and volunteers in each project, to capture different views and learning.
- The evaluation team had limited access to the beneficiaries of funded projects. This meant the team were only able to capture the experiences of a small number of beneficiaries through the case studies. The evaluation therefore relied on the findings on the impacts on beneficiaries from the learning partner evaluations.
- The team also had limited access to other partners and stakeholders involved with projects including commissioners. It was challenging to identify appropriate stakeholders to involve in the research at the local level and projects preferred the evaluation team to focus the research on their own staff, volunteers and beneficiaries. This limited the scope of findings of the evaluation on the impact of projects and the 50+ programme on public service areas.
- The evidence on the impact of projects on beneficiaries and volunteers in this evaluation draws on the evaluation team's primary research, and also on the findings from the learning partner evaluations. As such, some of the findings

in this evaluation, in particular those relating to the impact on beneficiaries, are dependent on the quality and robustness of these individual learning partner evaluations.

Appendix C: List of 50 + volunteering programme grantees

JOIN IN STAY IN (March 2017 – October 2017)

- Five organisations funded
- Grants of £15k to £22k and non-financial support
- Investigated how volunteers aged 50+ can be encouraged to transition from involvement in volunteering events to giving time regularly
- Aimed to use Randomised Control Trials (RCTs)
- Fund discontinued as not enough participants were recruited for an RCT
- All grants decommitted

Project/Organisation Name	Summary	Project Start and Completion
Barnado's	Volunteers aged 50+ support vulnerable children to improve their living conditions across England. Volunteers attend a single event and research methods applied to understand what works in retaining volunteers.	March 2017 – October 2017
CSW Group Limited (Somerset Volunteering Service)	Volunteers aged 50+ provide rural transport services in Somerset. Volunteers attend a single event and research methods applied to understand what works in retaining volunteers.	March 2017 – October 2017

Project/Organisation Name	Summary	Project Start and Completion
Marine Conservation Society	Volunteers aged 50+ collect waste and improve environments across 5 coastal locations in England. Volunteers attend a single event and research methods applied to understand what works in retaining volunteers.	March 2017- October 2017
Leicester City Council	Volunteers aged 50+ improve parks, gardens and nature reserves. Volunteers attend a single event and research methods applied to understand what works in retaining volunteers.	March 2017 – October 2017
Family Mosaic	Volunteers aged 50+ befriend older people and share skills such as digital and gardening. Volunteers attend a single event and research methods applied to understand what works in retaining volunteers.	March 2017 – October 2017

GIVE MORE GET MORE

(March 2017 – May 2018)

- Five organisations funded

- Grants of £49K to £100K with 4 grants reduced
- Developed and tested intensive volunteering placements (150+hours) for people approaching or in retirement in public service settings

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/give-more-get-more-fund-exploring-intensive-volunteering>

Organisation/project name	Summary	Dates
Genesis Housing Association (V50 Programme)	Recruiting and training volunteer Wellbeing Mentors aged 50+ to support unemployed residents in social housing with moderate to medium mental health support needs, helping them to improve their wellbeing and/or employment opportunities	March 2017 – July 2018
Kings College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (A&E Volunteers)	Develop and test intensive volunteer placements in A&E departments, recruiting volunteers aged 50+. Aims to improve the overall patient experience	March 2017 – July 2018
Coram Beanstalk (Reading Transition Programme)	Recruit, train and support volunteers to give one-to-one literacy lessons to primary school children.	March 2017 – June 2018

Organisation/project name	Summary	Dates
Volunteering Matters (Person Centred Plan Programme)	Match volunteers aged 50+ to a disabled young person and their family to provide a person-centred action plan which will help the young person identify their next steps upon leaving education.	March 2017 – July 2018
North Tyneside VODA (Friends of North Tyneside)	Support volunteers to undertake an intensive three- month programme of volunteering, working in teams to plan and deliver a series of social action projects aligned with the key priorities of the local authority.	March 2017 – July 2018

SECOND HALF FUND

(April 2017 to October 2019)

- 13 projects funded (4 decommitted)
- Grants of £83K to £285K
- Supported the growth of innovations that mobilise 50 plus to volunteer
- 4 priority areas: children and young people; parents and families; ageing well; and resourceful and resilient places

<https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/second-half-fund-sharing-time-and-talents-life/>

Organisation/Project name	Summary	Dates
AESOP (Dance to Health)	Scaling a programme aimed at increasing older people's mobility and in turn reducing their risk of falls through volunteer led dance activity.	April 2017 – March 2019
Access Project	Focusing on the recruitment of volunteers aged 50+ to support disadvantaged school students with one-to-one weekly tutorials in order for them to get into a top university.	April 2017 – October 2018
Family Action (National Digital Parent Support Service)	Developing a more accessible, innovative service model to offer a broad range of support services to families virtually.	April 2017 – March 2019
Eden Project (Deep Roots New Shoots)	Recruiting volunteers aged 50+ to support grandparents with a large caring role to engage in activities with their early years grandchildren.	April 2017 – June 2019
FareShare	Develop and deliver a new strategy including recruiting volunteers who are aged 50+ to distribute surplus food in order to	April 2017 – September 2019

Organisation/Project name	Summary	Dates
	reduce waste. Disseminate learning from this to other projects within the network.	
Tempo (Time Credits)	Developing and extending Time Credits with those aged 50+ with a focus on those at risk of isolation and long-term health conditions.	April 2017 – March 2020
St John Ambulance (Community Advocates)	Training volunteers within vulnerable communities who are aged 50+ to develop skills in first aid in order to support those within their community.	April 2017 – September 2019
St Joseph's Hospice (Compassionate Neighbours)	Developing a programme in which volunteers are paired with vulnerable neighbours at the end of their life in order that they can come to terms with this and feel part of their community. Scaling to other hospices.	April 2017 – December 2019
The Reader (Shared Reading)	Shared reading sessions aimed at reducing isolation. Transitioning from a staff-led model to a volunteer-led model to increase reach and	April 2017 – April 2019

Organisation/Project name	Summary	Dates
	impact and become sustainable.	
Volunteer It Yourself (VIY)	Teaching young people trade and building skills via volunteer mentors who are trades people. Young people gain practical skills and in the process fix community facilities.	April 2017 – March 2019
Volunteering Matters (Grandmentos)	Matching volunteers aged 50+ with young people leaving care to provide mentoring support in the transition between care and independent living.	April 2017 – March 2020
BuddyHub (Friendship Wheels)	Connecting older adults at high risk of loneliness and social isolation with volunteer 'Buddies' using smart technology.	April 2017 – September 2018
Home Start Greater Manchester (BabyBond)	Supporting parents with mild to moderate mental health issues to build positive attachments with their 0-2 year old infants through volunteers who are clinical specialists in mental health and child development.	April 2017 – December 2018

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES INNOVATION FUND

(April 2018 – June 2020)

- 16 organisations funded (1 decommitted)
- Grants of £75K to £280K
- Funding for growing innovations or early stage/prototyping ideas
- Public service priority areas: community resilience in emergencies; community connections and thriving places; and improving our environment

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/project/connected-communities-innovation-fund>

Organisation/Project Name	Summary	Dates
Equal Arts (Hen Power)	Working in older people care homes across England, empowering older people to build positive relationships through hen-keeping. Recruiting older people who have not previously volunteered to support this.	Many 2018 – June 2020
Cities of Service – The Next Generation	Working across four different locations with a different aim in each – reducing loneliness and isolation, providing reading buddies for children, supporting healthy affordable growing and cooking, improving health and wellbeing.	May 2018 – July 2020

Organisation/Project Name	Summary	Dates
Absolutely Cultured (Hull Volunteers)	Building on previous volunteering work done in the city to understand neighbourhood needs, build training, and work on engagement activities	May 2018 – July 2020
In2scienceUK (STEM placements)	Increasing the 'science capital' of young people from the poorest backgrounds by providing support and guidance from volunteers with STEM careers.	March 2018 – October 2020
Oomph Wellness Training Ltd (Community Wellbeing Walks)	Supporting older people to be more active, meet new people and connect to their local environment through volunteer-led walks. Developing a digital platform to support this.	May 2018 – March 2019
Kinship (formerly Grandparents Plus) (Kinship Connected)	Developing a sustainable network of peer-to-peer support for kinship carers through physical and virtual groups.	May 2019 – June 2020
Church Action on Poverty (Self-Reliant Groups)	Supporting individuals from low income communities to develop Self Reliant Groups.	March 2018 – June 2020

Organisation/Project Name	Summary	Dates
Library of Things (Borrow and Share)	Preventing environmental waste and improving community connections through a lending library of useful objects such as power tools, gardening items and cleaning equipment.	May 2018 – November 2019
UpRising Leadership (One Million Mentors)	Training mentors to support young people with the transition to adulthood. Each young person receives one hour of mentoring per month for a year with a longer term aim of developing one million mentoring relationships.	May 2018 – April 2020
The Restart Project	Preventing electronic waste and changing the consumption of electronics by hosting community events where volunteers repair electrical devices and train others in repair skills.	March 2018 – April 2020
Southampton Collective (Breathing Spaces)	Tackling air pollution and public health issues through collective community action.	May 2018 – February 2020

Organisation/Project Name	Summary	Dates
Neighbourhood Watch (Communities that Care)	Developing and testing a framework for community based support in crime prevention to be provided by trained volunteers.	May 2018 – March 2020
Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire (Blue Lights Brigade)	Recruiting retired emergency service personnel to deal with emergencies in their local community.	May 2018 – March 2020
Volunteer Centre Camden (CAMERA)	Developing an emergency volunteer programme to enable local people and businesses to be known to local authorities as trusted contacts to support in the event of a local emergency.	May 2018 – April 2020
British Red Cross	Developing a coordinated community volunteering programme to ensure that communities are more resilient, and better able to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.	May 2018 – January 2020
North Yorkshire County Council (Spontaneous Volunteers)	Recruiting and training volunteers to support public sector responders in the event of a	May 2018 – March 2020

Organisation/Project Name	Summary	Dates
	significant incident or emergency. Creating infrastructure to support and deploy those volunteering.	

Appendix D: Supplementary analysis of the monitoring data

Table D1: Unit cost per volunteer and beneficiary

	Project	Volunteer Unit Cost		Beneficiary Unit Cost	
		Actual	Target	Actual	Target
SHF	Project 11	£305.59	£423.53	£189.65	£304.09
	Project 1*	£90.08	£451.35	£90.08	£79.52
	Project 12*	£1,369.05	£504.39	£2,875.00	£605.26
	Project 10	£459.10	£594.83	£7.77	£11.06
	Project 7*	£1,851.11	£714.00	£116.88	£31.24
	Project 6	£27.30	£168.57	£0.20	£0.22
	Project 5	£83.48	£247.26	£16.21	£27.47
	Project 9	£175.31	£421.57	£23.78	£18.66
	Project 4	£322.97	£420.56	£89.94	£77.28
	Project 8	£416.83	£556.77	£737.68	£779.48
	Project 3	£23.78	£340.68	£28.15	£30.92
	Project 2	£318.70	£431.03	£408.35	£386.60
GMGM	Project 1	£4,545.45	£1,000.00	£1,190.48	£1,000.00
	Project 2	£2,500.00	£1,000.00	£2,500.00	£1,000.00
	Project 3	£2,940.76	£999.86	£10.11	£5.00
	Project 4	£3,073.06	£983.38	N/A	£983.38
	Project 5	£4,966.75	£993.35	N/A	£993.35
CCIF	Project 16	£144.21	£190.63	£22.45	£31.77
	Project 13	£183.78	£616.30	£31.89	£25.34
	Project 15	£103.18	£172.41	£56.24	£357.14
	Project 14	£422.30	£735.29	£394.32	£125.69
	Project 20*	£3,398.00	£393.29	£461.68	£88.31
	Project 18	£744.48	£923.16	£454.01	£245.09
	Project 17	£793.44	£1,226.22	£793.44	£786.32
	Project 21	£418.87	£999.71	£23.56	£27.17

	Project	Volunteer Unit Cost		Beneficiary Unit Cost	
	Project 19	£118.37	£253.76	£119.15	£49.51
	Project 27	£529.87	£1,275.00	£44.31	£26.64
	Project 26	£500.00	£600.00	£300.00	£300.00
	Project 22	£652.06	£1,153.65	£109.95	£115.36
	Project 23	£250.81	£258.33	N/A**	£387.50
	Project 28	£591.33	£231.80	N/A**	£434.63
	Project 25	£129.53	£474.68	N/A**	£375.00
	Project 24	£240.38	£1,250.00	N/A**	£500.00

* Decommitted projects

**These projects are the community resilience in emergencies cohort and they did not have data on beneficiaries

Table D2: Beneficiary and volunteer ratio (The only formal targets were set for volunteer and beneficiary numbers.)

Fund	Project	B:V Ratio	Implied Target
SHF	Project 11	2.04	1.39
	Project 1*	14.95	5.68
	Project 12*	6.67	0.83
	Project 10	85.50	53.77
	Project 7*	42.76	22.86
	Project 6	464.12	773.98
	Project 5	12.50	9.00
	Project 9	13.87	22.60
	Project 4	6.33	5.44
	Project 8	0.84	0.71
	Project 3	11.86	11.02
CCIF	Project 16	9.92	6.00
	Project 13	21.52	24.32
	Project 15	3.37	0.48
	Project 14	5.43	5.85

Fund	Project	B:V Ratio	Implied Target
	Project 20*	8.76	4.45
	Project 18	2.31	3.77
	Project 17	2.60	1.56
	Project 21	42.44	36.80
	Project 19	5.47	5.13
	Project 27	25.58	47.87
	Project 26	3.33	2.00
	Project 22	6.56	10.00

* Decommited projects

Appendix E: Case Studies

Compassionate Neighbours Case Study

This summary presents the key findings from research undertaken by Nottingham Trent University (NTU), exploring the impact of the Compassionate Neighbours programme and key learning from its roll out into new communities in London and nearby counties. This research was carried out as part of a wider evaluation of the Government's 50+ volunteering programme, which aims to mobilise the time and talents of people in the second half of their lives.

About Compassionate Neighbours

The Compassionate Neighbours programme provides community-led support to those who have a life limiting illness or those experiencing loneliness and social isolation. Described as a *'growing movement of people who support each other to promote compassion in their communities'*, Compassionate Neighbours are volunteers, predominantly in the second half of their lives. They offer friendship, emotional support and a listening ear to their matched community member through regular face-to-face visits; supporting them to participate in activities they like doing; and helping them stay connected to the community as well as family and friends. Many Compassionate Neighbours are also involved in other community activities as part of the Compassionate Neighbours 'movement' including running coffee mornings and acting as ambassadors. These are often focused on opening-up conversations within communities about the hospices and end of life.

Founded by St Joseph's Hospice in East London in 2014, Compassionate Neighbours received funding through the DCMS/Nesta Second Half Fund to roll the Compassionate Neighbours model out into other hospices. Between April 2017 and May 2019, Compassionate Neighbours was replicated in seven new hospice communities across Greater London and nearby counties. During this time, 561 Compassionate Neighbour volunteers were recruited (over 60%, 378 were aged 50

and over) with 317 Community Members matched to Compassionate Neighbours (123 volunteers were involved in other activities to support the programme).

About the research

As part of the case study, NTU undertook research between March and July 2019 to explore the experiences of those involved with the Compassionate Neighbours programme, including interviews with the rollout project manager and local project leads in six of the hospice communities and visits to two of the community hub settings. These visits included observations, informal focus groups and in-depth biographical interviews with Compassionate Neighbours and one-to-one interviews with two community members¹⁵.

This summary reports on the findings of the research on the early impact of the Compassionate Neighbours programme and its roll out on community members, the Compassionate Neighbours and the wider hospice communities. It also identifies learning from the scaling up of the programme.

Impacts on volunteer 'Compassionate Neighbours'

Reciprocity and mutuality

A strong theme emerging from the research is the reciprocity and mutuality of the Compassionate Neighbours Programme. Many of those who sign up to become Compassionate Neighbours have personal lived experience of illness, bereavement, isolation, or crisis, and the line between who is a Compassionate Neighbour and who is a community member is often blurred. As one Compassionate Neighbour put it

¹⁵ A separate evaluation of the Compassionate Neighbours programme has also been undertaken by McPin.

“we’re all one and the same”.



Figure 1: words used to describe what being a Compassionate Neighbour means to focus group participants

The difference that involvement makes to the Compassionate Neighbours was highlighted repeatedly by both the project leads and Compassionate Neighbours themselves (see figure 1). For some, the experience has been transformational:

“It’s changed my life. I’d retired and I didn’t know what to do and I walked in here and I knew what I wanted to do. The atmosphere - I wanted to be involved with it as much as possible. All the people you meet, it’s so lovely! It’s humbling for us. We’ve all been humbled by something to bring us here. And that humbling is a beautiful quality”

(Compassionate Neighbour, focus group)

Social connections, friendship and mutual support

For many Compassionate Neighbours, they not only feel they are ‘giving back’ through supporting community members who are going through similar challenges, but also gain personally from developing new friendships and connections. Compassionate Neighbours frequently spoke of a ‘ripple effect’ as social connections naturally flow and grow through Compassionate Neighbours communities:

“Well, my life, as it was before, with going to church coffee mornings, and just seeing people an hour or two at these meetings, and at first it was difficult to make friends, and then when I went onto this. I found I gained more confidence and I’m going around and talking to

different people. So, I've got confidence to sit next to them or something and say hello" (Compassionate Neighbour, interview)

Particularly highlighted were the connections made with other Compassionate Neighbours, sharing like-minded thoughts and feelings, providing a sense of mutual support, recognition and common purpose.

"I think it seems to me to be a sort of, win, win, all round. I think from our point of view our own wellbeing has improved, because in some respects we feel we've got a support network as well. And also, I think, you know, we're hopefully improving the wellbeing of those community users" (Compassionate Neighbour, interview)

"As a group we will support each other through bereavements, through difficult times, through potentially having to release somebody to specialist intervention" (Compassionate Neighbour, interview)

The value of these social and mutual support aspects of involvement were particularly highlighted for those who were aged 50+, some of whom were experiencing isolation and loneliness themselves.

The training programme for Compassionate Neighbours was felt to play a key role in helping to "*open up a support network between the neighbours themselves*", becoming as "*close as family*". Designed to be relational and experiential, the training encourages the sharing of stories and experiences, anxieties and worries; learning together about what 'compassionate' looks like. Some of the Compassionate Neighbours who trained together regularly communicate on WhatsApp groups to share news and questions about their experiences with community members, as well as for general socialising and get togethers.

"In the training someone would say something, it would resonate with someone else, and then people would open up and share. I've

come to the conclusion that everyone has issues of some sort of issue - relationship, money, health - but people when they meet in groups they mask it - we're all actors with different faces for different places - but it only takes one person to say I'm struggling a bit and someone else will say I know what you mean and then people will open up" (Compassionate Neighbours, focus group)

The Compassionate Neighbours model is designed to allow friendships between those who have been matched to develop in organic and intuitive ways. The ways in which Compassionate Neighbours aged 50+ are able to bring their personal lived experiences, often of loss and grief, was particularly highlighted as valuable in these matched relationships. Some spoke of the enjoyment and personal rewards of the contact they had with community members. When asked what the best thing was about being a Compassionate Neighbour, one said: "*without a doubt the neighbour herself – the friendship and shared passions we have - we can talk for hours!*". For some the relationship can be particularly challenging due to the multiple forms of loss and difficulty that can affect community members, however Compassionate Neighbours recounted the rewards felt from helping them achieve "*baby steps*" towards a more hopeful outlook.

Developing new understanding, learning and confidence

The project's staff leads and Compassionate Neighbours highlighted the different forms of learning and indeed unlearning that has resulted through involvement with Compassionate Neighbours, including understandings of, and attitudes towards end of life, dying and loss:

"I have never worked in a hospice before, and I did the training and I learnt what they do. Before you think they are just a place where people go to die. But St Joes where I did the training is huge and Compassionate Neighbours has been going on there for a while, so that opened our eyes, and we experienced one of their death cafes and I was like, OK [nervous tone], but it was actually really great!

And it does spur you on and go home and talk to your family”
(Compassionate Neighbour, focus group)

The way in which the programme provides a common-sense autonomous approach to supporting community members was also highlighted as a key area of learning for Compassionate Neighbours. Compared to more traditional befriending roles with rigid expectations and rules, the loosening of institutional boundaries and mindsets was found to be empowering for Compassionate Neighbours, helping them to develop confidence and deal with challenges when they arise:

“When they're stuck they do come to the coffee mornings and say I'm really struggling with this or this has happened, but actually they get a lot out of it and they quite like the problems that come up and if they can sort them and thrash them out together they go away with more confidence” (Project staff)

The project's flexible approach also provides an important sense of 'permission' for community action for the Compassionate Neighbours, helping to build trust and giving them the confidence to reach out to others in their communities:

“For me, it was the sort of thing I was already doing, but I'm enjoying doing it in a more trusted environment. I could walk up and down the town centre all day talking to people and helping them, but this puts a framework around it” (Compassionate Neighbours, focus group)

Impact on community members

Improved well-being

Community members, Compassionate Neighbours and project leads highlighted the difference person-centred support, attention and friendship has had on those experiencing loneliness, isolation, marginalisation and depression. Commenting on the difference their Compassionate Neighbour makes to them, one community member said:

“It’s benefitted me an awful lot, you know because I find that you become very depressed, especially if you were very, very active which I was. And then all of a sudden you get this and I’m not doing anything, I’m sitting around the house, which is very, very depressing, believe me and he is getting me out a bit now, he’s bringing me out a bit, it’s slowly but surely, he’s a good ear to bend”
(Community Member, interview)

“I can’t express enough what a difference it’s made – it’s just unbelievable – you’d cry at some of the stories. One of the most amazing things is, we’re able to turn potentially a bad death into a good death. It’s amazing to have the capacity to do that” (Project Lead)

Compassionate Neighbours can provide a crucial role of being a ‘critical friend’ that allows space for catharsis and truth-sharing. One community member who sees his Compassionate Neighbour three times a week noted that:

“I know that if I needed it I’d be able to call on him any time, I know I could. The good thing about it is he will tell me what he thinks, whereas the family will sugar-coat it. But he will tell me the truth. Which is good. I might not like it, but then I sit back and think about it and think, yeah he’s right. So he does calm me down that way”
(Community Member, interview)

Community engagement

The overall aim of the Compassionate Neighbours programme is for those coming to the end of their lives to continue to feel part of their community. There were a number of examples of the Compassionate Neighbours programme opening up opportunities for community members to engage more with, and in, their local communities, often through support or encouragement from their Compassionate Neighbour. This included going to social gatherings such as pubs or community

centres or getting involved in community projects. In one example, a Compassionate Neighbour noted that for his community member “*he’s connected with a whole host of community workers which wasn’t there a year ago*”. In another example, a younger community member whose older Compassionate Neighbour has helped her manage house moving and childcare while undergoing cancer treatment, has become a community advocate for the hospice, helping with coffee mornings and leading fundraising initiatives for Macmillan cancer support. Reflecting on the relationship between the matched pair, the local project lead noted:

“They define what they have as a friendship, not as a volunteer relationship or anything like that - they describe each other as an inspiration - so for me that really sums up the success of the project”

Impact on the hospice community

Raising awareness and changing public perceptions

Compassionate Neighbours and project leads felt that the programme (and the funding through the Second Half Fund grant) helped to increase the visibility of the hospices and started to shift the public perception of what hospices are and what they offer. For some, it helped to bring new and different people into contact with the hospice including young people. The community-facing focus of the programme and the role of Compassionate Neighbours as ambassadors and local champions was felt to have started to challenge stereotypes, facilitating more open and comfortable conversations with people in the community about difficult topics such as the end of life:

“The advantages of Compassionate Neighbours being able to infiltrate community in a more flexible way include destigmatising what a hospice is. We've still got a huge lot of work to do there - too many people see hospices just as places to die and never come out again” (Project Staff)

The Compassionate Neighbours programme is also becoming a key driver in developing organisational strategy and fundraising within some of the hospices. One

project spoke of how Compassionate Neighbours has become the “flagship” of their hospice’s community engagement work, informing their new five-year strategy to grow their community engagement remit for the hospice in order to meet the increased demands of a growing and ageing population.

Inter-hospice relations

The roll out of the Compassionate Neighbours project from one hospice to seven has had a significant impact on improving working relations between hospices.

Collaboration between hospices, the regular meetings and opportunities to visit other hospices to learn from their practices is seen as “*very new for hospices – it’s so important to have a creative forum to learn together*”. Two hospices in Hertfordshire have joined forces to win a three-year Lottery funding to join up their work and collaborate with a Bedfordshire charity to replicate the Compassionate Neighbours model there:

“From my experience it's quite unusual for hospices to work together and to partner and to share and I think that the Nesta funding almost forced them to do that - for two hospices to come together and put in a joint bid is really positive. For whatever reason there's usually a sense of competition like 'we've got our patch', so often working together is not something that comes naturally” (Project Staff)

Lessons Learnt

Reaching out to different groups and highlighting the reciprocity of matches – the hospices reached out to a wide range of organisations and groups to help connect with community members and prospective Compassionate Neighbours, including faith groups, local residence groups, housing associations, community singing groups and other local community groups. With many Compassionate Neighbours (in particular those aged 50+ experiencing their own isolation and loneliness) an important element of this work has been ensuring the reciprocity of the programme is communicated and understood within communities.

Volunteers in the second half of their lives bring diverse expertise and experiences – Compassionate Neighbours who are 50+ bring a wide range of insights, skills and experiences to the knowledge base of the hospice community. Project staff frequently spoke of how the expertise of the many former teachers, nurses, social care and creative practitioners has enabled new ways of engaging with and meeting the needs of community members. For example, one Compassionate Neighbour who worked for decades with people with learning disabilities was able to diagnose autism in one community member and recommend more appropriate ways of making that person feel included and safe in her interactions with the hospice community. This is something that is likely to have been missed without the Compassionate Neighbours model.

Involving volunteers as ambassadors can be powerful – Compassionate Neighbours play an important role in not only promoting the programme and recruiting new volunteers, but also in opening-up conversations within communities about the end of life, dying and loss. This was seen by project leads and by Compassionate Neighbours themselves as a key element of the Compassionate Neighbours movement. Their ambassadorial roles were also seen as powerful in shifting public perceptions about the important contributions of hospices in developing community connections and fostering quality of life for all.

Peer to peer support is a key element of the Compassionate Neighbour programme – the mutual support volunteers provide one another and the connections Compassionate Neighbours make through the training and in their roles is a vital component of the success of the programme. In part this has been facilitated by the hospices with opportunities for Compassionate Neighbours to share their experiences, for example, at practice development meetings. However, peer to peer support has also been importantly driven by Compassionate Neighbours themselves. The feeling that you are part of a 'community' of Compassionate Neighbours and the social element of the programme was highlighted as particularly important for those aged 50+ who might be isolated themselves.

Providing structure but also flexibility in the Compassionate Neighbours model – from the outset the affiliation model aimed to provide loose control and this

has given the hospice communities and the Compassionate Neighbours the freedom to develop and evolve the programme within their own areas. This has meant that volunteers, under the umbrella of the Compassionate Neighbours 'movement', have felt empowered to get involved in wider community activities such as running bereavement cafés, coffee mornings, walk and talk activities and taking the initiative to talk about end of life, dying and loss within their communities. For Compassionate Neighbours aged 50+, project leads highlighted learning around the need for the programme to be as flexible as possible to reflect the many commitments those over 50 have as well as their skills and experiences. One project lead noted:

“The "professionals" are the facilitators rather than managers. I'm not a manager, I don't tell you what to do, I don't teach you in the training. In the training you tell me what your boundaries are and what your skills are and what you can bring to it”.

Being open to cultural change - rather than having a rigid structure for volunteer involvement, the model of Compassionate Neighbours promotes the autonomy of Compassionate Neighbours to make their own decisions. This challenged some hospices notions of risk and management and for some encouraged them to re-visit their approach to volunteering and risk management. The new energy injected into hospices through the Compassionate Neighbours movement has, in some cases, shifted attitudes and habits in the multi-agency teams within hospice practices, and volunteers become role models for social change at the organisational as well as the community level.

Planning for how growth will be managed – the replication of the model in the different hospice communities presented particular challenges in terms of stretched resources and lack of staff capacity as the number of referrals, Compassionate Neighbours and matches grew. The ways to best manage this growth will need to be a key focus going forwards. Continuing the Operational Leadership Group which brings together the project leads for shared learning and development will be an important part of this.

Grandmentors Case Study

This summary presents the key findings from research undertaken by Nottingham Trent University (NTU), exploring the impact of the Grandmentors programme and key learning from its scaling up into five new local authority areas between April 2017 and October 2019. This research was carried out as part of a wider evaluation of the Government's 50+ volunteering programme, which aims to mobilise the time and talents of people in the second half of their lives.

About Grandmentors

The Grandmentors programme provides practical and emotional support to young people transitioning from care. Trained volunteer mentors (most of whom are aged 50 and over) are matched with a young person, typically aged 16 to 24. They meet regularly on a one-to-one basis for at least 6 months, with the young people mainly referred to the programme by their local authority personal adviser or social worker. Mentors support young care leavers in their transition to independent living, working towards a set of goals set at the beginning of the relationship. These might, for example, focus on moving into paid employment, going to college, or gaining parenting or budgeting skills. The support that mentors provide responds to the needs of the young person and what is going on in their lives at the time. As such, a key part of the mentor's role is to help empower the young person to make their own decisions and take control of situations arising in their lives.

Founded in 2009, the Grandmentors programme (co-created and run by Volunteering Matters) received funding through the Second Half Fund to replicate the Grandmentors model in 5 new local authority areas and increase the capacity to reach more people in the existing areas. Between April 2017 and October 2019, a total of 379 mentors were recruited (aged 50+) and 275 matches were made. The Grandmentors programme is now established in Islington, Hounslow, Suffolk, Milton Keynes, Stockton-On-Tees, Wiltshire, Wolverhampton and Warwickshire.

About the research

As part of the Grandmentors case study, NTU undertook research between July and September 2019 to explore the experiences of those involved with the programme, including interviews with six Volunteer Managers/Co-ordinators and visits to two of the Grandmentors projects (one pre-existing and one new project). These visits included observations at matching events, focus groups and in-depth biographical interviews with mentors and informal discussions with mentees¹⁶.

This summary reports on the findings of the research on the impact of Grandmentors and its roll out into new areas. It also identifies learning from the scaling up of the programme.

Impacts on mentors

Sense of satisfaction from 'giving back' and making a difference

Mentors commonly spoke of how rewarding it was to be a mentor, to help others and to see first-hand the positive changes in young people and their lives. Mentors spoke passionately about how young care leavers need to be better supported and that Grandmentors was important in helping vulnerable young people transition out of care, as one mentor noted *'I don't do this because it's good for me, but because it needs doing!'*. The role can be challenging and mentors often commented on how their mentee can be difficult to engage with, however mentors felt that what they were doing was worthwhile and enabled them to 'give back':

"I obviously get pleasure from seeing people develop and grow.....You know, you can help somebody be in a better position, so I get a benefit from doing that. I do feel I am in a very privileged position, and that it's only fair that you know, that I should support others that aren't" (Mentor interview)

¹⁶ A separate evaluation of the Grandmentors programme has also been undertaken by Manchester Metropolitan University.

“We’ve got a great life, and it’s just a way of giving something back and thinking, well how can we help somebody?...Being able to give somebody money is one thing, but being able to give somebody time over an eighteen month programme or two year programme or whatever is much more rewarding” (Mentor interview)

For some mentors, the programme has helped them feel that they have something valuable to offer young people, giving them an important sense of purpose.

Commenting on this, mentors said:

“It does give you something because you’re getting that satisfaction...You know, I’m actually doing something; I’m helping that person that’s got some issues. And you know, okay I might not think it’s a big deal, but you know, they feel it’s a big deal” (Mentor interview)

“And I think maintaining a link with a teenager and being helpful to them at the same time, for me is really rewarding because it just kind of makes me feel I’ve got something to offer rather than just doing my own thing, you know, for my own benefit” (Mentor focus group)

Use of life experiences and skills

A key element of the Grandmentors programme is the intergenerational matching and the emotional and practical support that ‘world wise’ mentors can give young care leavers. Mentors and Volunteer Managers/Co-ordinators highlighted numerous examples where volunteering was enabling mentors aged 50+ to use their experiences, skills and knowledge they have built up. Mentors spoke of how they were putting their experiences and skill sets to “*good use*” and this was highlighted by Volunteer Managers as an important motivator:

“So a lot of them were teachers and social workers. Yeah, and although they’re retired they don’t want their skills to go to waste. So

they like to be able to continue doing something that uses the skills they've built up over years” (Volunteer Manager interview)

Some mentors noted how the mentoring role resonated with other things they had done in their lives, whether as part of their career, as a parent or in a different capacity. Mentoring helped them use and build on their experiences or continue to pursue their interests, including engaging with young people. For some, their previous experiences (for example of volunteering as a scout leader or as a social worker) has helped to shape how they are working with their mentee:

“In a previous life I was a school teacher, no longer. But I think that’s really helped me to engage with my mentee. And, because the sort of things we are doing is picking a location, going to a museum or something like that, where I spend a lot of time talking and explaining things to him.... for me, that’s kind of what I was wanting to do really, to teach and share knowledge. So, you know, it’s an extension of that” (Mentor focus group)

“Having that non-judgemental approach and saying, I’m really am not judging here, you know, things are as they are. But in order for you to cope with it, we have to understand it and work through it. But this isn’t a judgement...But actually it really helps, being in the care sector, understanding mental health, understanding you know, the impact that mental health can have on you” (Mentor interview)

Personal development and learning

Some mentors recounted how they felt they had personally developed from being involved with Grandmentors. Particularly highlighted was how involvement had raised their awareness and ‘*opened their eyes*’ to the issues and challenges facing young people leaving care. Learning on issues relating to safeguarding and boundaries were also noted by mentors.

Mentors recognised that the mentoring relationships is a two-way reciprocal relationship - both the mentor and mentee learn and develop as the relationship progresses. Commenting on this, one mentor noted:

“I mean you do learn from them as well you know, it’s not just a one way, it’s not just a one-way thing. You know, they’ll teach you things as well. You know in terms of emotions, and personalities... so there's also things that you get from them” (Mentor interview)

Making connections and being part of the community

Mentors felt the Grandmentors programme brought people together who wouldn’t normally meet, both through the inter-generational matching and the opportunities mentors have to mix with one another. Involvement helped some mentors to feel more connected with young people, “*part of society*” and part of a community:

“I used to be in youth work for a long time, and then that finished about five or six years ago. And the thought of losing contact with young people and just growing old frightened me a bit, because I don’t like the idea of being disconnected from the younger generation” (Mentor focus group)

“I mean the big thing is, it keeps me grounded..... But you know, so in a sense, I’m aware of and involved in a community” (Mentor interview)

Impact on mentees

Trust and opening up

A strong theme emerging from the research with mentees and mentors is the sense of trust that can develop in matched relationships. This trust can take time to develop and mentors highlighted the need for patience in building the trust between mentee and mentor. Mentees commented on how they felt they could “*open up*” to their mentors, that the relationship was “*less controlled*”, and that mentors would be non-judgmental. One mentee said that he wasn’t scared of how his mentor would respond to things he said, which he felt was very different from the relationships he

had with “*members of staff*”. Mentors felt that being someone outside ‘the system’ who regularly and reliably supported the young people was key to mentees opening-up and the development of a strong relationship. As one mentor put it; “*He certainly appreciates having this figure who is not part of the system, that is pretty clear*”.

Another noted:

“I think the fact that you’re volunteering has got a lot to do with it because you’re not being paid for it and these kids have seen a lot of professionals in their life. And they just see us in a different way I think, because we’re doing it because we want to, we want to help them” (Mentor focus group)

Personal development, confidence and self-efficacy

Mentors and Volunteer Managers/Co-ordinators gave numerous examples of how mentees have developed personally during their time involved with the programme. The importance of ‘small steps’ and changes to the lives of the young care leavers were highlighted: a willingness to get out of bed in the morning; turning up to appointments on time; engaging more in conversations; a better understanding of how to manage anger and feelings; a positive shift in dealing with and making decisions about relationships; a growth in confidence are just few of the changes noted:

“All of it comes back to the young person. Feeling empowered enough to make their own choices and to understand that they have got a choice, even when the situation is really quite bad. They still have a choice to make and I think that that’s the impact that having a Grandmentor has. It gives them the confidence to take risks and not go into situations where they are scared or they don’t know what they’re doing” (Volunteer Manager interview)

Commenting on his observations of his mentee (who was an unaccompanied minor), one mentor noted:

“Just the little things, I think are quite important, smaller outcomes, soft outcomes in terms of culture, greetings, talking, conversation. All those things, particularly for someone from a different culture, is things which perhaps we’re less aware of, but are equally important in bringing those skills to bear” (Mentor focus group)

Practical support

Mentors also provide practical support to mentees, from advice on benefits to help with finding accommodation. One mentee commented on how their mentor had helped them with their CV to make it look ‘more professional’ and supported them with interview practice for an apprenticeship. The mentee felt that the mentoring relationship had made “*so much difference*” over a short time.

There were numerous examples of mentors seeking out opportunities for their mentees, for example, apprenticeships or using their own networks and contacts to help open-up opportunities:

“There’s been a series of opportunities that we have together worked on. And I would like to think that with my support, he’s secured those opportunities, or that he may not have done had we not worked together (Mentor interview)

Volunteer Managers/Co-ordinators highlighted the value of the career and lived experience of mentors aged 50+ in providing practical and emotional support to young care leavers. Some felt that the careers and career histories of the mentors aged 50 and over is inspiring for the young mentees, particularly if these mirror their own interests.

Wider impacts

Volunteer Managers and Co-ordinators involved in delivering Grandmentors across the different areas felt the programme brought wider benefits, particularly for Volunteering Matters as an organisation. They felt it had helped raise the profile of the organisation and its work with vulnerable groups at both a national and local

level. An important part of this was seen to be the innovative nature of the programme and “*not being afraid to take a challenge*”.

Reflecting on the second half fund grant specifically, Volunteer Managers highlighted how it had helped the organisation to innovate and learn:

“I can see actually what has gone wrong and where we've reflected on it, where they're moving forward and improving that I think has changed the culture of the way that we do things. We're much better at having productive conversations about where things could be better and learning from each other” (Volunteer Manager interview)

This learning, particularly in terms of models of working and collaboration with stakeholders such as local authorities, is reportedly being transferred to other projects and work with vulnerable groups within the wider organisation. Commenting on this, one Volunteer Manager said:

“Sharing good practice has definitely become much more essential part of what we do across all aspects of the organisation and I've seen a lot of that come from Grandmentors. So yeah, I think it's had a massive impact and is really helping us to fine-tune what we do really well” (Volunteer Manager interview)

Lessons Learnt

Flexibility and innovation in the Grandmentors model are key to delivery – it is clear that the areas with established Grandmentors projects vary hugely in terms of geography and demography. As such, the Grandmentors model needs to remain flexible with sufficient scope for innovation. As noted by one Volunteer Manager:

“Look at the model and make the model fit the beneficiaries rather than making the beneficiaries fit a model that has already been created”.

Projects need to adapt the model and innovate to reflect the uniqueness of their area including: the particular needs of the young people and the issues they face (the approach to working with unaccompanied minors, for example, will be different to working with young people who have spent their lives in the care system); geography (in rural areas physical distance between mentee and mentor will influence the approach); capacity and ways of working of local authority teams (smaller teams and fewer personal advisers/social workers will result in fewer referrals); and the 'culture' of an area (the extent to which there are organisations to partner with and levels of community engagement). The expectations and targets set for any new projects will need to be area specific and take account of the above issues.

Targeted recruitment and making the direct ask can help to engage 50+

volunteers – the projects used different ways of recruiting volunteers aged 50 and over. The more successful methods reported by Volunteer Managers tended to be those where people were asked personally to get involved and when those involved with Grandmentors directly engaged with those in the community, including through local organisations, and networks such as the rotary club, classes for the over 50s or through social media. Particular success was found in one area by targeting individuals directly through LinkedIn, whilst in another they appealed to those aged 50+ with adverts in the Evening Standard and Metro.

Mentors aged 50+ bring diverse experiences, skills and knowledge – Mentors bring a wealth of experiences and skills to their relationships with young people and the Grandmentors programme. Volunteer Managers, mentors and mentees spoke of how the lived experiences of mentors aged 50+ – gained through parenting, paid work, volunteering and life in general – helped support mentees practically and emotionally. As noted by one of the mentors: *"In giving them life skills and helping them to face the challenges and sort of guiding them, I think the age definitely helps, because we've had them experiences, we've done that"*.

The approach to matching needs to be flexible and tailored to specific areas and individuals - projects identified useful lessons on the matching process, in particular the need for flexibility in the approach and to adapt it to the needs of specific individuals. As noted by one Volunteer Manager: *"It has to be absolutely*

specific to the needs of the young person relative to all that's going on for them". Soft matching (organised group events for mentees and mentors to meet) was felt to give more agency and choice to the young mentee, however it was noted that it isn't appropriate in every setting and some young people would find a soft matching event too intimidating. For projects in rural areas soft matching events are challenging to set up because of the long distances individuals have to travel. Adapting the matching approach to the individual and retaining flexibility was therefore seen as key.

Building strong relationships from the outset is vital - establishing strong relationships with local authority teams (typically the Leaving Care Team), and specifically personal advisers and social workers, is key to ensuring young people are referred to the programme and that the mentoring relationship addresses their specific needs. Volunteer Managers highlighted how building these relationships and trust can take time and that this needs to be recognised when setting projects up in new local authority areas. Some areas have also built strong relationships with local businesses who have helped support the programme, for example, by referring their staff to Grandmentors for volunteering opportunities and hosting soft matching events.

On-going support is an important part of the volunteer experience – the role of the Volunteer Manager in supporting the mentor in their matched relationship is seen as a fundamental element in the support for mentors. Having access to a wider community of support was also identified as important, particularly opportunities for sharing ideas and experiences with peers. Some mentors felt that they wanted better access to up-to-date knowledge and information relating to issues that might be affecting young people, including the benefits and welfare system and dealing with mental health challenges. Mentors asked for Grandmentors toolkits, case studies, an intranet for mentors and an online community to help them in their relationships with young care leavers.

Growth can be challenging for staff on the ground – Volunteer Managers and Co-ordinators highlighted the pressures and challenges they face in managing the workloads involved in setting up and managing Grandmentors projects in their areas.

They reflected on the large number of relationships they manage with the young people, the mentors, the mentor-mentee match and personal advisers/social workers alongside all of the other responsibilities the role involves. Collaborating across projects and sharing learning is important, particularly for those in more isolated roles. The programme will need to explore how to best manage this growth moving forward so that more capacity is created for delivery. The creation of a SuperGrandmentor role has been posited as one potential way to increase capacity with mentors potentially taking on additional roles, for example, in recruiting volunteers, group training new mentors or acting as ambassadors for the programme. This has potential, however, it is important that these are added value roles and that they are not undertaking core tasks of the Volunteer Manager role.

Building a Grandmentors 'community' - projects highlighted how the Grandmentors programme is about more than the match between mentor and mentee and the potential for building a supportive on-going Grandmentors community as part of the programme. This is seen as particularly important for those matched relationships which have come to an end to ensure those young care leavers can continue to be part of a supportive community. The continued growth of the programme presents opportunities for this:

“I want to create a community for the young people of mentors that they can tap into their knowledge so that they don't only have their mentor, they have all of these other people who are available to them. Even if it's just in terms of kindness and good will that they have this sense of being surrounded by people who care and who are willing to give time and effort to support them” (Volunteer

Manager, Interview)

Kinship Connected Case Study

This summary presents the key findings from research undertaken by Nottingham Trent University (NTU), exploring the impact of the Kinship Connected programme and key learning from its scaling between May 2019 to June 2020. This research was carried out as part of a wider evaluation of the Government's 50+ volunteering programme, which aims to mobilise the time and talents of people in the second half of their lives.

About Kinship Connected

Kinship Connected was set up by Kinship (formerly Grandparents Plus) to provide support, information, and advice to kinship carers. Kinship carers are relatives or friends who raise a child or children full-time, usually because their parents are not able to care for them, often due to parental substance misuse, death or imprisonment.

Kinship Connected builds on the experiences of a similar support programme, Relative Experience, with peer support at its foundation. With funding from the 50+ volunteering programme, Kinship looked to consolidate the work they had already undertaken in the North East of England and London, as well as expanding to new areas of West Yorkshire and Milton Keynes. Between May 2019 and June 2020, thirty-five new peer to peer support groups were established and the programme reached a further 574 kinship carers and engaged 364 volunteers, most of whom were aged 50 and over and were kinship carers themselves. Alongside supporting more carers, the programme looked to encourage a more sustainable approach to kinship care within communities, encouraging groups to become independent and sustainable in the long term.

The foundation of the Kinship Connected programme are the volunteer led peer-to-peer support groups. These provide an opportunity for kinship carers to regularly come together, providing emotional support to help them manage and cope as well as practical information and signposting. The vision is for all these groups to be self-sustaining. Some groups, including those in the North East, are constituted and independent meaning kinship carers manage and run the group themselves. If

affiliated with Kinship, the groups have access to support and advice from project workers if needed. Other groups set up by Kinship or commissioned by the local authority receive more hands-on support from project workers who organise and facilitate the groups. Kinship carers are provided with training to take on lead roles within the peer to peer groups. Some kinship carers have also been trained as 'kinship carer champions' to help raise awareness of kinship care and the support groups.

In response to Covid-19, the Kinship Connected programme was quickly moved online, with most groups providing virtual support via Zoom. As part of this, kinship carers were offered training and support from Kinship project workers in how to use Zoom and WhatsApp and how to run the groups virtually. In some areas, groups were run more frequently than before the pandemic on a weekly basis.

About the research

As part of the case study, NTU undertook research between September 2019 and July 2020 to explore the experiences of those involved with Kinship Connected, with a particular focus on the impact of the peer-to-peer support groups. The research included interviews with four staff members responsible for the delivery of the programme at the national level and local level in the North East and London, interviews with three kinship carer volunteers aged 50 and over and a focus group with fourteen volunteers, most of whom were 50+, kinship carers themselves and led support groups in their areas.

This summary reports on the findings of the research on the impact of the Kinship Connected support groups and the roll out of the programme into new areas. It also identifies learning from the programme¹⁷.

¹⁷ A separate evaluation of the Kinship Connected programme has also been undertaken by Starks Consulting and Ecorys, commissioned by Kinship

Impacts on kinship carers

Making a difference

The difference the peer-to-peer support groups make to the lives of the kinship carers was particularly highlighted in the research by both the kinship carer volunteers and staff. Volunteers commented on the impact of the groups on their own lives as well as others. Key to this was the peer-to-peer element and the shared lived experiences of the kinship carers. Kinship carers felt that support groups provided a non-judgemental space where you could be honest about how you are feeling and where people understand what you are going through because they have been through it themselves:

“It’s being with people who just know sometimes without even saying the words how you’re feeling. That you’re saying that about your own child but then you’re feeling guilty about it at the same time, it doesn’t need explaining because every one of us have been in either that or a similar position. And you can’t even get that from professionals because although to a point they know what you’re talking about, they don’t know the feeling” (kinship carer volunteer)

“You all kind of put on this mask, this care mask, where you’re the rock in the family and you’re doing all this but it’s a kind of self-realisation, self-reflection, which sometimes makes you break down and I think it’s really important to have that because it’s not something that kinship carers in general do on a daily basis because you’re there for the children” (kinship carer volunteer)

For some volunteers the groups had been *‘life changing’* and a *‘lifeline’* in their own lives, helping them to get through challenging times and situations:

“Well, it was a life-saver because at the end of the day, I had no-one. And having this child with these outbursts I was finding it hard because although I brought up [my] children and not one of them

was anything like that and I just thought my god, you know, this is really hard, no-one to talk to. But when you went to the group, because you're not the only person who may have a problem"

(kinship carer volunteer)

Some volunteers were driven to volunteer and lead the groups because of the perceived lack of support for kinship carers from elsewhere. They wanted to ensure that other carers did not experience what they themselves had been through. Some volunteers spoke of feeling isolated and unsupported when they first became kinship carers. Commenting on this one staff member said:

"Often when carers first come to us, they're often feeling really lonely, isolated, downtrodden, desperate often, really in a very, very difficult place and dark place. And when they come to the support group, it's like a light turned on. And they see what can be achieved.

They see these other inspiring carers that have come through that darkness" (staff)

Kinship carer volunteers remarked on how they felt frustrated by the 'system' and the lack of support provided to kinship carers:

"Frustrated because when you're sitting in a small group everybody's got the same problems and they don't get fixed easily and it's really difficult to find the answers so you do get frustrated because you do want to help everybody else as well as yourself and it's not always the easiest thing" (kinship carer volunteer)

When asked for one word to describe their experience with the peer-to-peer support groups, 'frustrated', 'daunting' and 'challenging' were noted by volunteers in the focus group as well as 'gratifying', 'achievement' and 'enlightening' (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Words used to describe volunteers' experiences with the peer-to-peer-support groups



Sense of purpose

Some volunteers spoke of how their involvement with the kinship groups brought a sense of purpose and helped them to feel useful to others. Supporting the groups as volunteers enabled kinship carers to feel like they were doing something useful for others, giving back because they know how hard it is to be a kinship carer and how the groups have helped them.

“I started doing the group, going to the group then I started sort of getting a little bit more involved, especially when we started doing fundraising, I thought I’ll come along because I felt there was a purpose, you know, you’re choosing to bring everyone in the same boat together and to me, that’s what it was all about” (kinship carer volunteer)

“I feel useful. I feel useful again. Going from being like working full-time and then having to take medical retirement you went from being out there all the time to being in four walls” (kinship carer volunteer)

Developing confidence

A strong theme from the research was how kinship carers developed confidence through involvement with the support groups. Staff commented on how for some this had been transformational and many examples were given of kinship carers who at the start were very low or 'on their knees' who overtime, through the support of the group, developed their self-esteem and confidence and felt able to take on facilitating a group:

“She’ll be the first to admit that her life has totally changed. That is us kind of getting them involved and encouraging them but it’s also other kinship carers helping them out of themselves and leading by example. I think one of the easiest ways to encourage someone is not by saying “go on, go on”, it’s by them watching other people do it. So it’s leading by example I think” (staff member)

Volunteers also commented on how involvement with the groups had helped develop their self-confidence. Some felt that this had a positive knock-on effect on others, including their children and families. They spoke of how their confidence and positivity “*rubs off on the kinship children as well at home, as well as at group and on other kinship carers*”. Commenting on this, one volunteer said:

“I started volunteering at quite a low time... so you can only go up really and the more you learn or the more you try to help other people the more your confidence grows, which usually means you are going to do a better job with the kids anyway, because you are more confident about what you are doing”

Using skills and life experiences

Staff in particular commented on the skills and experiences kinship carers are able to bring to the volunteer role, using their own experiences with their families and as kinship carers in a positive way to help and support others:

“I would say the majority of our carers have a plethora of skills and experience, whether that be work based experience, volunteering, just life experience bringing up families. So, the skills that they can bring to the support groups that they are within is just immense. And I've seen those skills also being, you know, adopted by other members of the support groups as well” (staff member)

Staff felt that this was empowering for kinship carers but that it could take time for them to recognise the impact that this has on them personally. As one staff member noted:

“They are sharing their experiences to have a positive impact on someone and what that means then for them. Again, it takes quite a while for them to recognise it but it's really powerful when they do recognise it” (staff member)

Volunteers remarked on how using their own experiences within the support groups not only made them feel useful but also how they gained knowledge from other people in the group. One volunteer noted:

“There's lots of legal things that are going on, and nobody knows. When you're speaking to people that have been through that process, or are going through the process, you just feel a bit easier. You can go home and, you know, have your normal conversations with other friends and family. But know that everything's been dealt with” (kinship carer volunteer)

Impacts on Kinship

The research explored the difference the 50+ volunteering programme funding and the Kinship Connected work made to Kinship as an organisation. Staff commented that over the funding period the growth and development of the organisation had been *'transformational'*. A number of key themes emerged from the interviews with staff.

Reaching more kinship carers

With the funding, Kinship were able to expand support for kinship carers to new areas with 35 new groups set up over the funding period. A key element of this scaling was the development of the organisation's partnerships and commissioning model with local authorities. Kinship were able to focus on how they worked with local authorities, adapting their model and proposition to help generate further partnerships and funding for the programme. As noted by one staff member, "*it's about generating those relationships and seeing the value and investing in that going forward*". Funding for a project worker and volunteer development manager also meant that existing and new groups could access advice when they needed it and volunteering could be developed and embedded within the programme and the organisation more widely.

Embedding volunteering across the organisation

The Kinship Connected programme and the organisational thinking that developed around the value of volunteers and social action has brought volunteering more to the centre of Kinship, underpinning their work across the organisation:

"I think across the organisation actually there's been an organisational change towards volunteering and it just feels like it's embedded in every strand of service delivery, and really recognising the value of that social action approach and we are all invested in that rather than it being siloed over to a volunteering development manager" (staff member)

Fundamental to this was a shift towards thinking about the engagement of volunteers more broadly, in terms of social action and people helping people. This approach recognised that kinship carers were giving their time by attending groups and supporting others even if they hadn't taken on a formal volunteering role or activity. This was reflected in the way that Kinship changed how they talked about engagement and the language they used when recruiting volunteers, using 'friends' rather than volunteers (see below for further discussion):

“We have really tried to breakdown those stereotypes of volunteering and thinking more in that social action approach and people helping people has been really helpful in enabling carers to grasp that concept and also staff to shift the way they think about it”
(staff member)

Developing systems and processes

As well as enabling the organisation to employ a new volunteer development manager and project worker, the grant helped Kinship invest in their systems and processes to support the growth of Kinship Connected as well as their other programmes. This included the development of their CRM database as well as aligning other processes and systems to improve the delivery of programmes.

Moving to virtual support groups

The set up of virtual support groups was a key element of Kinship’s original proposal for the Kinship Connected programme. However, many kinship carers were reluctant about engaging in this way, preferring instead face-to face-groups. However, with the onset of the pandemic, Kinship were able to use the thinking and work they had already done to move rapidly to virtual groups. During the early stages of the pandemic project workers changed their schedules to train kinship carers to use Zoom and WhatsApp. Staff felt that this rapid transition highlighted that the peer-to-peer groups were “*flexible, adaptable, agile and able to move into a new way of working*”.

Lessons Learnt

How you frame and talk about volunteering makes a difference - Kinship wanted to break down barriers and open up opportunities for kinship carers to get involved in leading and supporting peer-to-peer groups. Staff found that changing the terminology they used made a significant difference to engagement amongst kinship carers. While reluctant to register as ‘volunteers’ because they didn’t feel they had the time, kinship carers were more open to registering as a ‘friend’. When the roles

were broken down, kinship carers recognised that they were already doing many of those voluntary activities within the groups.

“We came to the terminology of registering as a friend, a friend of [Kinship] and a friend to other carers and really fitting in with that social action ideology and that made such a difference. We saw such a change in the number of people registering to be part of that and they would then become part of the kinship community” (staff member)

“When you’re approaching people and saying will you volunteer, most of the carers will say – no way, I’ve got too much on. But if you say are you willing to belong to this group, it might be bringing tea and coffee or biscuits or just setting up the room most people will say – oh yeah, that’s fine. So then it’s talking about it and saying well actually that is volunteering, it’s not asking for very much, it’s just asking a little bit of your time and then for me, you get much more of an uptake” (staff member)

Flexibility in volunteering opportunities is key – Kinship carers often have complex lives and the volunteering opportunities developed need to recognise and reflect the needs and personal circumstances of kinship carers. This should allow for volunteers to reduce their commitment or step back if they need to. A key element of this for Kinship is the development of self-initiated roles and activities, with kinship carers identifying what they would like to do and what they are able to do as volunteers. For some groups this might mean breaking down the key roles of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer into smaller manageable activities and tasks.

Virtual support groups can create new opportunities for volunteers – staff identified that the move to virtual support groups has encouraged some kinship carers aged 50+ who were once reluctant to take up a leadership role step up and lead the virtual groups. Again, this potentially offers a more sustainable model of kinship support. However, the move to virtual ways of working has also presented

Kinship and groups with challenges, including reaching those who do not have access to the technology or do not want to engage with others virtually.

Peer networks for group leaders to share experiences and provide mutual support will be important to sustaining groups – kinship carers highlighted the pressure they sometimes felt when leading the support groups. Some spoke of how daunting it could be making the transition to an independent group and how they valued the support and advice of the Kinship project worker. There is considerable potential for the development of a stronger peer to peer support network where carers responsible for leading groups provide support to one another and share experiences and learning. Forums have been established in some areas and offer a model for more sustainable and long-term support for group leaders.

Blue Lights Brigade Case Study

This summary presents the key findings from research conducted by Nottingham Trent University (NTU), exploring the impact of the Blue Lights Brigade project and key learning from the initiative. This research was carried out as part of a wider evaluation of the Government's 50+ volunteering programme, which aimed to mobilise the time and talents of people in the second half of their lives.

About Blue Lights Brigade

Blue Lights Brigade provides volunteering opportunities for Ex-Emergency Services and Ex-Forces community members to use their skills to provide a Community Emergency Responses Team (CERT) to the Humber Region. It was run by Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire (VANEL) and has now, post the funded period, been spun out as a separate Community Interest Company, Blue Lights Brigade CIC.

The project brings together two key needs; the demand for skilled volunteers who can be involved in community emergency responses in case of events like flooding, and also the need for many retiring members of the forces to get involved in meaningful and purposeful activities after they retire.

Funded through the Connected Communities Innovation Fund (CCIF), between May 2018 and March 2020, the project mobilised a total of 309 volunteers (target 300), of which 221 were over 50. The initiative was part of the Community Resilience cohort, a group of projects that specifically focused on community resilience work, as part of the wider CCIF programme.

About the research

The research for the Blue Lights Brigade case study was conducted between October 2019 and December 2020. It consisted of four interviews with Volunteer Managers/Co-ordinators and analysis of the grant proposal, tracking data for the project and eleven short case studies of participants involved in the Blue Lights Brigade project.

Original concept

The original concept behind the Blue Lights Brigade was that emergency services personnel had a need for volunteering opportunities and particular skills that they could contribute. The idea arose from an experience of one of the founders who noticed that ex-police officers were struggling after retirement and finding it difficult to transition to a new life. This need became particularly apparent when one of the founders 'lost a colleague to suicide'. This led to the idea of developing a programme to support this transition, through creating tailor-made volunteering opportunities to aid their transition into retirement by being active community members, who can contribute to their own, and others, wellbeing:

“the idea was that the individual retirees from police would get some volunteering experience”

The original pilot was focused on those within the police, and this was broadened to the other emergency services for the 50+ programme. The 50+ programme was a good fit, particularly with the focus on an older age group, so connected well with the trajectory of the project:

“the Nesta programme came along again, it was the right sort of age group, we were looking over 50 volunteers, we focused on those from the ex-emergency services”

The central premise was that people who have served in the Emergency Services would have specialist skills, from a lifetime of working in the area, which were transferable, making them highly suited to working within emergency resilience programmes, in ways that gave them meaning and purpose as they transitioned into retirement. Secondly, that those over 50 would have life experience that would be useful for the project.

The central goal of the project was to work with these skilled volunteers to develop emergency resilience understandings, plans and capabilities and to develop new

capacity to be part of the official emergency response process in times of emergency. Through this there would be a direct benefit to public services by reducing the pressure on the emergency services and provide backup support at the time of incidents and support communities to be able to respond to potential emergencies.

Activities for the project

The primary activities for the Blue Lights Brigade have been the recruitment and training of volunteers, particularly Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) and working with community action projects. During the lifetime of the CCIF funding they did not face any emergencies, such as flooding, so were not able to test the model to its full extent, but this did not prevent them engaging in a range of activities:

“We didn’t test it enough because we didn’t have major incidents which are good really. The team were called out quite a few times for little environmental spillages and other bits and pieces. We had a young lady go missing who was murdered in the area and we did volunteer some of our teams to be involved in that but they were stood down from that, they didn’t want to get volunteers involved in searching in that way”

Blue Lights Brigade volunteers were involved in a range of social action projects, such as river clean ups and safe and well checks. They were also involved in assisting the wider voluntary sector to develop community emergency plans and a ‘little lifesavers’ project which teaches beach and swim safety to children.

Post award

The Blue Lights Brigade CCIF funding ended in March 2020, but they have since been spun out into a separate CIC led by Steve Jones who was the coordinator of the project. The Covid-19 pandemic has been the Blue Lights Brigade’s busiest period, as they have been involved in Covid-19 community responses. The Covid-19 emergency, and the way that the Blue Lights Brigade has been able to respond

demonstrates their value during emergency situations. They have been nominated for local awards and developed a junior CERTs and mini first aid sessions.

Core learning

Challenges of growth

This project was run by Voluntary Action North East Lincolnshire (VANEL), an organisation with extensive experience in delivering volunteering programmes. However, many of those programmes and projects were often quite focused and small scale, where they could provide bespoke volunteering opportunities and spend time matching the needs of the volunteer to the opportunities that they had available. This project being run on a larger scale, with many more volunteers was challenging, particularly as it increased the complexity of the work and the time needed to engage volunteers.

Diversity of volunteer motivations

A key challenge for the project was trying to develop opportunities, particularly on this scale, that matched the motivations and interests of individuals to the project. An important component of the initiative was to help give volunteers a sense of meaning and purpose through taking part in volunteering. This required a highly individualised approach, which on a large-scale project could be challenging to achieve.

Importance of timing for recruiting retirees

Whilst the original concept was that the volunteers would use the Blue Lights Brigade as a way of transitioning into retirement, getting the timing right for engaging with the potential volunteers was challenging. They found that many individuals, as they approached retirement, were not immediately ready to volunteer, but instead were thinking about holidays or having a break. It was often only a few months after they had actually retired that they wanted to think about volunteering. However, managing this relationship and keeping in touch with potential volunteers was difficult as it required maintaining contact. If they approached individuals too early then the potential volunteer was not ready, but if they left it too late then they might have gone on to other activities such as employment, or alternatively be struggling and not feel able to engage.

Importance of building relationships with stakeholders

A key component of this project was that it required the participant and buy-in of multiple different stakeholders to make it a success, particularly in two ways. First, as the volunteers were all drawn from those working in the emergency services, people working within these emergency services were vital gatekeepers for engaging with these potential volunteers. Secondly, being called on to help respond to emergencies also relied on the awareness of, and engagement with, other key gatekeepers, particularly local authorities. Each of these local authorities had their own structure, key personnel and requirements, which made the relationship different.

A central feature of the success of the project was therefore dependent on these various key gatekeepers and building, maintaining and adapting to these relationships over time. Whilst some of these relationships were already strong within the project team, others took longer to develop. Some of the reoccurring challenges included:

- People move around: maintaining relationship can be difficult when sometimes those in post move between roles and organisations
- Variety of assumptions and expectations about the role of volunteers: across the different stakeholders there are a variety of assumptions about what the skill levels and knowledge of volunteers are, or the appropriateness of volunteers to provide this type of work. Some of these assumptions arise from the variety of cultures and contexts across the various stakeholder groups
- Variety of individual needs across stakeholders: different stakeholders have different needs and requirements for the services. In some jurisdictions there were clear needs for the services whereas others already had schemes that meant Blue Lights Bridge added less value

Trust, building relations with key stakeholders and awareness raising about the project and the benefits to volunteers and the wider community were critical for the success of the project. Given that the emergency crises were not common, there were not multiple opportunities for engagement with stakeholders on an ongoing

basis. However, if a need did arise, then the stakeholders would need to be aware of the Blue Lights Brigade, know them and trust them to be able to act. Therefore, a key challenge was engaging with these stakeholders to keep this awareness level where there were not opportunities for regular contact. This relationship building process takes time, is iterative and requires continual maintenance.

Context is important; different local authorities have different community response set ups and something that might work well in one locality would not necessarily translate to another setting. Such local variability makes it difficult to run a consistent project and to also simply transplant the project from one context to another.

The importance of local knowledge and being part of the local VCSE infrastructure was key in terms of building links with existing bodies and networks.

Challenges of engaging volunteers

Another key finding was that recruiting volunteers was more challenging than was originally envisaged. The concept of the project was built on a premise that the potential volunteers had a need and would directly benefit from engaging in volunteering and that the stakeholders within the forces had identified a need and demand for the volunteering opportunities. Yet, in practice, recruiting those individuals to take part was significantly more complex:

“I think we expected was we would just have this list of ex-police officers, we would tell them the story, they’d sign a piece of paper, they’d turn up to the sessions, we’d do some training and they’d get on with it. That was the model on paper – very simplistic. Reality was everybody needed a different communication approach, everyone needed a different set of motivations”

Not only was recruitment challenging, but also maintaining the relationships was difficult to achieve when the participants needed tailored volunteering opportunities as the project scaled. Managing hundreds of volunteers when many of them had individual challenges, such as around their mental health, was often difficult:

“So some of the volunteers who came forward had trickier life situations and were really quite desperate”

Variety of skills

One of the original assumptions behind the project was that they were drawing from a specific cohort of volunteers, those that had worked in the emergency services and forces, and that these individuals would come with a particular skill set. Furthermore, that these skills would be transferable and were relatively consistent within the cohort. Whilst some of these assumptions have held to be true, through delivering the project a few key things have been learnt.

The first is the diversity of the skills that people working with the emergency services had. The most noticeable feature was that back-office and call centre workers also volunteered as well as front-line retirees, therefore there was a diverse skill set within this group, even though they were all working within the same area. Similarly, there was also a diversity of skill sets between the different emergency services.

The second was the different levels of confidence that volunteers had in their own skills and abilities. Many volunteers, particularly those who had recently retired, lacked confidence, which took a while to rebuild through engaging with the project. This was important, particularly as one of the central goals of the project was to help individuals transition into retirement.

Third was that age did not seem a particularly relevant factor. The assumption that volunteers who were over 50 would have more life experience and transferable skills did have some truth, however they also valued the involvement of younger volunteers in the project, particularly those who were willing to undergo training:

“the youngsters, early 20s joining our junior CERT teams were just as much use without any past experience because they were willing to go through the first aid training and some emergency preparedness training and to take part in exercises and to turn up excited and to get their hands dirty and you could almost argue they were just as much use as the ones who had the experience because

they weren't being asked to go and control that crowd on their own or something, they were part of a directed structure"

Covid-19 and the future of the Blue Lights Brigade

Whilst the Blue Lights Brigade did not have to face any emergencies during their funding period, which finished in March 2020, as soon as the funding ended the Covid-19 pandemic hit. They, like many other community organisations, were involved in responding to the national emergency. Whilst this falls outside of the evaluation, it is notable that the way that the Blue Lights Brigade has responded to the pandemic through the network of volunteers built up during the DCMS/Nesta funded period demonstrates the benefits of this type of funding. Whilst they did not operate as CERT teams, the volunteers who were mobilised and trained through the Blue Lights Brigade were able to provide Covid support:

“the council who were in charge of making sure shielding partners get out there were using Blue Lights Brigade as the vehicle of volunteers because they had hundreds of volunteers. ... the council knew that that was the competent volunteering resource out there so that was a win”

Despite this success the project has struggled to gain further funding. They have been able to secure small amounts of support from businesses and community donations, such as recently the loan of two electric vans, but have struggled to achieve more long-term support. However, given the enthusiasm, commitment and goodwill of 100s of volunteers who had signed up, the project team have continued to run Blue Lights. However, without further funding the long-term sustainability of the project will be challenging.