VOLUNTEERING TOGETHER: INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING AND DISABLED PEOPLE

A report for Spirit of 2012

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SPIRIT OF 2012
INVESTING IN HAPPINESS

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FOREWORD

Spirit of 2012 was delighted to fund this research into the experiences of disabled volunteers. The publication of this report is very timely. It is the ten-year anniversary of the London 2012 Paralympic Games and follows an increase in some forms of local volunteering during the pandemic, with surveys showing that more than 12 million people offered their time in 2020, playing an essential role as vaccine volunteers, working in foodbanks and reaching out to isolated friends and neighbours.

Volunteers have always played an active role in many of the projects that Spirit of 2012 fund. We have always used our funding to make sure that volunteering opportunities are inclusive, and actively address the many barriers that stop people from volunteering. During the pandemic, volunteers from Hull City of Culture helped out in foodbanks, volunteers in the Get Out Get Active programme delivered exercise equipment to individuals at home and called participants for a supportive chat. We witnessed the huge contribution that volunteers make to their local communities. Spirit of 2012 staff also saw the benefits that volunteering brought to the individuals who gave their time. For disabled volunteers, these benefits included meeting new people, developing new skills, increased confidence, and improvements in their health and wellbeing.

While coronavirus forced many disabled people and those with long-term health conditions to self-isolate, large numbers also volunteered in their local community. Together Coalition's survey suggests that 25% of the UK's disabled adults, volunteered in 2020, a similar proportion to non-disabled volunteers.

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of the UK's disabled adults volunteered in 2020, a similar proportion to non-disabled volunteers.

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The same survey shows that 360,000 disabled people volunteered for the first time in 2020.

Despite the known benefits and the large numbers of disabled volunteers in the UK, there are some major gaps in what we know about their backgrounds and experiences. For organisations that engage volunteers, there is also little information about how they can reduce barriers to volunteering for disabled people. This is why Spirit of 2012 has funded new projects, including this research, that aim to fill this knowledge gap and support more disabled people to volunteer as equals alongside their non-disabled peers.

We are now very pleased to publish this study. Its insights highlight the essential role that technology plays in helping disabled people to volunteer, and it shows that disabled volunteers are positive about their volunteering experience if they feel supported, connected and valued. But the research also highlights the many barriers to volunteering faced by disabled people, as well as persistent stereotypes and examples of discrimination. The new National Disability Strategy is an opportunity to address the inequalities faced by disabled people. There are a number of new initiatives that aim to build on surge in some forms of volunteering during the lockdowns. This research will help organisations better understand the background and needs of disabled people, open up positive volunteering opportunities for disabled people and address harmful stereotypes and disparities. These are issues that need to be tackled if disabled people are to participate on equal terms in society.

Ruth Hollis
Chief Executive,
Spirit of 2012

CHAPTER

01

INTRODUCTION

SETTING THE SCENE – DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE UK

Disability is a common experience in the UK, with more than 20 million disabled adults across the country, representing two out of every five adults (38%) in the population[1]. Older people are more than twice as likely to be disabled than younger adults: 46% of state pension age adults and 19% of working age adults report disability[2].

Disabled people continue to experience disadvantage in key areas of life including[4]:

EMPLOYMENT

As of 2021, around half of disabled adults (54%) are in employment compared with around 8 in 10 (82%) of non-disabled adults.

EDUCATION

Disabled people are less likely to have a degree-level qualification with one-quarter (25%) having a degree as their highest qualification compared with 43% of non-disabled people.

WELLBEING

On average, disabled people have poorer ratings than non-disabled people on all four of the ONS personal wellbeing measures[3], with the greatest disparity in average anxiety levels (4.6 out of 10 for disabled people compared with 3.0 for non-disabled people).

LONELINESS

The proportion of disabled people (15%) who report feeling lonely "often or always" is approximately four times that of non-disabled people (4%).

HOUSING

Nearly 1 in 4 (25%) disabled people rent social housing compared with fewer than 1 in 10 (8%) non-disabled people. They are also less likely to own their own home (40% compared with 53% of non-disabled people).

VOLUNTEERING AND DISABILITY

There is a growing body of literature and guidance about volunteering and inclusion. Yet there is widespread acknowledgment from organisations themselves that there are inequalities and a lack of diversity within volunteering and that volunteering needs to be more inclusive and accessible to a wider range of people.

Volunteering and disability is an area that is still under-researched. Existing research reveals a relatively poor understanding of disability: disabled volunteers, like disabled people more generally, are often seen as a homogeneous group with little consideration of differing impairments, the many diverse and intersecting identities that individuals within this group will have or how needs might change over time. Studies suggests stigma and stereotypes affect the recruitment and retention of disabled people as volunteers[5]. Disabled people are still often viewed as being the recipients of help rather than the helpers[6] or the 'instigators of social action'[7]. This view of disabled volunteers' participation fails to recognise the growth of campaigning organisations or user-led organisations that have given disabled people opportunities to get involved, shape services and service delivery while advocating for their rights[8].

Previous research has consistently shown that inequalities of resources and power mean that some people are more likely to be excluded from volunteering[9] and that levels and types of involvement vary considerably, with the largest differences relating to socio-economic status and education[10]. Research has indicated that the 'civic core'[11], a term that is used to refer to the most engaged, is made up of people from more well-off backgrounds, who are more likely to be in managerial and professional occupations and who have higher educational qualifications[12]. Because disabled people face greater disadvantage, specifically with regard to income, employment and education, inclusive volunteering is particularly important in relation to this group. The most recent data from the *Understanding Society* survey shows little signs of change to these structural inequalities (see Chapter 2).

PRACTICE AND POLICY INITIATIVES

Guidance on supporting disabled volunteers has been written to help organisations reduce or eliminate barriers to volunteering, such as the Inspired Action toolkit[13], a good practice resource produced by the British Red Cross. Supported volunteering schemes geared towards disabled people with extra support needs have been going for many years through local Volunteer Centres and organisations[14]. These schemes have been further developed with the emergence of social prescribing aimed at people with complex health and social care needs in the community.

Periodically since 2009, there is talk of creating an Access to Volunteering fund to support disabled people similar to the government-funded Access to Work scheme. Despite the positive results of a pilot scheme in 2011, this fund has not been established.

In 2014, the Disability Action Alliance launched a Volunteer Charter with Volunteering Matters (Community Service Volunteers at the time) and Disability Rights UK calling for organisations to pledge their support for and provide volunteering opportunities to disabled people as well as personalised help and references for future employment. The Alliance, originally established by the Office for Disability Issues, stopped getting government funding in 2017.

There is no mention of volunteering in the recent National Disability Strategy[15] published in 2021. Diversity and inclusion feature prominently in the Scottish government's strategy for volunteering and are at the core of two current policy initiatives in England – Vision for Volunteering[16] and the Shaping the Future of Volunteering[17].

A CHANGING CONTEXT

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in developing inclusive volunteering opportunities and good practice. This is, in part, due to world events. The global anti-racism movement linked to Black Lives Matter has been one of the catalysts for change leading some organisations to reconsider their approaches to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). At the same time, the COVID pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities and vulnerabilities by disproportionately impacting older people, disabled people[18] and people from minority ethnic communities.

CHAPTER 01 INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH APPROACH

This is a mixed-methods research project with three key components which are briefly described below. Further information on the methodology we have used is available in the Appendix.

- **Horizon scanning** of the latest evidence and resources on inclusive volunteering and disability to understand the context, build on what was already known and gather information on relevant trends and developments in this area. This included looking at research reports, articles and published guidance.
- The quantitative **analysis of *Understanding Society*** (The UK Household Longitudinal Study) data, collected in Wave 10 (January 2018 – February 2020) and during the special July 2020 and March 2021 COVID surveys. *Understanding Society*[19] is the largest longitudinal household panel survey in the UK covering topics such as people's social and economic circumstances, attitudes, lifestyle, health, family relationships, employment and volunteering. The sample size for Wave 10 (2018–2020) was 34,318 adults aged 16+, of which 12,296 report having a life-limiting long-term mental or physical impairment, illness, or disability that causes difficulties with everyday activities. However, one of the limitations of the survey is that it lists mainly physical impairments and does not include a wide range of mental health issues.
- Six **organisational case studies** based on interviews and focus groups with staff and volunteers, both disabled and non-disabled. While the total number of case studies is relatively small, we were careful to select a diverse range of organisations in terms of size, geography and activity in order to capture different perspectives. A total of 51 individuals (12 staff, 20 disabled volunteers and 19 non-disabled volunteers) were interviewed in 36 one-to-one interviews and three focus groups (which were mainly non-disabled volunteers). The priority was to pick organisations with both disabled and non-disabled volunteers and to have a mix of disability specialist and non-disability specialist organisations. We included national charities as well as grassroots groups and user-led organisations (see Table 1 for a brief outline on each case study organisation).

Stakeholder engagement was an integral part of the approach. A research reference group was set up comprised of nine representatives from disability and volunteering infrastructure organisations or networks to inform the different stages of the project. In addition, the emerging research findings were discussed at a meeting with the research reference group and during a stakeholder roundtable event with 22 attendees to explore what these findings meant for practice and policy. Both have informed the implications and recommendations sections of the report.

A NOTE ON SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

The focus of this project is formal volunteering among adults, that is volunteering that happens through a group or organisation. Within this context, we have looked at volunteering in organisational settings with different levels of formalisation and structure. In the *Understanding Society* survey, volunteering is defined as giving any unpaid help or working as a volunteer for any type of local, national, or international organisation or charity in the past 12 months (for the analyses between 2018–2020), or in last four months (for the analyses between 2016 and March 2021). We define inclusive volunteering as the practices and processes undertaken by organisations to welcome and include all people equally as volunteers, regardless of age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, social background, ethnicity, culture or religion.

We have framed this research within the social model of disability which states that people have impairments but that the exclusion and discrimination people with impairments face is not an inevitable consequence of having an impairment, rather the way society is run and organised. The social model of disability holds that people with impairments are disabled by the barriers operating in society that exclude and discriminate against them[20].

When referring to disabled volunteers, we include those with physical, sensory and cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, learning difficulties* (including those who are neuro-diverse) and people living with mental health issues. We have used the Mencap** definition of learning disabilities. We acknowledge that there is much variation between types of impairments, scale and differences in the needs of disabled volunteers, as well as many intersecting identities. Disabled volunteers are a heterogeneous group. In the context of this project, the concept of intersectionality is particularly important where many aspects of a person's identity and life experiences interact with each other and cannot be separated out. A person is the sum of all their characteristics and consequently can experience specific discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion. Similarly, these characteristics impact on how they may best be supported. One size definitely does not fit all, and equality is not treating everyone the same, it is about the whole person.

How we use language in relation to disability is a constantly evolving and contested area. Not everyone agrees on these terms or definitions however we aim to be guided in our use of language by people with lived experience and current best practice.

In *Understanding Society*, survey respondents are asked whether they have a life-limiting long-term mental or physical impairment, illness, or disability that causes difficulties with everyday activities. By 'long-standing' they mean anything that has troubled someone over a period of at least 12 months or that is likely to trouble them over a period of at least 12 months. This definition is consistent with the Equality Act 2010.

* Learning difficulty is distinct from learning disability as it does not affect general intellect. There are many different types of learning difficulty, including dyslexia, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia and dyscalculia, as defined by Mencap.

** A reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities – for example household tasks, socialising or managing money – which affects someone for their whole life. From Mencap website, accessed on 29/3/22: What is a learning disability? | Mencap.

TABLE 1: CASE STUDY ORGANISATIONS

ORGANISATION	REMIT	SIZE*	ACTIVITY	VOLUNTEERING CONTEXT
Disability Advice Service Lambeth	Local – London Borough of Lambeth	Medium	Peer-led services and activities for local disabled people	Membership organisation with over 400 members. Currently 80% of board members identify as disabled. Core group of volunteers of 10 to 15 people. A range of volunteering roles include supporting the delivery of advice services and social/sports activities.
Girlguiding	National	Large	Activities for girls and young women	There are approximately 80,000 volunteers across the UK. Volunteers run the local units attended by girls and young women. In addition, there are a range of volunteer roles at county, district and country levels to support the units and the work of Girlguiding.
Jock Tamson's Gairden	Local – Edinburgh	Small	Community garden	Originally a church funded project that became a separate charity in 2020. Has three volunteer sessions a week from 10am–2pm. Currently 25 volunteers in total but sessions are for 12 people maximum.
Opening Doors	National	Medium	LGBTQ+ membership organisation for people over 50	UK charity providing activities, events, information and support services specifically for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, non-binary or gender fluid (LGBTQ+) people over 50. Currently over 340 volunteers who help with delivery. Recently switched from London-based to national scope.
Scope	England and Wales	Large	Disability equality charity	Has a dual purpose to provide practical, informative support services for disabled people and their support as well as campaigning. Over 4,000 active volunteers, mainly in charity shops.
SEAS Sailability	North Wales	Small	Water-based sport for disabled people	Volunteer run and led group that supports disabled people from North Wales to get active and have adventures on the Menai Strait in a safe and social environment. At least 20 volunteers and some sessional workers.

* Micro: income of less than £10,000
Small: income between £10,000 and £100,000
Medium: income between £100,000 and £1 million
Large: income over £1 million.

CHAPTER

02

WHO ARE DISABLED VOLUNTEERS?

CHAPTER 02 WHO ARE DISABLED VOLUNTEERS?

This chapter looks at who disabled volunteers are, the levels of volunteering and what the key predictors of volunteering are for this group. It presents volunteer portraits throughout the chapter from organisational case studies to illustrate the diversity of the volunteers we spoke to. Most of the data in this section is from the quantitative analysis of the *Understanding Society* survey.

Internet use is a predictor of volunteering for disabled people but not for non-disabled volunteers.

Disabled volunteers are more civically minded and are more likely to give to charitable causes than any other group.

People with more severe impairments are less likely to volunteer.

Disabled adults are just as likely to volunteer as non-disabled adults.

Volunteering can be seen as a replacement for paid employment or a pathway to employment by some disabled people.

Disabled volunteers volunteer more frequently and contribute more time than non-disabled volunteers.

Disabled volunteers tend to be older, less likely to have a degree, worse off financially, more likely to be retired and live in a single person household than non-disabled volunteers.

Transport is a disproportionate barrier for disabled volunteers.

Predictors of volunteering are similar for disabled and non-disabled people – those from higher socio-economic groups and with higher levels of education are more likely to volunteer.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

Disabled volunteers have a wide range of impairments, most commonly impairments affecting lifting/carrying or moving objects and mobility impairments (Figure 1) and on average have more than one impairment. Disabled volunteers tend to be disabled people with less severe impairments than disabled people who don't volunteer.

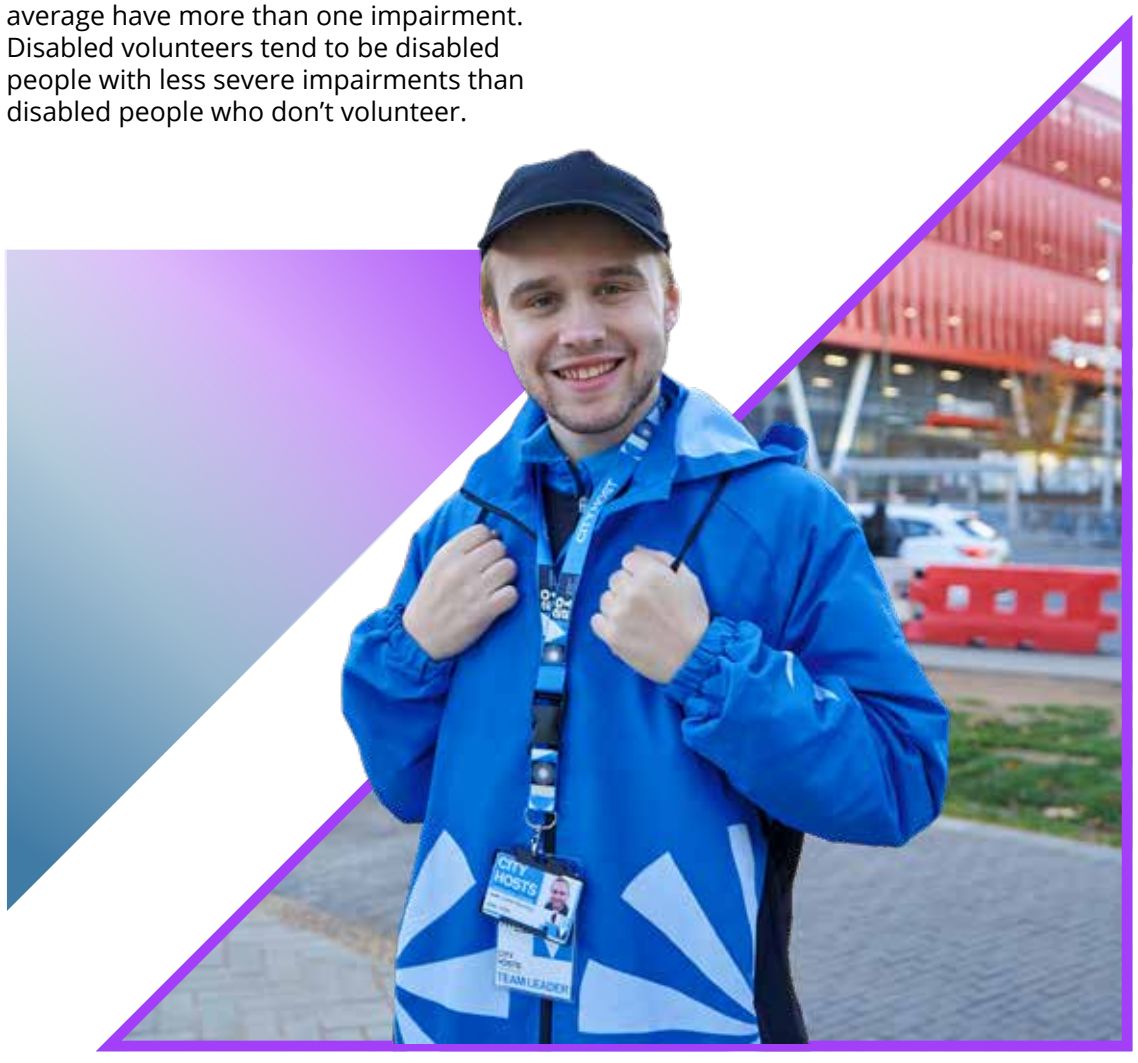
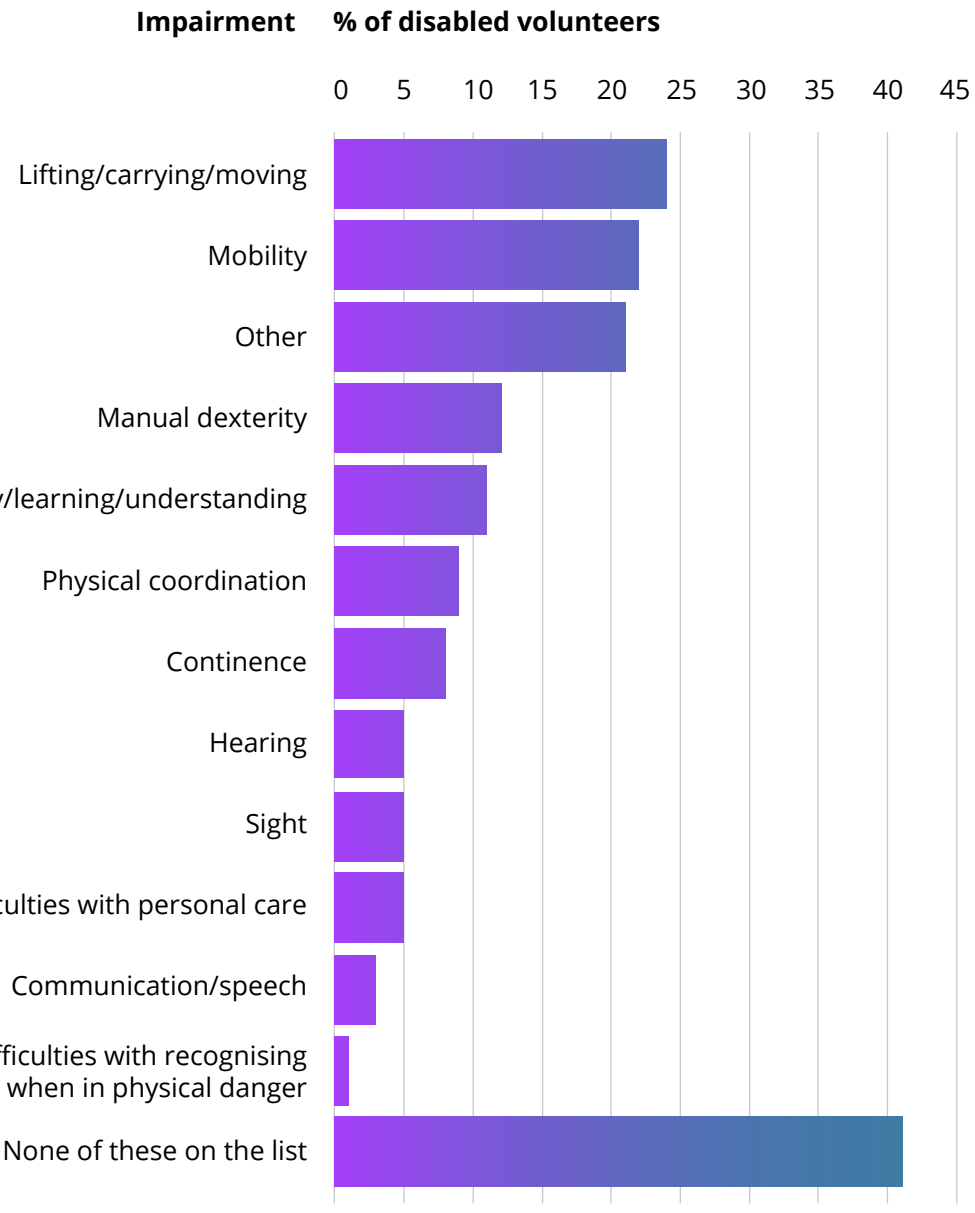


FIGURE 1: PRESENCE OF IMPAIRMENTS AMONG DISABLED VOLUNTEERS



Source: UKHLS 2018 – Feb 2020 (pre-pandemic Wave 10)

CHAPTER 02 WHO ARE DISABLED VOLUNTEERS?

The socio-demographic composition of disabled volunteers is slightly different from the composition of non-disabled volunteers (Table 2).

Disabled volunteers tend to be older, less likely to have a degree, worse off financially, more likely to be retired and live in a single person household.

Disabled adults tend to be older, more likely to be white, less likely to have a degree, more likely to be worse off financially and retired, and live in a single person household than non-disabled adults

TABLE 2: DEMOGRAPHICS OF DISABLED VOLUNTEERS COMPARED TO NON-DISABLED VOLUNTEERS, DISABLED AND NON-DISABLED ADULTS

DISABLED VOLUNTEERS	NON-DISABLED VOLUNTEERS	DISABLED ADULTS	NON-DISABLED ADULTS
Average age 57	Average age 47	Average age 57	Average age 44
58% women	56% women	54 % women	51% women
95% white	92% white	95% white	91% white
37% have a degree	47% have a degree	20 % have a degree	31% have a degree
43% from 2-person and 25% single person household	31% from 2-person and 14% single person household	39% from 2-person and 26% single person household	29% from 2-person and 13% single person household
17% have children under 16	32% have children under 16	17% have children under 16	34% have children under 16
45% retired, 44% self-employed/ employed, 2% unemployed	24% retired, 57% self-employed/employed, 2% unemployed	40% retired, 38% self-employed/ employed,4% unemployed	16% retired, 67% self-employed/ employed, 4% unemployed
28% retired between ages of 55–64	28% retired between ages of 55–64	17% retired between ages of 55–64	18% retired between ages of 55–64
47% annual equivalised after-tax income of under £20,500	33% annual equivalised after-tax income of under £20,500	57% annual equivalised after-tax income of under £20,500	44% annual equivalised after-tax income of under £20,500

Source: UKHLS 2018 – Feb 2020 (pre-pandemic Wave 10)

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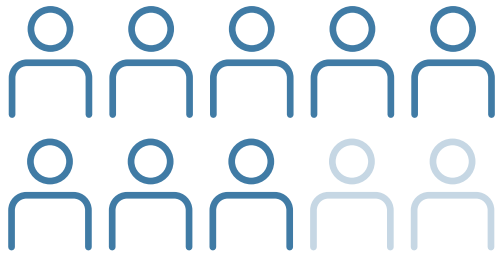
Disabled volunteers have more financial resources and higher levels of education than disabled people in general but are worse off than non-disabled volunteers (Table 2). Disabled volunteers (72%) are also more likely than disabled adults in general (66%) to say that they are doing alright financially or living comfortably. Disabled volunteers (12%) are less likely to receive disability benefits than disabled people in general (20%), but this may be because disabled volunteers have less severe impairments than disabled adults who don't volunteer.

Most disabled volunteers (8 out of 10) have access to a car they can use when needed. Employed disabled volunteers are more likely than non-disabled volunteers (and other groups) to think that public transport to work is unreliable, it costs too much, or is unpleasant. Among both disabled and non-disabled people, those who have access to a car (20% and 19%) that they can use were significantly more likely to volunteer than those who have no access (12% and 16%, respectively). Having access to a vehicle seems to have an enabling effect and **lack of access to a vehicle appears to be a disproportionate barrier for disabled volunteers**.

There is also an indication that for people aged 55–65, the age when it is more difficult to find a job if one becomes unemployed[21], **volunteering might be a replacement activity for employment** – the retirement rate among both disabled and non-disabled volunteers (around 28% for both) is considerably higher than it is among disabled and non-disabled adults in general (around 18% for both).

Disabled volunteers are more civically minded (i.e. interested in politics and voted in the last general election) and more likely to donate to charity compared to non-disabled volunteers, all adults, and all disabled people. Eight out of ten disabled volunteers say that they donate money to charity and six out of ten donate monthly. Seven out of ten disabled volunteers also are fairly/very interested in politics and nine out of ten voted in the last general election.



12%

of disabled volunteers receive disability benefit, compared to 20% of disabled people in general

8/10

Most disabled volunteers have access to a car they can use when needed.

VOLUNTEER PORTRAIT
KEVIN

Kevin is a middle-aged married man who is deaf and has been volunteering as a powerboat helm. His grown daughter often provides sign language interpretation for him. He does not work and has been deeply impacted by the pandemic.

I don't feel that I am disabled, I would say that I'm Deaf. I don't park in the disabled spots for example. Sometimes people say, 'oh he's deaf and dumb' and that does annoy me.

At home, there isn't much to do but when I come here, I feel motivated, I'm actually doing something and it does make me feel better, I feel like I'm working and it is really positive. Staying at home and doing nothing is not very good for my mental health but when I come here it feels like a massive change and I get very involved. Going out on the boat, everything just melts away. Everyone is positive here, there is no negativity. It makes me feel included and empowered in the group and its good for my mind.

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RATES OF VOLUNTEERING

There is no significant difference between disabled and non-disabled adults if we simply compare rates of volunteering: nearly one in five disabled (18%) and non-disabled (18%) people reported that they had volunteered in the past 12 months in the pre-pandemic period (2018–February 2020). Once a wide range of socio-demographic, contextual, and attitudinal variables are controlled, disabled people are statistically significantly but only slightly more likely to volunteer than non-disabled people (see logistic regression table in Appendix).

VOLUNTEER PORTRAIT
JUDY

Judy has been volunteering as a befriender for about a year and is a straight middle-aged woman who is blind and has a guide dog. Judy has volunteered for many charities previously, with mixed experiences.

> *When I first contacted them, this is probably going back maybe about three or more years, they were only offering face-to-face befriending relationships to which I did say to them, you know, "I've now lost all of my vision and for multiple reasons, I'm not sure how practical it would be for myself and for their client if we're going to be going to different places together. Could I do something telephone-based instead"? And they said, "Well, primarily it is all face-to-face, but we might look to do something telephone-based in the future. And I kind of touched base with them maybe every few months or so. And then obviously as the pandemic hit last year it looked like they were definitely rolling out everything telephone-based so then I was matched with somebody, and I've taken it from there.*

Disabled people volunteer more frequently than non-disabled volunteers: 13% volunteer 'at least three days a week', 11% 'just a few times in last 12 months' and 4% 'as a one-off' (compared to 9%, 14% and 8% of non-disabled volunteers respectively). Also, disabled volunteers contribute more time than non-disabled volunteers (12 hours per month compared to 10).

During the pandemic, levels of volunteering decreased: both disabled and non-disabled adults were noticeably less likely to say that they had volunteered in the last four weeks than they were before the pandemic (see Figure 2). By March 2021 the extent of volunteering had not recovered to the pre-pandemic levels. As in the pre-pandemic period, there were no substantial differences in volunteering between disabled and non-disabled people during the pandemic (see COVID spotlights for more details about the impact of the pandemic on volunteers and organisations).

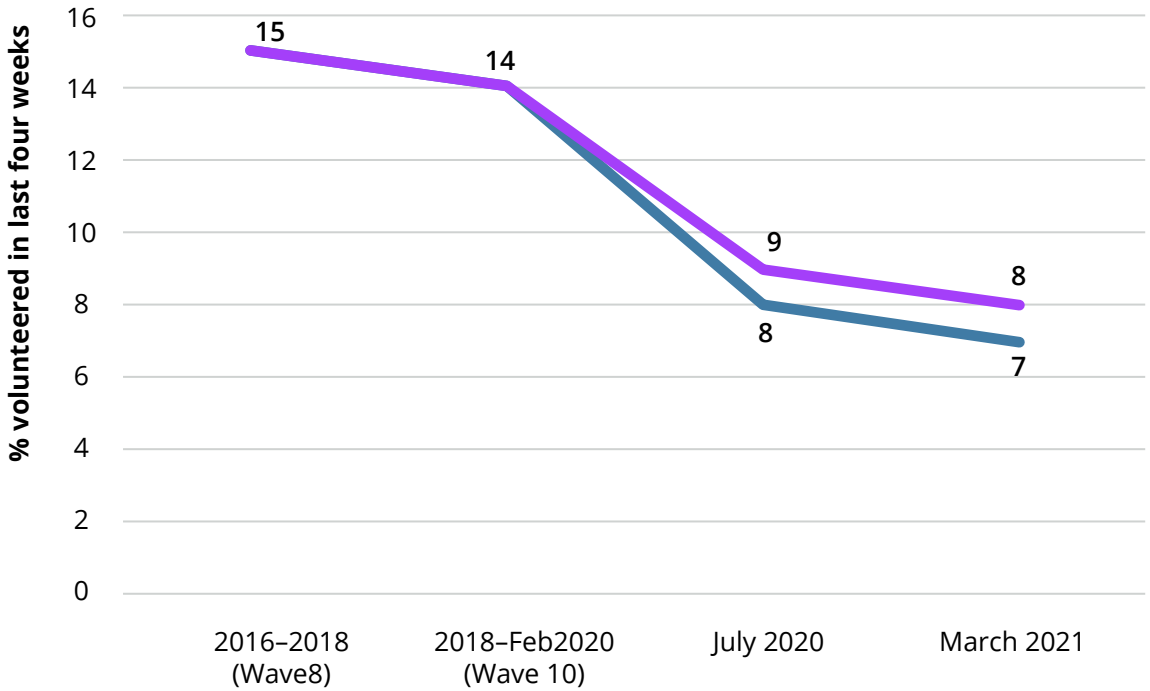
12 hours/month

disabled volunteers contribute more time than non-disabled volunteers (12 hours per month compared to 10).

CHAPTER 02 WHO ARE DISABLED VOLUNTEERS?

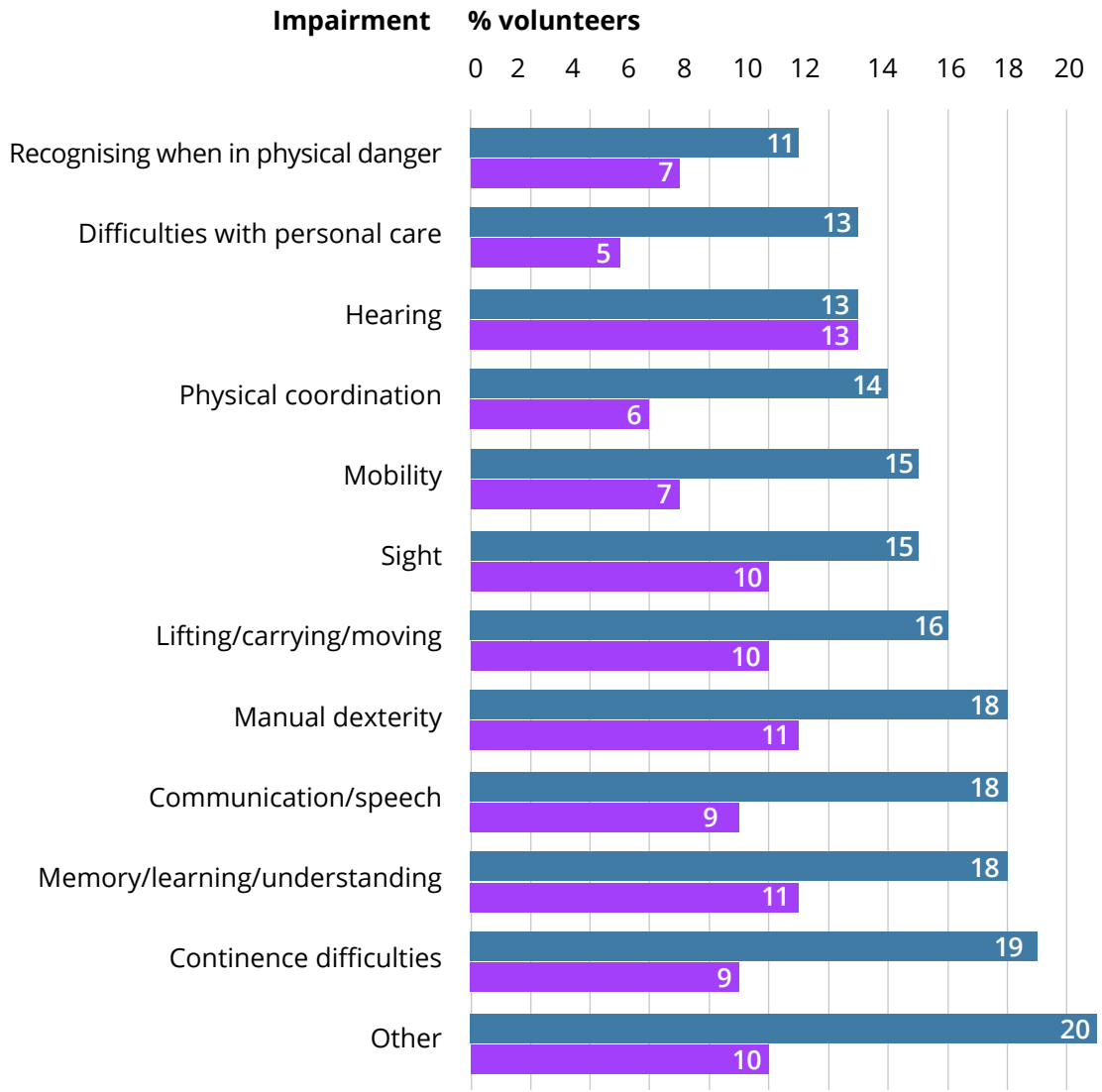
Average rates of volunteering mask the diversity within different groups of disabled (and non-disabled) adults, depending on specific impairments, their severity (Figure 3) and socio-demographic characteristics. People with physical impairments are considerably less likely to volunteer than disabled and non-disabled people in general and the more impairments a person has and the more severe the disability, the less likely they are to volunteer.

FIGURE 2: CHANGES IN EXTENT OF VOLUNTEERING BETWEEN 2016 AND MARCH 2021



Source: UKHLS 2016 to March 2021

FIGURE 3: VOLUNTEERING RATES BY DIFFERENT TYPES OF IMPAIRMENT AND THEIR SEVERITY



Source: UKHLS 2018–Feb 2020 (pre-pandemic Wave 10)

CHAPTER 02 WHO ARE DISABLED VOLUNTEERS?

PREDICTORS OF VOLUNTEERING AND VARIATIONS

We know from previous research that people with greater resources are more likely to volunteer and this includes people from higher socio-economic groups and with higher levels of education. The *Understanding Society* data (Table 3) shows that **existing structural inequalities affect disabled people disproportionately** – they are less likely to be educated to degree level, have less income, etc. However, we found that despite these structural inequalities disabled people are at least equally (if not more) likely to volunteer, donate and be civically engaged.

Predictors of volunteering are similar for disabled and non-disabled people. The volunteering levels vary greatly among different socio-demographic groups of disabled adults but once we take into account a wide range of variables interacting with each other (see logistic regression table in Appendix), most predictors of volunteering among disabled and non-disabled people are very similar. The same socio-economic disparities and other factors that predict volunteering among disabled adults predict volunteering among non-disabled adults too.

As a result, for disabled and non-disabled people alike:

- women are slightly more likely to volunteer than men
- those who have a higher income are more likely to volunteer than those who have a lower income
- those who belong to a religion and those who have A-levels or higher education volunteer more than those who don't
- those who rent from local authority or a housing association volunteer less than those owning their houses outright
- those who donate to charity and are interested in politics volunteer more than those who do not
- those living in an area that they perceive to be more cohesive volunteer more than those who perceive their areas to be less cohesive.

Importantly, the research found that **internet use is a predictor of volunteering for disabled people**. But this isn't the case for non-disabled people.

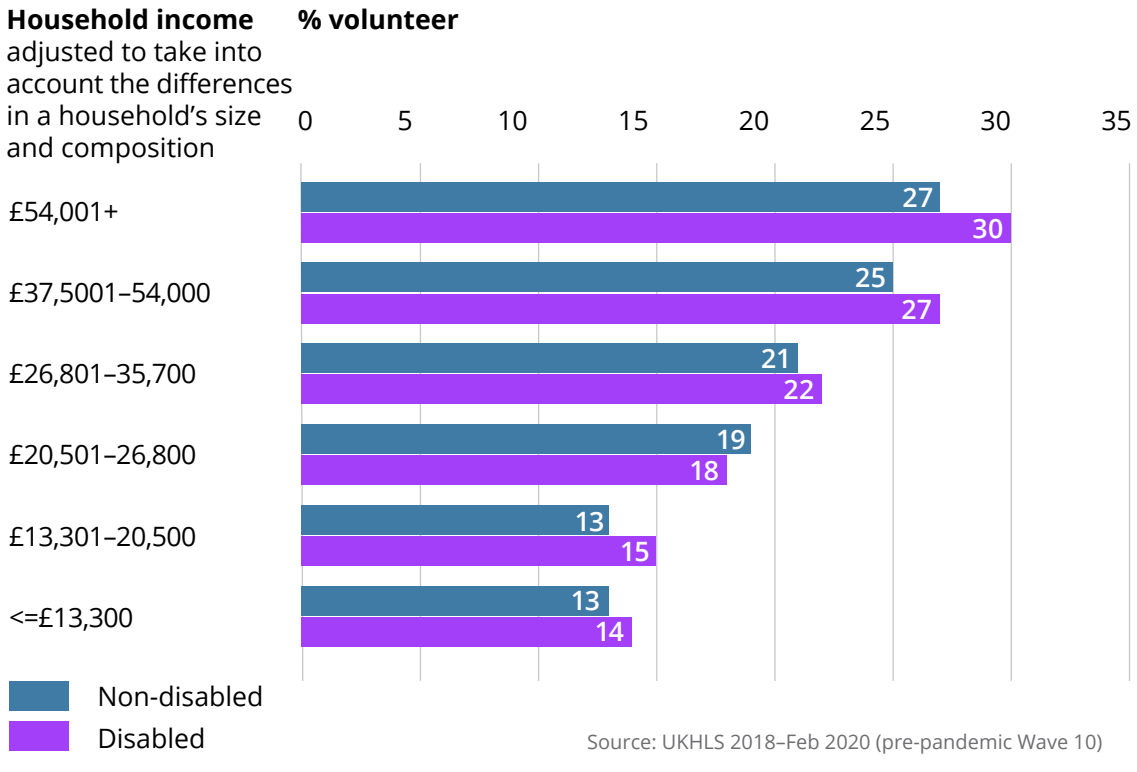
Internet use is a predictor of volunteering for disabled people. But this isn't the case for non-disabled people.

KEY PREDICTORS OF VOLUNTEERING IN MORE DETAIL

Education is an important predictor of volunteering. Higher education is related to higher levels of volunteering for both disabled and non-disabled people. Disabled people who have A-levels or a higher qualification have a higher rate of volunteering (24%) than non-disabled people with the same levels of education (20%).

Higher income is related to higher rates of volunteering (Figure 4). While disabled volunteers have lower incomes than non-disabled volunteers, they have higher income than disabled adults generally. When disabled people have the same level of income as non-disabled people, they tend to volunteer more. This is also the case with charitable giving.

FIGURE 4: HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND VOLUNTEERING RATES



Source: UKHLS 2018–Feb 2020 (pre-pandemic Wave 10)

CHAPTER 02 WHO ARE DISABLED VOLUNTEERS?

Disabled people from different ethnic groups have different rates of volunteering. Among disabled adults, Asian people are the least likely to volunteer (13%), and there are no significant differences in volunteering rates for other ethnic groups: White (18%), Mixed heritage (19%), and Black (16%). The survey sample size was not sufficient to be able to analyse ethnicity at any greater level of detail. We also acknowledge that the categories used in the survey are unsatisfactory as they conflate ethnicity and heritage with skin colour.

Location is significantly related to both disabled and non-disabled people's volunteering (Figure 5). Disabled people have the highest volunteering rates in London, the Southwest and East of England, and the lowest rates in Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland.

In some regions disabled people have lower rates of volunteering than non-disabled people, and in three regions these differences are statistically significant: Southeast England, Wales and Scotland.

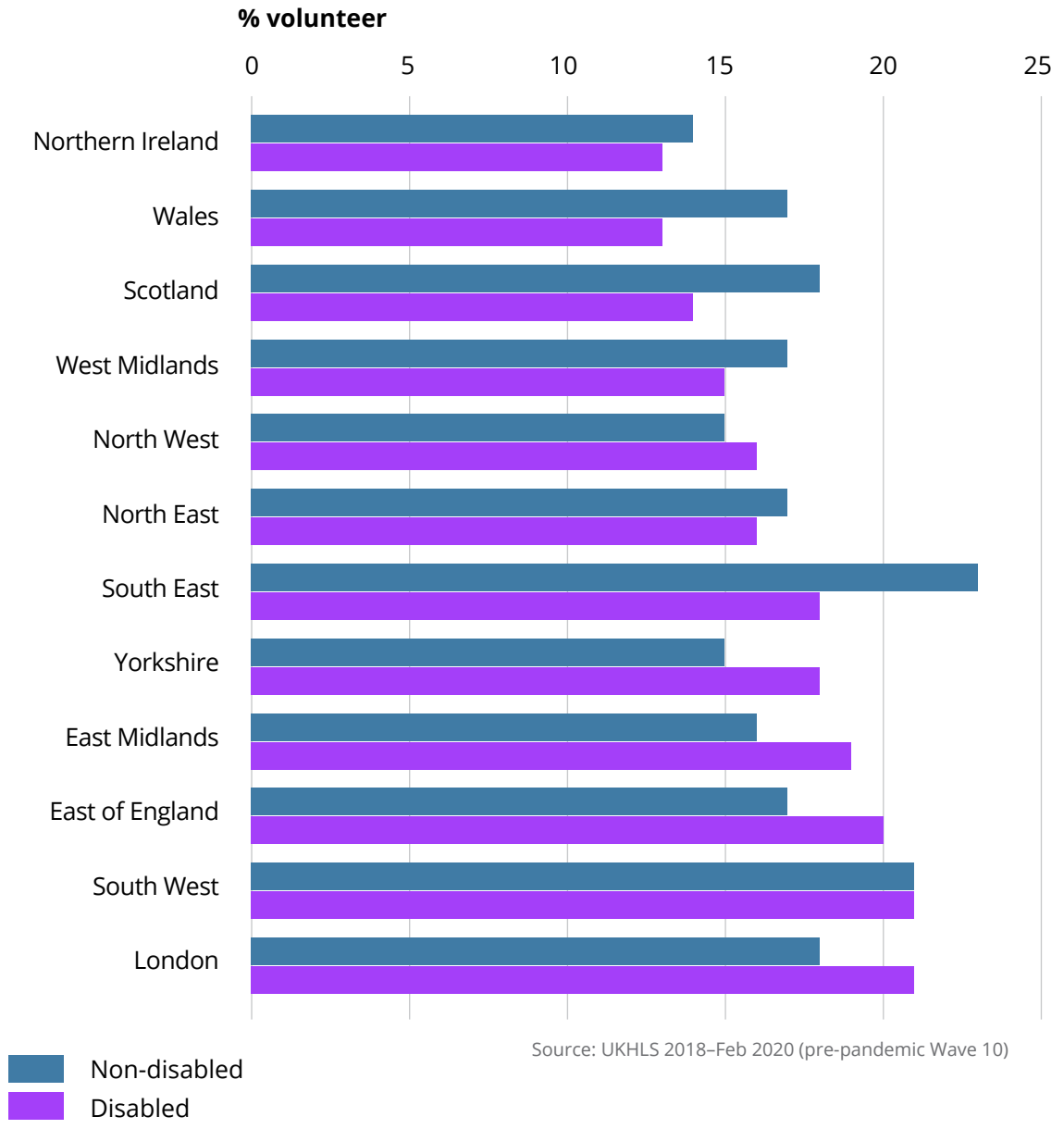
VOLUNTEER PORTRAIT
JOE

Joe is a gay man in his fifties who is a wheelchair user and has been volunteering since he was a teenager, when he started playing the sport of Boccia. He is not in paid work and employs personal assistants 24 hours a day.

My volunteer role has changed over time. I try to find ways to use my education, because my education never led to paid employment, I have always been happy to volunteer so that I have not wasted my education.

I do identify as a disabled person, with hesitation, it is not at the forefront of my brain. Some situations make me more aware that I am disabled, and others I don't think about that even if I'm facing challenges. I was a student a long time ago and that was my identity, then I was an athlete but my focus was sport, not being a disabled athlete. But I think as I get older, and I need more things doing for me physically, you do become more aware. Before, I would just jump in the van and go places without thinking too much, now I need more help but maybe that is more age related. Being gay, when I meet people, I am more aware that I need things in place to make that relationship work. Before I didn't need to think about it.

FIGURE 5: VOLUNTEERING RATE BY COUNTRY AND GOVERNMENT REGION 2018–2020



Source: UKHLS 2018–Feb 2020 (pre-pandemic Wave 10)

CHAPTER 02 WHO ARE DISABLED VOLUNTEERS?

When we controlled for a range of socio-demographic and attitudinal factors, **age and employment status were not significant predictors of disabled people's volunteering**. However, we found significant variations in volunteering rates among disabled people of different ages and with different employment status.

Disabled people between 25 and 34 are significantly more likely to volunteer than non-disabled people of the same age. However, from 55 onwards, the pattern is reversed– disabled people in these age groups are significantly less likely to volunteer than non-disabled people of the same age (Table 4). It is possible that older disabled adults experience multiple barriers and forms of discrimination and have fewer resources to volunteer. Older adults are also more likely to have more complex and severe disabilities. They are also more likely to report that they have no access/do not use the Internet – an important predictor of volunteering for disabled people (Figure 6).

Disabled people who are economically inactive (i.e. people who are not working for reasons other than retirement) are the least likely to volunteer (13%), but disabled retired people are most likely to volunteer (19%). And these volunteering rates are lower than for non-disabled economically inactive (19%) and retired (26%) volunteers. The volunteering rate for disabled people in the labour market (i.e. employed, unemployed, self-employed) is 18%, this group is more likely to volunteer than non-disabled people (15%) in the labour market. It might be that economically inactive adults are more likely to have lower levels of income and education, both of which are important predictors of volunteering (in other words, they don't volunteer not because they are economically inactive but because they don't have enough human and financial capital).

Disabled people who do not have social benefit income (including state pension) are more likely to volunteer (20%) than those who do have a social benefit income (17%); the reverse is true for non-disabled people (19% with benefits volunteer, compared to 17% without). However, this effect was not significant once other socio-demographic and disability factors were taken into account (see logistic regression model in Appendix). This is related to the severity or complexity of impairments – disabled people with more severe impairments are also more likely to be on social benefits, and people with more severe impairments volunteer less.

TABLE 3: RATE OF VOLUNTEERING BY AGE (%)

AGE	DISABLED ADULTS	NON-DISABLED
<25	19	18
25–34	16	11
35–44	17	15
45–54	18	18
55v64	17	20
65–74	21	27
75+	16	22

Source: UKHLS 2018–Feb 2020 (pre-pandemic Wave 10)

VOLUNTEER PORTRAIT
ANNE

Anne is visually impaired and in her fifties. She used to work as a social worker and is a trained counsellor. She took voluntary redundancy from her last job and had quite a lot of time on her hands. She started her current volunteering role late in 2020 as a welfare mentor and caller. Her volunteering is telephone based, and takes about three hours a week of her time. She is looking to get involved as a volunteer in other organisations.

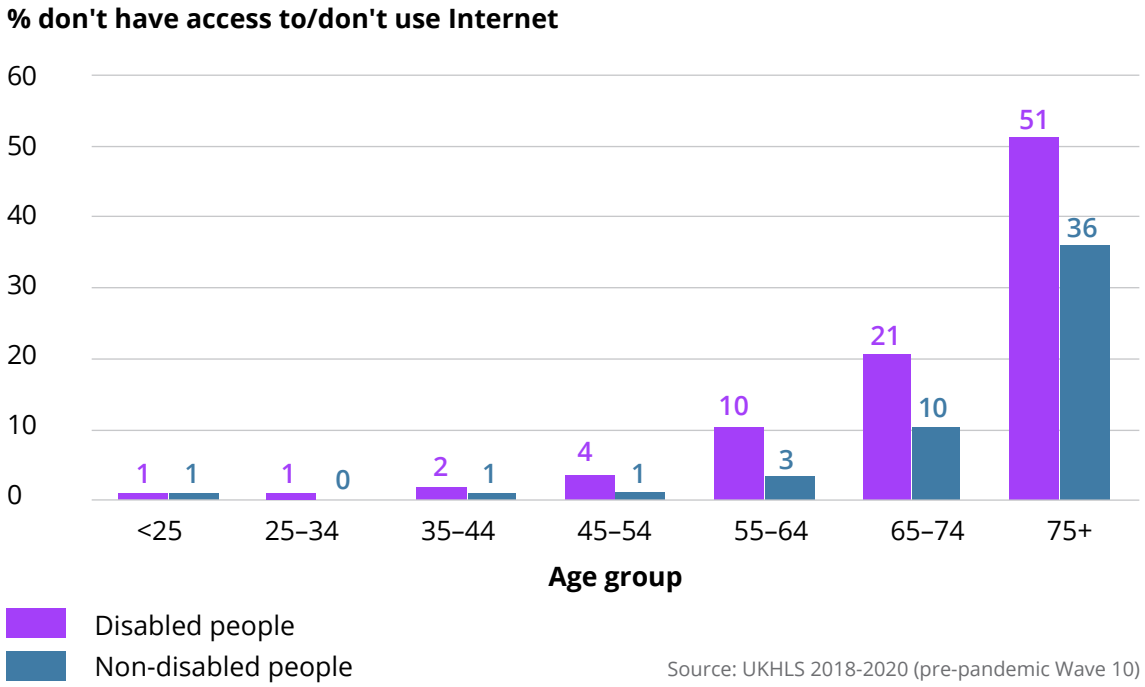
"It's difficult to get a job as a paid counsellor. If you want to be self-employed it's quite hard as well, you either have people coming to your home which I'm not comfortable with or you rent a room and you've got to find a room that's accessible for you within a distance that works for you. It's got to be a cost you can afford. And it's a competitive market, so I just stopped. If I had been a lot younger I would have kept on trying [...] People who aren't able to work anymore, they still have all those skills that they've used in their working life."

CHAPTER 02 WHO ARE DISABLED VOLUNTEERS?

Internet use is a significant predictor of volunteering for disabled people. Internet users and more frequent users volunteer more than non-internet users in the case of disabled people but not in the case of non-disabled people. Disabled people who have no access to the internet or who never use it have significantly lower volunteering rates (8%), than those who use it once a month or less (16%) or use it regularly (20%). The pattern is similar but not significant, for non-disabled people (13%, 14% and 18%).

While both disabled and non-disabled people aged under 45 have similar levels of access to and use of the internet (Figure 6), older disabled adults are considerably more likely not to have access or use the internet – this could, at least, partially explain why older disabled adults tend to volunteer less than older non-disabled adults.

FIGURE 6: DISABILITY, AGE AND ACCESS TO/USE OF THE INTERNET (%)



Source: UKHLS 2018-2020 (pre-pandemic Wave 10)

SPOTLIGHT
THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology can be an enabler and a leveller for disabled volunteers. Technology and remote or online volunteering can remove the need for an accessible venue to volunteer in, which is a deal-breaker for some. In many cases, the use of technology allows disabled volunteers to be involved in a way that suits their needs. Many of the disabled volunteers interviewed spoke about how technology opened up volunteering possibilities for them and their engagement with online communities. However, some also noted that remote volunteering can feel less connected and the group consulted for this research preferred some in-person time. There is clearly a tension here between creating new ways of volunteering that are more accessible while maintaining the types of social connections that are important to disabled volunteers.

We also saw that technology could be a barrier. Those volunteers with greater resources (such as data, IT skills and computer equipment or specialist software) were more likely to experience it as enabler and those with fewer resources as a barrier. Technology is also more likely to exclude older volunteers. For some disabled volunteers, specialist software and equipment has opened up many possibilities for volunteering that did not exist before the technology and additionally there seems to be better information now about how to make documents and programmes more accessible (such as Easy Read formats, screen readers, closed captioning, etc.).

> *Technology is huge, without a doubt it has helped, it has been an enabler. I can be the 'brains behind the show' and there are effective ways to be behind the scenes in roles; it is critical to me doing good work.* **Disabled volunteer**

> *I am not a person that is good with computers, I am always frightened of breaking them. I do have a laptop, and I use my smartphone a lot. I have been trained up to use the iPad Gift Aid system and the till but me and technology aren't the best of friends. I sometimes work in catering, which is hands on, and I never learned about IT in school.* **Disabled volunteer**

> *I'd sent off my application form pre the first lockdown but then during that there were certain documents that they needed scanning and certain things that they needed doing. I don't have a scanner at home and I don't have the facility to go to a library or do any of this stuff. I said, "is there a way we can work to kind of move the application process on?" They were completely happy to just work with whatever worked for me at that given time. But there was another organisation who were very absolutely stuck with, "We have to have this scanned and we have to..." and in the end I had to explain to them that it's just not possible. I don't have a way of doing it and they wouldn't be flexible in any respect and in the end I just gave up with that organisation because I thought, well these are very odd circumstances and surely we can try and come to some kind of compromise. But they didn't.* **Disabled volunteer**

CHAPTER

03

THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

CHAPTER 03 THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

This chapter looks at why, how and when disabled people volunteer and the importance of context. While much of what we heard from research participants is similar to what we know about volunteering more generally and is not specific to disabled volunteers, here we focus on the areas that are particularly relevant for disabled volunteers and on the differences between disabled volunteers and non-disabled volunteers. The chapter focuses on what disabled volunteers told us about their positive volunteering experiences and the challenges they encountered.

CHAPTER 03 THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

WHY DISABLED PEOPLE VOLUNTEER

The most common reasons for volunteering in the general population, according to the latest edition of the *Community Life Survey* chime with what disabled volunteers we interviewed told us: wanting to improve things/help people, having a personal connection with a particular cause/ organisation, having spare time, feeling there was a need in the community, having a chance to use existing skills and wanting to meet people/make friends[22] – chime with what disabled volunteers we interviewed told us.

We know from previous research[23] that people get involved for multiple reasons and that their volunteering is influenced by who they are as a person, what they care about and what is happening in other areas of their life. Like everyone, disabled volunteers have diverse and complex life circumstances as well as intersecting identities that influence why they get involved. **Disability may play a role in people's decision to volunteer but this isn't always the case.** We saw with the interviewees how disability could shape the choice of cause or organisation that a volunteer wants to support. However, for some disabled volunteers, it was just one of several factors that contribute to their decision because it represented only a part of how they saw themselves. And in some instances, they did not consider disability an integral part of their identity.

Feeling useful seemed particularly important to disabled volunteers. Using *Understanding Society* data[24], we found that disabled volunteers feel significantly more useful than disabled non-volunteers: 87% of disabled volunteer said that they feel useful compared to 78% of disabled non-volunteers. In the interviews with disabled volunteers, we heard about their desire 'to be of use' and how some of them did this by using their existing skills and sharing their lived experience with others. For some disabled people volunteering was viewed as an alternative to work, maybe due to early retirement or barriers to employment. Others were transitional volunteers who viewed volunteering as a pathway to paid employment and sought to use their volunteering experience to improve their employability. In both instances, the need for people to feel socially valued and the human desire to be of use to society were highlighted and this may be particularly important to disabled people who have been excluded from the labour market, permanently or temporarily. As we saw in Table 3, disabled people are much less likely to be in employment than non-disabled people.

Having a purpose and structure to one's day and 'something to do' was another prominent theme within the interviews. Many of the disabled volunteers interviewed had time as a resource, whether this was due to not working or other reasons, which is reflected in the *Understanding Society* data which indicates that disabled volunteers on average spend more hours volunteering than non-disabled volunteers. For those disabled volunteers who saw volunteering as an alternative to paid work, some treated their volunteering role more like a job, put in large amounts of time, and also experienced more stress related to their volunteering than others.

> *Being a county commissioner is almost a full-time job, so it means I've got a purpose. I've got something that I can achieve and work on. I feel I'm doing something productive with my time, I help people benefit from what Girlguiding has to offer, so it gives me a purpose.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

> *I feel that I do have quite a bit to offer. I have applied for many paid jobs and unfortunately not been successful in securing, so I like to volunteer as an alternative to that.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

87%

of disabled volunteer said that they feel useful compared to 78% of disabled non-volunteers.

CHAPTER 03 THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

Interviewees often saw volunteering as a way of meeting people and feeling connected. This was important for all the disabled volunteers we spoke to, but especially for those who felt socially isolated. Because disabled people experience four times the level of isolation and loneliness than non-disabled people, wanting to build social connections through volunteering with others and be part of a group or community seemed particularly relevant.

> *If I come here and am with people, it helps. It builds confidence and helps to not be so isolated.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

VOLUNTEER PORTRAIT
PAUL

Paul is in his twenties. It was through his support worker that he started volunteering initially and he has volunteered in a range of settings mostly to do with the environment. This has helped with an anxiety disorder which had led him to being socially isolated. Over the months he has been coming to the garden, he has got to know people he volunteers with and is now more comfortable talking to them.

> *I've come on quite a bit, even when I compare myself to when I started volunteering at the garden and now, I am more able to hold a conversation without seeming a bit awkward. The conversation flows more freely than beforehand.*

HOW DISABLED PEOPLE START VOLUNTEERING

Most disabled volunteers choose who they volunteer with, when and how they volunteer, and contact individual organisations themselves. However, some get involved through supported volunteering projects[25] or through specific referral pathways. Some disabled volunteers that we spoke to had been referred to volunteering roles through the Job Centre, a key worker, a GP or Community Payback scheme. Both supported volunteering and referrals seem to support a high proportion of disabled people, particularly those with invisible disabilities.

For other disabled volunteers, their route into volunteering began as a participant or service user and evolved over time into a helper or other volunteer role. This type of volunteering pathway is not straightforward and is full of blurred boundaries, because it can be unclear how volunteers are distinct from service users. This seems more prevalent in smaller volunteer run and led organisations.

HOW AND WHEN DISABLED PEOPLE VOLUNTEER

Disability shapes how people volunteer, which types of volunteering activities or roles they get involved in, and how frequently or how long they volunteer for, even if it is not necessarily what motivates people to volunteer, as we have seen in the previous section. For instance, a person who is chronically ill might need to manage their energy levels and only be able to volunteer from home for short periods of time. We also saw in the interviews that volunteers' circumstances could change with time. For some disabled volunteers this could mean altering their volunteering and having to present different support needs.

Being able to volunteer in a flexible way was important to the disabled volunteers we interviewed because they often faced changing circumstances and had to manage physical or mental health challenges. The interviewees gave numerous examples of needing a flexible and understanding organisation or volunteer manager, willing to change and adapt, in order to balance looking after themselves with volunteering.

CHAPTER 03 THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

In many ways, what people's volunteering looks like is shaped by the wider context that they operate in. In this research, we saw, for instance, how the COVID pandemic (See Spotlights on pages 28 and 37) and related lockdowns had often transformed the way people volunteered. We also noted the importance of disabled volunteers' formal and informal support systems. The level of support from carers (particularly unpaid family carers) can have a big impact on whether some disabled people are able to volunteer and on the quality of their volunteering experience. While a high level of support from carers can be an enabler of volunteering, having no support can prevent someone from volunteering. Within organisations, some disabled volunteers benefitted from a buddying or mentoring scheme, or less formal support from fellow volunteers. This was generally seen as an enabling mechanism. However, this can be problematic if issues arise between the volunteers or if either volunteer is not willing or able to engage positively.

> *We train up the carers too so that they can participate, we have trained up quite a few people to Powerboat 2 level so they can take the boats out and it means that they want to come out here, it gives them focus. Carers get more involved but it's difficult at the moment because we have so few carers and they change and move on and we lose them.*
> **Non-disabled volunteer**

VOLUNTEER PORTRAIT
LUCILLE

Lucille has been a volunteer at Girlguiding for 25 years and is a home tutor in her sixties. She has a long-term chronic health condition. She was unit leader for many years, but this is no longer possible because of the way her condition has evolved. She currently volunteers from home doing a range of desk-based roles including as a mentor to other unit leaders and a District Commissioner helping for example with risk assessments and commendations. Her health condition requires her to put drops in her eyes very often, which is a problem if meetings last more than an hour.

> *I can do short bursts; some days I can do a massive amount and some days I just can't deal with it.*

THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

Disabled volunteers felt predominantly positive about their volunteering, confirming the findings of the *Time Well Spent* survey, which found that 93% of disabled volunteers were satisfied with their volunteering experience[26]. We also found that much of what makes an experience good was the same for disabled and non-disabled volunteers.

> *It is how they speak to volunteers, everyone is really nice and calm, they listen, they hear you, they sort out problems with you. I really like working here, it is a great volunteering job, I'm happy that I am appreciated, and happy to have more responsibility.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

The disabled volunteers we interviewed told us they had a positive experience when they felt well supported, useful and valued. Disabled volunteers essentially described how an asset-based approach that is people-centred helped them to volunteer in a way that suited them and met their expectations of volunteering, as well as their support or access needs. They often felt positive about their volunteering because of the enjoyment they got out of it. This tended to be linked to activities they were doing with others. The connection to others and the camaraderie, friendships and 'family feeling' that people experienced often led to a feeling of belonging. It contrasted with the experience of stigma and bias sometimes felt in social or public settings.

93%

of disabled volunteers were satisfied with their volunteering experience

CHAPTER 03 THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

VOLUNTEER PORTRAIT
SEAN

Sean is in his thirties and is autistic. He has volunteered in several organisations. Some of them have felt quite corporate to him; everybody was treated the same and there were a lot of obligations. In his current volunteering role, he feels it's very different. People can be themselves – the project manager knows the volunteers well and is accommodating of people's needs and the different ways they want to work. For example, if he wants to work on his own like he does at times because he finds it hard to multitask and talk with others while doing a task, the project manager finds him something that he can do that is suitable. If things are happening that are upsetting him, he feels comfortable talking to her about it and she will look to address the issue. He thinks she's good at managing people in a friendly and positive way. Over time, he's been given more responsibilities and his confidence has grown.

Before I would be thinking about all the negative things that could happen and plan for that, but now I know it doesn't have to be myself on my own, other people can support me.

The personal benefits disabled volunteers experienced often mirrored their initial motivations for getting involved, including:

- increased health and wellbeing, including reduced anxiety levels and improved feelings of enjoyment and fulfilment;
- social connections and networks, including making new friends and meeting people they wouldn't have met otherwise;
- building confidence and self-esteem, including through learning skills, social interactions and through taking ownership and responsibility;
- learning new skills (including new skills to prepare for employment) or practicing skills that have become rusty due to long periods of unemployment;
- a feeling of 'being of use' to society and using existing skills, education and lived experience to help others or a cause.

The skills I have learned have helped me get paid work, if you say 'yes, I'm volunteering', it's like you have a job, and it is easier to get a job if you already have a job and employers like that you are volunteering, it looks good on your CV.
Disabled volunteer

Two ladies came up and said my name one day when I was out shopping and I asked how do you know me? They said from Scope, and that made me feel really good that they knew my name.
Disabled volunteer

According to the *Understanding Society* data, disabled volunteers are significantly more satisfied with their lives, have better mental health and feel less isolated than disabled people who don't volunteer. The effects of volunteering on life satisfaction, mental health and isolation disappear once we take into account the feeling of belonging to a community. The most likely explanation is that disabled people who feel they belong to a community are more likely to volunteer and they are also more likely to have higher life satisfaction, better mental health and feel less isolated than disabled people who feel lower levels of neighbourhood belonging.

Some of the other benefits of volunteering identified by disabled people related to the wider community and included improving understanding, support and knowledge about disabled people. This was described by disabled volunteers in two potential scenarios: the first related to volunteering alongside non-disabled volunteers and the second to public-facing volunteer roles for disabled volunteers. In the first scenario, volunteering alongside was perceived as a way to help build connections with people who are different to each other by challenging assumptions and ideas held by non-disabled volunteers. The second scenario is one of visibility in relation to the public where disabled volunteers sometimes challenge stereotypes, assumptions or unconscious bias.

The charity shops also serve to teach the public about disabilities, we have many disabled volunteers and exposure is important in relation to public understanding and support about disability, especially for children.
Disabled volunteer

If a unit has disabled and non-disabled volunteers, the young members, the girls get to see that just because you have a disability, it doesn't mean you can't do things. In my units, there's a young member with a disability, I have a disability so they're seeing that young members can be involved, adults can be involved...parents can see that we're an inclusive organisation. People with disabilities are accepted and part of the organisation.
Disabled volunteer

THE CHALLENGES OF VOLUNTEERING FOR DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

Despite the disabled volunteers we interviewed feeling largely positive about their experience, they had encountered some significant challenges. When disabled volunteers had more difficult or negative experiences, they were usually either to do with practical barriers related to accessing volunteering opportunities and accessibility more broadly, or with cultural or attitudinal barriers from the public, organisations, paid staff or other volunteers. This was also discussed by our research reference group and at the stakeholder roundtable. In both instances, people highlighted the harsh reality of volunteering for some disabled people who had faced very challenging and at times distressing situations.

PRACTICAL BARRIERS

In relation to practical barriers, the **initial application process was key** to the disabled volunteers we interviewed. The first stage of the volunteer recruitment process is the first point of contact for potential volunteers and becomes one of the most important steps to making volunteer opportunities accessible. This is where some people found a closed door and were turned away, either due to inaccessible environments (physical or online) or on purpose due to lack of knowledge, incorrect assumptions or direct bias about disability. That is notwithstanding the situation where an organisation may reject a potential volunteer for any number of valid reasons such as skills, schedules, or not being able to meet access or support needs.

Transport is a particularly important issue for disabled people, and many disabled volunteers spoke about this being their number one barrier to volunteering, especially those with mobility issues. The culture at some organisations discouraged volunteers to get reimbursed for expenses. This was a major barrier for disabled volunteers, who on average have lower income than non-disabled volunteers.

> *The biggest challenge is getting here. I live locally but it's too far to walk, so I have to pay for it, by either bus or taxi. I don't ask to get reimbursed because I like to make things and it's good for my mental health.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

VOLUNTEER PORTRAIT
JUDY

Judy is blind and has a guide dog, she has been volunteering as a telephone befriender with Opening Doors. Judy has volunteered for many charities previously, with mixed experiences.

> *My experience has been quite mixed, the volunteer roles I have done in the past they've all worked out very positively, but I have had some very negative experiences when applying for voluntary work with organisation – they were very keen and very positive and when I disclosed that I have a sight problem and that I have a guide dog – several organisations actually withdrew the offer of an interview. Telling me that it wouldn't be suitable. They would come up with all kinds of varying reasons. Some of them would include things like, "Our building isn't suitable for you". So, I would ask, "In what respect do you feel it isn't suitable"? and they would say things like, "Oh well we have stairs". And as I said to them, "Well I have a guide dog. I go up and down stairs on a daily basis". Just because your building has steps it isn't a barrier to me coming in. That was very disappointing. Another organisation sounded quite positive and then telephoned and left a voicemail to withdraw the offer of their interview. And every time I telephoned to make another date for the interview, they would be very vague and then not call me back.*
>
> *In one volunteer role that I was at for 18 months, and it was a very positive experience, but I didn't actually disclose before the interview anything about having a guide dog or a sight problem because I'd got a bit fed up at certain points and thought, "Just take my application and then we can cross that bridge when we come to it". I didn't disclose anything until I got to the interview and the person said, "You didn't mention any of this in your application or when we've had a telephone conversation" and I had actually had quite a long journey with my guide dog to get there and I did say to the person, "Well if I had told you, would I be sitting here having an interview with you now"? And the person said, "Probably not, no". So, I said, "Well that's exactly why I didn't say anything" and luckily, we discussed things and worked around how the computer could be made completely accessible with certain software and obviously my guide dog is completely well-behaved and wouldn't be a problem.*

CHAPTER 03 THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

VOLUNTEER PORTRAIT
DIANE

Diane has '*moderate dyslexia*' and is '*more on the autistic spectrum than not*'. She has been involved in Girlguiding since she was a child. She is currently a guide unit leader and involved in several oversight roles supporting other volunteers. During the pandemic she ran a second guide unit. She finds the paperwork that goes with her responsibilities very challenging. The amount of paperwork is a problem for her as are the different formats that are used, and she ends up having to pay a great deal of attention to it. She finds the documents not accessible enough and thinks this is a barrier for more neurodivergent people becoming leaders in the future.

> *You don't get very far saying you don't like paperwork and if you tell them the truth, they don't understand. I think people don't understand why you struggle.*
>
> *They come in PDFs and paper, they come on email, I can't cope with it.*

Some disabled volunteers have practical needs in relation to the **physical and online environment** they volunteer in, such as a hearing loop, a wheelchair ramp, accessible toilets, sign language interpreters, a screen reader, quiet spaces or easy-read documents. In some cases, disabled volunteers were not able to volunteer without these adaptations.

Partly related to this, some disabled volunteers also spoke about challenges regarding the amount and format of paperwork and documentation on policies, particularly on health and safety and safeguarding.

Digital exclusion has been widely discussed recently in relation to the government's levelling up agenda and people from lower socio-economic groups, including disabled volunteers, may find technology more of a barrier (e.g. if they cannot access the internet, data or ICT equipment). We heard about technology being a barrier for older volunteers, disabled or not. This is consistent with the *Understanding Society* data (see Chapter 2). For some volunteers with learning difficulties, the digital skills needed to use technology also presented a challenge and this was a growing challenge as many organisations were increasingly delivering their support and training online.

Some disabled volunteers mentioned the issue of their **welfare benefits** and how this presented a challenge for their volunteering. There are seemingly numerous and persistent misconceptions and a widespread lack of understanding regarding the benefits system and the rules related to volunteering[27]; some of which appear to be coming from Job Centre advisors.

> *Volunteering and benefits information should be clearer to disabled people. Benefit agencies should allow people to volunteer on benefits, with no cap on hours.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

CULTURAL AND ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS

In addition to practical barriers faced by disabled volunteers, there are clearly cultural and attitudinal barriers in place coming from the public, fellow volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations. Disabled volunteers spoke about their experience facing **stigma, stereotypes and bias** from all these groups. Sometimes people had made assumptions about disabled volunteers based on unconscious bias or a lack of knowledge in relation to disability. While direct discrimination is less common, it still exists and is faced by disabled volunteers. Some disabled volunteers with very public facing roles, such as working in a charity shop, spoke about the stresses and challenges that sometimes come with public attitudes which, at times, reflect ingrained stereotypes and bias. Some of the barriers faced by disabled volunteers came from other volunteers and this may be related to generational differences or from volunteer cliques that exclude anyone who is different.

> *I often feel that the main difficulty that people with disabilities face are the misunderstandings of other people or other people feeling that they know what you need or what you don't need or what you can or can't do. There are obviously things that you can't do, or you may need assistance with either technology or via another person to do, but I just think very often other people sort of leap to these conclusions and it's very unhelpful.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

CHAPTER 03 THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE OF DISABLED PEOPLE

For disabled volunteers, **intersecting identities** can sometimes equate to more barriers, particularly in relation to bias, assumptions and stereotypes, and this can lead to less satisfying volunteer experiences. The degree of visibility of an impairment may also have an impact on how, if and when volunteers choose to disclose this to others, including the volunteer coordinator or manager.

> *Being disabled and gay, sexuality is very low on the hierarchy of needs. Organisations don't understand that. I'm out, but now I need to do work with organisations to show them being gay and disabled are not mutually exclusive.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

> *I don't know if it's because I'm under 30 or disabled, but the negative impression I'm getting is basically that they think I'm immature, that I don't have enough experience.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

> *There are lanyards for hidden disabilities then people can see that you're a disabled person, but I'm not sure I want to shout about it.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

SPOTLIGHT
THE IMPACT OF COVID ON VOLUNTEERS

The global pandemic related to COVID exacerbated much of the existing trends in society pre-pandemic. Some organisations felt an economic pinch from lower income streams while others found new sources of income related to supporting communities through COVID. Data from *Understanding Society* showed that overall levels of formal volunteering decreased during the pandemic, although other surveys have shown an increase in informal volunteering. While some people had to shield or were forced to stop volunteering for other reasons, many took part in mutual aid efforts or other activities in their community to help with the crisis.

Interviews with volunteers provides a rich picture of volunteering during the pandemic. Many spoke about feeling very isolated and anxious during the pandemic, particularly during lockdown periods and how this impacted on their emotional wellbeing and mental health. Many disabled volunteers talked about how much they missed their volunteering if they had had to stop, the impact that this had on their daily lives and about the ways in which groups were able to remain in touch. It was clear from our interviews that many disabled volunteers relied on their volunteer roles to provide structure and purpose to their week.

> *It has been really sad [the pandemic], it's been hard for me, building up frustration at not being able to come here, it felt like such a long time not being able to do anything. I just watched the same things on the TV but there are only so many cups of tea and so many rooms in the house you can go around. I'm over the moon that things are open again.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

> *This past two and a half years has changed me and my place in the world, I used to have such a busy diary going places, now all I have to do is get out of bed, get dressed and have meetings on Zoom.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

Some disabled volunteers talked about challenges related to carers during the pandemic, including issues to do with stress and pay levels that were exacerbated during COVID. Other disabled volunteers told us they had to shield for extensive periods of time which impacted on their ability to volunteer in many cases, but not always as some activities were able to continue and new activities were created. Some volunteers were able to get to know the organisations they volunteer with better during this time.

> *It impacted on my mental health really badly, I wasn't coming in [to volunteer], I had panic attacks but was able to pop in to see everyone for a minute every now and then. I had been in the house for so long, the charity shops were shut for around seven months and I had been shielding as well. When things started to open up again, I was having panic attacks about going out again. I couldn't stay out for too long as my anxiety levels would go way up. They had flexibility about not scheduling me or insisting on me committing to a set schedule, it helped to ease my panic attacks and I knew I could come here and it would be a safe space and I could see friendly faces.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

> *I missed my team, we kept in contact via text or email, it got emotional, but we kept in touch. I had to stay at home for health reasons, but I kept myself occupied, sorting out my house. The regular contact from the team [mainly volunteer managers] meant a lot to me, it made a big difference.*
> **Disabled volunteer**

CHAPTER

04

HOW ORGANISATIONS ENGAGE WITH DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

CHAPTER 04 HOW ORGANISATIONS ENGAGE WITH DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

This chapter discusses organisational perspectives and practical insights related to inclusive volunteering, the associated challenges and benefits and highlights good practice related to engaging with and managing disabled volunteers. It is mainly based on the case study organisations and the interviews that took place with staff and volunteers, both disabled and non-disabled, but is also informed by the stakeholder roundtable where participants discussed emerging findings and reflected on their own organisational experience.

CHAPTER 04 HOW ORGANISATIONS ENGAGE WITH DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

A CONSTANTLY CHANGING CONTEXT

Organisational perspectives and approaches to inclusion are shifting and the last two years have seen a renewed priority around EDI. Recent research has shown that while organisations have made some progress on this journey, there is still a long way to go for many organisations[28]. The same research states that 'issues around diversity and volunteering are steeped in a history based on notions of power that are currently being challenged' and that 'power, privilege and prejudice must be addressed for inclusion to thrive'. While developments in EDI strategies and actions in some organisations focus solely on ethnicity, there has also been a growing emphasis on the importance of engaging people with lived experience more broadly.

> *It's never going to be perfect, but it has got better and I think people are more aware. We've been talking about inclusivity in terms of ethnicity and race for a long time and we have for a number of years now had a BAME outreach worker. We haven't got a disability outreach worker, but I think that says something about the priorities of the sector and about the values of the sector.*
> **Volunteer manager**

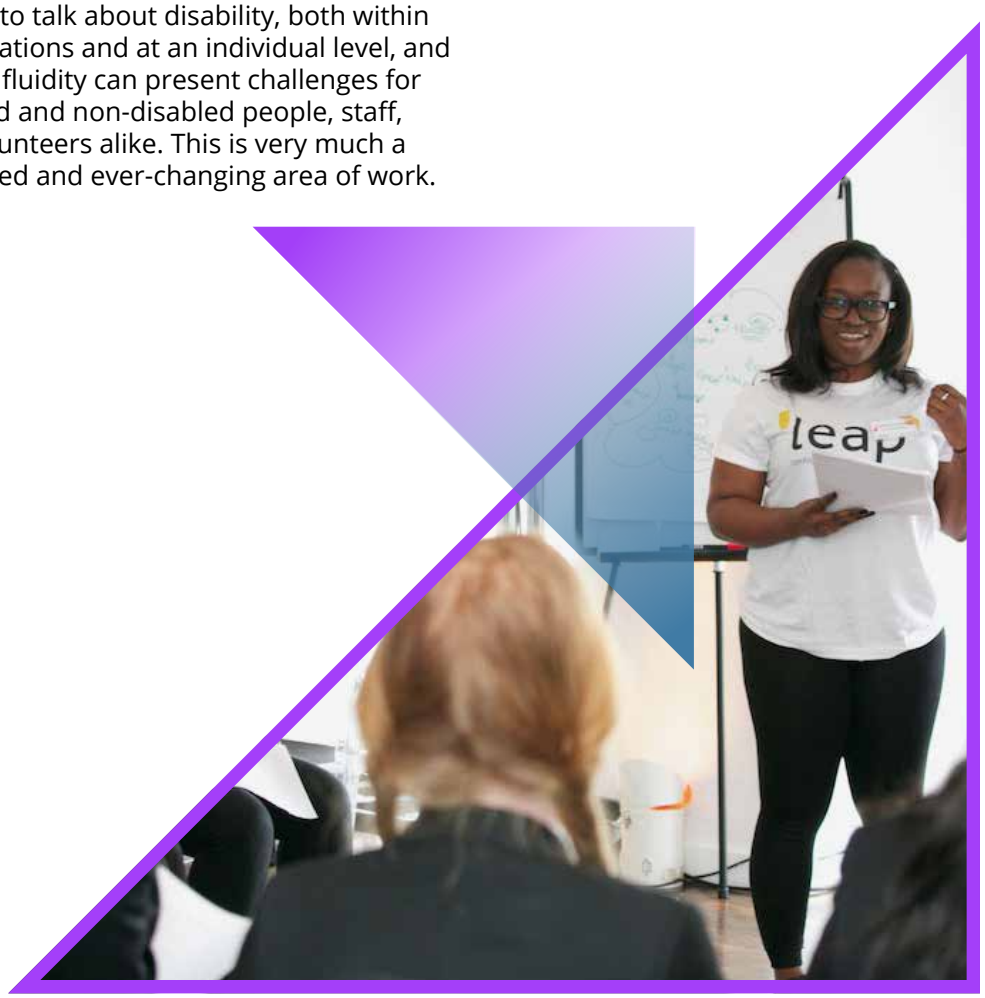
Some staff we interviewed reflected on the progress that had been made in terms of EDI, including in relation to disability. For some organisations, particularly where disability equality is part of their mission or ethos, the role of visibility as a way to increase public support and decrease stigma is an important one. This sometimes played out by purposefully placing disabled volunteers in public facing roles.

Despite progress, staff members also spoke about the reality of siloed working, EDI strategies not being sufficiently embedded across organisations or integrated with volunteer strategies (if such strategies existed). Changes in organisational culture and leadership with regards to EDI and inclusive volunteering had not yet taken hold to a significant degree.

> *As a volunteering team, we are going to use the EDI strategy to support our strategy, they've basically got there before us but interestingly, it should be an organisation wide approach so rather than us going off and doing our volunteer strategy around EDI, we need them to go first because they're engaging with stakeholders, so they're going to bring so much knowledge in building that strategy. So, we'll probably piggy-back onto that.*
> **Volunteer manager**

The social model of disability[29] has grown in prominence over the last several decades, due largely to the work of disability organisations and user-led groups. It is generally accepted as best practice and states that people with impairments are 'disabled' by the barriers operating in society that exclude them. Yet, **the understanding of what this looks like in practice remains limited for many organisations on the ground**. Related to this is the language we use to talk about disability, both within organisations and at an individual level, and how its fluidity can present challenges for disabled and non-disabled people, staff, and volunteers alike. This is very much a contested and ever-changing area of work.

> *It [social model] influences the way we approach problem solving with volunteers, the problem is never the impairment or the person, it is about eradicating the barriers and challenges. It backs up what we do.*
> **Volunteer manager**



CHAPTER 04 HOW ORGANISATIONS ENGAGE WITH DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

ORGANISATIONAL SNAPSHOT
SCOPE: ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

As a disability charity, Scope has carefully thought about the language, visuals and messages they use in relation to volunteers and recruitment. They have also honed their application process for volunteers to make it more accessible and to focus on adjustments that might be needed and then to regularly check in about those needs.

On all of our volunteer roles, we have an EDI statement which says we encourage applications from disabled people specifically. Everybody gets asked the same questions in the registration form, "Do you identify as having a disability, impairment or condition?" and the next question is around reasonable adjustments. We never ask what someone's disability or condition is, the social model of disability says we don't need to know what it is, we need to know what support they need.

Not everyone discloses their needs at first, so it is important to keep asking and be open throughout, at every stage of the process, keep asking. Needs change over time sometimes. It's important they feel comfortable asking. We need to make them feel at ease.

Volunteer Development Manager

CONFIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DISABILITY

Understanding of disability and of the diversity of impairments and conditions is still inadequate. One of the key themes from case study interviews among both staff and non-disabled volunteers was the overall lack of knowledge about disability and the social model of disability, and low confidence levels around how to appropriately ask about and make adjustments for disabled volunteers. Knowledge levels differed widely along with understanding about how to implement the social model. This is likely linked to differing definitions and understandings of disability and while the government has a clear definition of disability[30], definitions vary considerably between organisations. Another factor that added to poor understanding and low confidence levels is the immense diversity of impairments and circumstances of disabled people. While organisations felt that they had made some progress on removing barriers related to physical disabilities, they seemed far less confident with invisible disabilities linked to mental health and neurodivergence. There was also little acknowledgement of the role of intersecting identities, and how this might impact on how organisations support their volunteers.

They haven't told us that they need adjustments, but then again we probably haven't asked. It's really about sometimes having that difficult conversation… So it's down to having the conversations once you get to know that person…if that person is willing to tell you, because there are many conditions out there that they're not willing to tell you about because it's private to them, but sometimes you want them to have that conversation so that you can deal with it.

Volunteer manager

This lack of understanding leads to poor support and missed opportunities. Some of the staff we spoke to, and indeed some of the volunteers who were not disabled, seemed to have real fears about 'getting it wrong', which may be linked to concerns about legal requirements or may be more closely linked to shifting cultures, discomfort with language or difference, concerns about being too intrusive or unwittingly causing hurt or offence. This is particularly the case when discussing how and when disabled volunteers disclose information about who they are and whether they are disabled, their access requirements and wider needs. It was a commonly held view within the case study organisations that the number of actual disabled volunteers were greater than the number of volunteers who disclosed that they are disabled or noted any access needs. Organisations felt it was challenging for them to support disabled volunteers, particularly with invisible disabilities, if they did not disclose their needs.

CHAPTER 04 HOW ORGANISATIONS ENGAGE WITH DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

RELATIONAL VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

The importance of good volunteer management is highlighted in the examples of good practice regarding disabled volunteers given by case study organisations. Whether engaging with disabled or non-disabled people, **volunteer management is inclusive when it is relational** – it is based on building and maintaining supportive relationships and on taking a person-centred approach that focuses on volunteers' assets and skills.

The application process or the first point of contact was considered key by organisations and volunteers (see Chapter 3). Having lengthy paperwork or an online form was viewed as less inclusive than allowing for flexible options for potential volunteers, for example providing an optional contact person who could support enquiries. This is also normally the stage where potential volunteers were asked about any needs or requirements they may have. While some organisations had mostly informal recruitment processes, others had very formal ones. Some organisations asked volunteers questions about who they were (mostly in terms of demographics) and some asked questions or had a conversation with them about their access requirements or support needs but many only asked about needs once, at the recruitment stage.

The challenge for organisations was around disclosure and trust. As discussed in the previous chapter, many potential disabled volunteers did not choose to disclose their impairments or support needs so early in the process. Some volunteers had felt more comfortable talking about their needs at a later stage, so it was important for the volunteer managers to keep the conversation open throughout and beyond the recruitment and induction phase. It was often through having an informal conversation and doing things together that the volunteer manager got to know the volunteers and their support needs better. This was also important because needs can change over time.

Being flexible proved essential and applied to everything from scheduling to volunteer roles. Volunteers, whether disabled or non-disabled, have different needs, which is why the combination of trusted relationships (in order to disclose needs or requirements) and flexibility (in order to match needs to volunteer roles) proved so important and is crucial to the initial and sustained involvement of disabled volunteers.

At times volunteer managers needed to decline a volunteer offer or ask a volunteer to leave (for example if there is unacceptable or dangerous behaviour). While this was never easy, it was seen as an important part of the role. There was both discomfort and lack of understanding around when it might be appropriate to say no to disabled volunteers. This mainly centred around reasonable adjustments and situations where an organisation was not able to meet the requirements of a disabled volunteer.

ORGANISATIONAL SNAPSHOT
JOCK TAMSON'S GAIRDEN: AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH

Jock Tamson's Gairden's approach to volunteering is informal, flexible and relational. The project manager has an initial conversation with each volunteer when they come to the garden for the first time to understand who they are, their motivations, abilities and needs, but it is through doing things with them in the garden and continuing the conversation that she gets to know them and builds trust. The way the project manager engages with volunteers is centred around who they are and tasks they are given are tailored to suit them. The programme is able to accommodate people's needs which can change from one session to the other. Over time, she has developed a friendly, supportive and empathetic environment where people don't feel judged and can be themselves.

Peer learning is an important component of the organisational culture and volunteers are often paired up to work on tasks together. This helps build good relationships between volunteers and a sense of common endeavour. Every task is seen as valuable and important for the garden to flourish and celebrated as such. Jock Tamson's Gairden's approach is conducive to increased confidence, mental and physical wellbeing and social connections. Its success is linked to the personal qualities of the project manager, the commitment of the trustees to the approach and the limited number of volunteers (25 in total, a maximum of 12 per session) but also the space in which the project operates and the positive benefits that comes from working in the natural environment.

> *I quite like that people get to discover each other as a person and not as a disability.*
> **Project manager**

> *She's such a good manager, not everybody would be able to cope and coordinate people with different needs, but it doesn't seem to faze her, she just accommodates them and lets them do what they feel comfortable with.*
> **Trustee**

ORGANISATIONAL SNAPSHOT
SEAS SAILABILITY: A SPECTRUM OF ENGAGEMENT

Being a small volunteer run and led organisation that supports disabled people to engage in water-based adventures brings with it a certain level of chaos and a need for flexible working. There was a spectrum of engagement between service users, volunteers, and people working in a paid capacity. Blurred boundaries between users and volunteers seemed to stem from the desire to find a role for everyone within the volunteer ecosystem and to maximise the benefits related to volunteering for the individuals involved. There is a motivation to see everyone as a type of helper in order to gain the benefits related to increased confidence and usefulness and to find a role for everyone regardless of their needs or ability but runs the risk of patronising people. In addition, this sometimes conflicted with the need to manage risks and implement health and safety processes.

It's really tricky to put people into boxes. There are participants who become volunteers who become leaders. There's a volunteer who has Downs, he is a participant but he helps out quite a lot and he sees himself as a volunteer. I don't like those boxes. We just all muck in. We have trained certain people, we try to concentrate on the family members. It's those enablers who bring people down here and they are probably under more pressure and need more help than the disabled people themselves. Our focus is not disability, it's the whole group or community of people. That's why we try to engage the whole group, even the paid carers. I don't like using the term disability or disabled, I prefer to use the word people.

If you try to impose structure down there, it isn't going to work, they will push back. You work with the chaos and you try to shape the chaos and then you end up with something, and that is usually good. You have to value people. It takes a lot of time and a lot of skill and you have to actually be listening to what they are saying and sometimes it is really hard to understand. There is a guy downstairs who I was having trouble understanding, it took me 18 months to get what he was saying. It's hard with so many people to have that time to listen to be able to work out what everyone needs or wants. That is the key, don't treat people all the same, you have to listen and understand.

It's been very organic up to now with the structure. We just offer up opportunities and see what happens and people find their own interests. We need to sit down now this year and figure out what we are going to do and that does involve a bit more structure. Whoever wants to do it, we will try to train them up. Some people can be quite tricky and they can't do everything and we are running flat out to keep this place going.
Founder

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Whether an organisation is able to embed inclusive volunteering is dependent on organisational culture. Where people focused on the relational dimension of volunteer management, they were able to create a culture of understanding and empathy, where peer support played an important role. However, they sometimes faced challenges related to the views, attitudes or bias of volunteers within the organisation, which were not always inclusive, welcoming, or friendly. Identifying and managing tensions that arose between disabled volunteers and others was difficult to manage at times if information or skills in this area were lacking. Supporting all volunteers to be open and to acknowledge bias, whether unconscious or not, sometimes took a lot of effort if there were cliques or particularly difficult volunteers.

These issues are linked to organisational culture and comfort levels with navigating difference. Some organisations talked about wanting 'to treat everyone the same' but this attitude can sit in conflict with acknowledging and understanding volunteer access and support needs. Inclusivity and the removal of barriers to engagement requires a conversation about needs, which can be different for everyone. Within some organisations, non-disabled staff and volunteers felt that asking about needs was 'prying' or being too intrusive, which potentially reflects a culture that highly values individual privacy.

Many of the interviewees we spoke to in the case study organisations felt more information and training was needed for staff and volunteers on inclusion, disability and how to support the needs of disabled people.

> *I think the organisation is under-motivated to [engage disabled volunteers]. I'm trying to have this conversation with the people that I work with and I don't think it's conscious prejudice. We've all got unconscious bias and we don't understand the issues well enough – myself included – but we need to have a much better understanding of these issues and embed them more closely into everyday practice.*
> **Volunteer manager**

ENGAGING WITH AND SUPPORTING DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

Very few volunteer managers told us they specifically recruited or targeted disabled volunteers and many did not know where they might focus recruitment efforts if they were to recruit disabled volunteers. One case study organisation that does regularly recruit disabled volunteers (and is also a disability charity) has disability positive images of volunteers in their recruitment and online presence. In addition to internal and external networks of recruitment, this organisation has also developed numerous referral pathways (such as via Job Centre, GPs and key workers) which are key recruitment sources for disabled volunteers, particularly for charity shops.

When disabled volunteers had (paid or unpaid) carers present, organisations had to decide how the carer would interact within the volunteer role or project. While some organisations treated carers as volunteers, others didn't. Regardless of the approach, **organisations had to take account of carers in their planning**. This was a challenge if organisations had not thought through the role of carers in the volunteer journey.

> *We encourage volunteers who require a carer or personal assistant to bring that person along with them, but we have to treat that person like a volunteer as well, we have to capture their data.*
> **Volunteer manager**

Volunteer support approaches are varied and have different levels of formality. Some organisations had developed one-to-one volunteer support roles and/or put in place grants to help make volunteering more accessible. Others had focused more on informal peer learning and support or user/membership-led models which can blur boundaries between participants, helpers, volunteers and paid staff. This was more likely to happen in the case study organisations that were smaller and/or volunteer or user run and led, with volunteers supporting and training other volunteers, no paid staff and few resources for training outside of peer learning models. Less formal approaches offered advantages such as more flexibility and the ability to respond to personal needs. However, these approaches could also lead to gaps if they were too reliant on individual personalities or relational skills.

ORGANISATIONAL SNAPSHOT
GIRLGUIDING: VOLUNTEERING TOGETHER

In order to provide more volunteering opportunities to disabled people and support them in their volunteering, Girlguiding has recently put in place a buddying scheme which involves pairing a supported volunteer role with an individual supporter role. The former is suitable for people who would not be able to carry out the full responsibilities of another volunteer role, including safeguarding responsibilities, without support. The latter carries out a regular volunteering role and provides support to the supported volunteer, making adjustments at meetings and events that mean the supported volunteer can carry out their role.

On the ground this had been happening for years informally with volunteers buddied up. In most cases, it involved a young member becoming a volunteer with the support of a carer/family member. It was formalised when it became apparent that not all volunteers were able to conduct an online training module on safeguarding which is compulsory for everybody. It was well received because it recognised a need that people had been highlighting. Currently approximately 70 people are in the supported volunteer role. These roles are created on a case-by-case basis once a supported volunteer assessment form has been completed by the unit leader and agreed with the Girlguiding safe practice team.

> *Despite the adjustments we realised that some volunteers weren't able to understand the content of the training because of learning disabilities and they'd been volunteering for us for years and years and we didn't want to lose them.*
>
> *Some girls have been involved in guiding a long time, will have been well supported throughout and they want to help, but they might not be able to do the training for a range of reasons. Girlguiding doesn't want to say you can't be part of this anymore, but if we make them into a supported volunteer and they have somebody who supports them they can carry on being part of the family of Girlguiding.*
>
> **Head Office staff**

RESOURCES AND BUDGETS

Engaging with and supporting volunteers is not cost free. Even in volunteer led and run organisations with no paid staff, **organisations need time and resources in order to engage and support volunteers**. This is especially important in relation to creating an inclusive environment for disabled volunteers. Adequately meeting the access needs of disabled volunteers takes capacity (whether voluntary or paid time) at a minimum and in some cases requires bigger budgets for adjustments such as a hearing loop, a ramp, or specialist software or equipment. However, the case study organisations demonstrated that many adjustments could be made with very little resource implications, such as being flexible about schedules or assigning volunteer buddies.

Organisations found it difficult to predict the types of reasonable adjustments that might be necessary for a disabled volunteer although they could give examples of the types of adaptations that had been made in the past for other volunteers. As they couldn't accurately predict what adjustments were needed, it was also difficult for them to budget and plan. This sat alongside the reality of very small (if any) volunteering budgets and diminishing staff capacity.

> *But how can we fundraise and embed in our applications money to support people with disabilities without pricing ourselves out of getting funding? We need to find a way to think about these things more structurally, to embed these things into part of the whole process. Where can we go to get money to support inclusion of disabled people in our organisation, for example?*
>
> **Volunteer manager**

One of the most frequently mentioned examples was the cost of hiring BSL interpreters. Organisations told us that the costs in this area are prohibitive. There are few to no funding sources available to cover these costs and there are not enough interpreters. Some specialist equipment or kit is expensive and organisations with smaller budgets are particularly at a disadvantage here.

> *We've had a year's long conversation about having signers when we have events. We haven't got the money to have signers. We don't want to not pay people, but we just haven't got the money for it. I have got a long-standing advert up for volunteer signers and understandably, I've never had a single person offer.*
>
> **Volunteer manager**

Paying volunteer expenses is still an issue. It is a widely accepted element of good volunteer management practice and seen as a way of encouraging inclusive volunteering. Yet the culture within many organisations is one where volunteers feel embarrassed or ashamed of getting reimbursed for expenses related to their volunteering role. This is a particularly important issue for both disabled volunteers and for people on low incomes, as disabled people tend to have lower incomes (see Table 3 in Chapter 2). For many of the disabled volunteers we spoke to, transport was the most important and most often cited area where support was needed. For example, some disabled volunteers needed to be reimbursed for taxi journeys to or from their volunteer location.

Linked to this issue is the reality that many organisations are only able to engage disabled volunteers who already have any specialist software or equipment needed, particularly for remote or online volunteering. This reinforces the inequality of volunteering, where only people with enough resources can afford to volunteer.

> *Access To Work only offer funding for paid members of staff, not voluntary roles. That's one of our barriers, as much as we want to provide support and adjustments for volunteers, we're inhibited by cost and budget. It's a shame because when there's so much appetite to do more and better, the challenge is always resource and budget, it's the barrier we all come up against even as a disability charity.*
> **Volunteer manager**

The requirements of supporting volunteers with learning disabilities can be particularly time intensive, so it is not just about buying specialist equipment. Staff capacity in the case study organisations was often limited and staff with volunteer management responsibilities were commonly juggling multiple roles. Supporting volunteers with high levels of needs or multiple needs takes time and human resources regardless of whether they are paid or unpaid.

MANAGING TENSIONS: A BALANCING ACT

Ensuring everybody within an organisation is on the same page can be problematic. There is a challenge for some organisations to ensure that information and policies flow back and forth between all levels of the organisation. Specifically, their ability to manage risks and balance requirements and legal duties with being responsive and flexible on the ground. In both smaller and larger organisations, we noticed a tension between the need to meet legal requirements, with understanding how to implement equalities on the ground and within volunteering. Some organisations felt they lacked the capacity or resources to adequately reflect, grow and change in ways that would result in a more inclusive environment for volunteers.

Another key challenge for organisations is related to tensions between mission and people. For some organisations this was not an issue, for example where the mission was linked to supporting disabled people. However, for others who have a mission that is unrelated (for example to restore or protect the environment or to play sport), supporting volunteers with additional needs can be seen as being in competition with the 'core mission' or services. Some organisations will choose to only involve volunteers who are perceived to have no support needs and to be easy to work with. Organisations attempted to strike a balance, ensuring volunteering was beneficial to the organisation as well as the volunteer. However, this becomes challenging when volunteering is seen as a one-way relationship where the volunteer 'serves' or contributes to the organisation without asking for anything in return.

CHAPTER 04 HOW ORGANISATIONS ENGAGE WITH DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

PARTNERSHIP AS AN ENABLER

Partnerships and links with other organisations can be part of the solution. They were an important enabler for many of the groups we spoke to. Partnership working has meant for some that they create the capacity and resources to engage disabled volunteers. Links and partnerships with organisations such as other charities, local businesses, agencies and regulatory bodies can mean increases in resources as well as capacity and often lead to a win-win situation, creating more volunteer opportunities that people can access.
For one case study organisation, a local boat dealer donated numerous pieces of adaptive and specialist equipment, including two wheelyboats. The group raised funds to purchase other equipment such as an adapted sailboat, life jackets, a hoist at the dock, paddles, chairs, straps, windsurfers and paddleboards.

> *We take placements from organisations, we work for example with the Probation Service, adult education colleges, charities like Mencap, we partner with organisations who support people into work experience. We build a partnership with them and a working agreement so their clients can achieve X amount of work experience across a period of time, we're getting a lot of approaches which suggests opportunities for young people particularly.*
> **Volunteer manager**

SPOTLIGHT
THE IMPACT OF COVID ON ORGANISATIONS

The COVID pandemic[31] changed organisations in numerous ways, including in how they engaged with their volunteers. Many had to use technology more, and with greater effectiveness (and some for the first time) while working from home became the norm. In many respects, this was a silver lining for some organisations that suddenly adopted new ways of working and engaging that also had the potential to be more inclusive, including for disabled volunteers.
Paid staff and volunteers often had to quickly learn new skills related to online engagement and remote working.

Government guidelines during lockdowns represented a new burden for organisations and volunteer managers, many of whom were responsible for safeguarding people considered to be 'vulnerable'. Levels of stress and anxiety increased for both staff and volunteers, especially in the many organisations in which there were limitations on the number of volunteers. While some people started to volunteer for the first time, others stopped volunteering completely.

> *I would say it's made us more inclusive, people up and down the country can now do remote roles which we weren't set up to provide before the pandemic. We've had a really positive response; it's increased our diversity of who can apply for our volunteer roles.*
> **Volunteer manager**

> *We have to check everyone is safe to come to volunteer because we could wipe out our client group with one case of COVID.*
> **Organisation leader**

It was noted that some organisations had to completely close their doors during the pandemic while others experienced smaller numbers (of service users and volunteers, mainly due to social distancing requirements) and staff being furloughed. Organisations reported an increase in interest for volunteering from the public during this time. Some organisations became much better at using technology during the pandemic and improved their overall communications with volunteers. Some also became more aware of disabilities and the particular needs of their volunteers and consequently seemed more inclusive.

> *We know a high percentage of our volunteers were shielding. We've come to the year anniversary of going into lockdown and a lot of volunteers haven't returned, they weren't quite ready to come back or felt confident to do so, it's quite a high number, a couple of hundred at least.*
> **Volunteer manager**

CHAPTER

05

CONCLUSIONS AND IDEAS FOR ACTION

CHAPTER 05 CONCLUSIONS AND IDEAS FOR ACTION

This research has shed light on the enormous contribution that disabled volunteers, despite facing structural inequalities, make to volunteer-involving organisations and communities across the country.

The findings show that disabled people volunteer just as much as non-disabled people and they tend to volunteer more frequently and for longer. This means there are likely more than 3.6 million disabled volunteers giving unpaid help to organisations throughout the UK[32] contributing on average 12 hours per month. Disabled volunteers are also the most civically minded people among the adult population and are participating in other aspects of civil society.

These findings also present an opportunity for organisations to create volunteer environments that welcome, support and celebrate the contribution of disabled volunteers. This chapter draws together our conclusions focusing on the implications of the research findings for both policy and practice and suggests ideas for action for volunteer managers, organisational leaders, funders and policymakers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE: ADAPT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE WITHIN YOUR RESOURCES

More widespread understanding of the social model of disability within organisations and how it should be implemented is key to inclusive volunteering for disabled people and can help address some of the cultural and attitudinal barriers they experience. This can be achieved by focusing on the support and adjustments needed rather than the health condition or impairment. This requires a knowledge of what volunteers need to participate and involves asking volunteers about their needs on a regular basis, as they can change over time. The social model of disability can also address some of the issues we have talked about related to lack of knowledge and confidence around disability.

- **Improve understanding of how the social model of disability can be implemented in practice – it's not about the impairment, it's about meeting needs and removing barriers.**
- **Develop or access disability inclusive training for staff and volunteers in your organisation.**

Sharing knowledge and data is an important component of inclusive volunteering. To maximise engagement with (and benefit from) disabled volunteers, organisations need a system in place to collect and make use of key data about volunteers. Having a system in place to share this information can be both an effective and efficient tool, especially when coordinating large numbers of volunteers. Systems can be more or less formal but they should allow an organisation to understand how many volunteers identify as disabled and what their access requirements or support needs are. Organisations might need to implement training, processes and procedures on how to ask volunteers about identity or needs. Some organisations will need to introduce robust internal communication that allows for data sharing (following GDPR guidance) between volunteer managers or coordinators.

- **Acknowledge that people have intersecting identities – disability is not one dimensional and not everyone with support and access needs will identify as a disabled person.**
- **Have a system in place to share this information internally and protect data.**

CHAPTER 05 CONCLUSIONS AND IDEAS FOR ACTION

Good volunteer management is relational and relational volunteer management is inclusive. Good practice in volunteer management is about engaging with volunteers and creating trusted relationships and safe spaces for people to be themselves. In order to be inclusive, it is essential to get to know volunteers and find out what motivates them. For disabled people, it is important to recognise that volunteering might be a pathway or an alternative to paid employment, or completely distinct from employment. Being inclusive is also about understanding the needs of volunteers and having the ability to meet them as an organisation. By building trust and creating a safe space, organisations will help disabled volunteers feel more comfortable and confident about disclosing any support or access needs they may have. The quality of volunteer experience generally has little to do with disability and more to do with good volunteer management practice. Disabled volunteers, like all volunteers, want to feel useful and valued while being well supported. While most disabled volunteers have a positive experience, it is important to acknowledge and address situations where barriers and challenges exist. Practical barriers are generally more clearcut to resolve, however cultural and attitudinal barriers appear to be more ingrained and more difficult for organisations to shift. Yet, these are key to any real and long-lasting change.

- **Take an asset-based approach to volunteering by focusing on the value and contribution the volunteer and the lived experience they bring to the role.**
- **Understand volunteer motivations and create volunteer roles that match them.**
- **Build trusted and supportive relationships and create spaces where people feel safe to talk about their needs.**
- **Be realistic and transparent about your organisation's ability to meet those needs and make adjustments.**

Disabled volunteers can be supported in a range of formal and informal ways, but organisations should be flexible and willing to engage with the volunteers' lived experiences to see how they can adapt to their needs and circumstances. When a disabled volunteer has a carer, they might need to be factored into the volunteering. Some organisations view carers as an additional volunteer, while others do not. This has an impact on the volunteer experience. It is important to understand the whole ecosystem for disabled volunteers and their carers, whether they are full-time paid carers or family members, as some disabled volunteers may need assistance in order to volunteer. This is a distinct situation for disabled volunteers and one which many organisations have not thought enough about.

- **Provide flexible volunteering opportunities that can adapt to people's changing circumstances and encourage movement between different roles and activities within your organisation.**
- **Consider how you can engage and support carers so that it is a positive experience for all involved.**
- **Pay attention to the culture in your organisation and the attitudes of staff and volunteers – look out for stereotypes, stigma and unconscious bias about disabled people and ensure all volunteers feel welcomed and valued.**

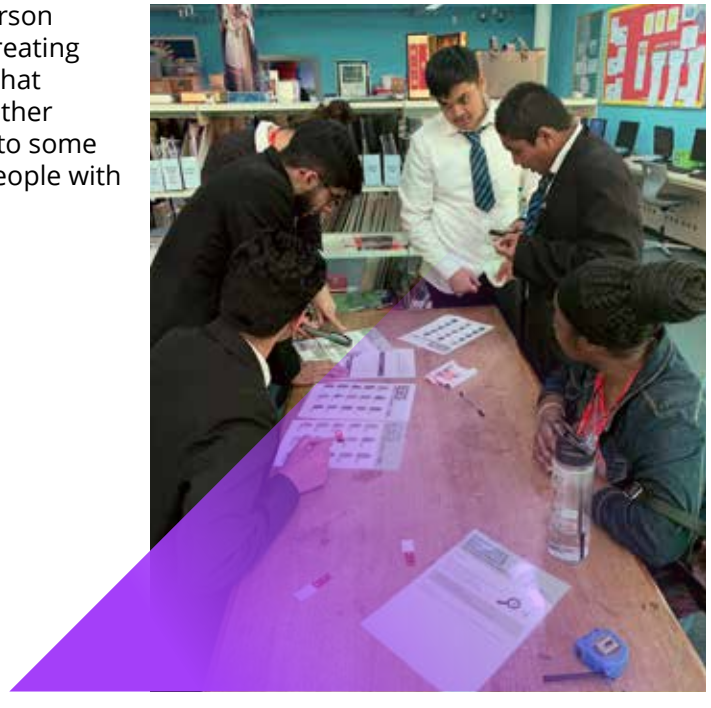
Pay attention to organisational entry points. Making the entry routes into organisations for potential volunteers easy to access and removing any barrier is a key element of making volunteering inclusive. There are numerous enablers that are particularly important for disabled volunteers. Organisations can also be more proactive in recruiting disabled volunteers. This includes the use of disability positive images in recruitment, promoting volunteer role models within and outside of the organisation, as well as making clear statements encouraging disabled people to apply as volunteers.

- **Create accessible entry points for potential volunteers and work to eliminate any access barriers that might be in place.**
- **Use a range of recruitment methods and consider reaching out to disabled people through disability or user-led organisations and groups.**

CHAPTER 05 CONCLUSIONS AND IDEAS FOR ACTION

Technology is an enabler of volunteering for disabled people. This is illustrated by the fact that internet use is a predictor of volunteering for disabled volunteers, but not non-disabled volunteers. However, it is important to bear in mind that it can also be a barrier and we shouldn't under-estimate other enablers such as paying expenses and creating an inclusive and supportive culture among staff and volunteers. In order for technology to be an enabler, there are three key elements that need to be in place: the volunteer needs to have access to the types of resources we have discussed previously including internet access and equipment; the organisation needs to be ready, willing and able to support volunteers by having the right capabilities (i.e. equipment and skills); and the volunteer role needs to be able to be done remotely or online. For example, creating befriending roles that have traditionally been done in-person to occur by telephone or online. Creating micro-volunteering opportunities that involve small, bite-sized tasks, whether online or offline, are well adapted to some disabled volunteers, particularly people with chronic long-term illness.

- **Use technology to your advantage and create remote or online volunteer opportunities where possible including micro-volunteering opportunities.**
- **Ensure remote and online volunteering opportunities are accessible and well-supported including for those who may lack confidence and digital skills.**
- **Consider how digital processes may increase barriers to the involvement of people who are not online and impact on how information is shared within your organisation.**



Resources matter for volunteering. Levels and types of involvement vary according to demographics, with the largest differences relating to socio-economic status and education. That is why levelling the playing field of volunteering with actions such as paying expenses, providing equipment, and creating accessible environments is so important. Paying transport costs is particularly important for disabled people in terms of accessibility. If paying volunteer expenses is normalised within an organisation, there would be no stigma attached to asking for this and volunteers would face less of a barrier. Some organisations struggle to find the budget to pay for volunteer expenses but it is important for all organisations to be transparent about what they are able to offer volunteers in relation to expenses upon recruitment.

- **Be clear and transparent about your policy of paying volunteer expenses.**
- **Make it easy and normal for volunteers to get reimbursed for things like transport costs.**
- **Include volunteer expenses when applying for funding.**

Effective volunteer management comes at a cost and volunteering is not free. Inclusive volunteering based on good support depends very much on getting the balance right between formal processes that maximise efficiency and less formal relational approaches to supporting volunteers. On a more strategic level within organisations, linking any EDI efforts with volunteering strategies and plans creates a more effective approach to inclusion and an asset-based framework works well for engaging disabled volunteers. Organisations should adapt as much as possible with the resources available and be mindful that being accessible and inclusive does not always carry a high price tag.

- **Get buy-in and commitment from leadership and senior staff members.**
- **Link EDI and volunteer strategies together and make sure that these strategies reflect the ethos and values of your organisation.**
- **Look out for partnership working opportunities that may lead to additional capacity and resources.**

CHAPTER 05 CONCLUSIONS AND IDEAS FOR ACTION

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY: REMOVE BARRIERS AND CELEBRATE THE CONTRIBUTION OF DISABLED VOLUNTEERS

The current economic and post-pandemic environment in the UK is one that is bracing itself for huge challenges for households across the country, including steep rises in living costs and a growing mental health crisis. Volunteering is seen by many as part of the solution alongside policies and resources to help communities cope with the immense challenges ahead, but the benefits of volunteering for individuals and wider society depend largely on whether and how volunteers are supported.

Volunteering contributes to better health and wellbeing outcomes for volunteers and builds social capital for volunteers, as well as supporting organisations to fulfil their mission. It provides a way to feel connected to a community in a mutually beneficial way, with disabled volunteers feeling significantly more useful than disabled non-volunteers. Policymakers should consider how to make volunteering more accessible to all.

- **Support the development of a national volunteer management training on implementing the social model of disability in practice.**

Access to Volunteering could increase the power of inclusive volunteering. The previous pilot project, Access to Volunteering (similar to Access to Work, a government fund that provides people with specialist equipment that they need in order to work), reimbursed organisations for the cost of providing volunteers with specialist equipment and access. This should be considered as an effective way to remove barriers for disabled volunteers. Many organisations are calling for this to become a permanent fund, which could go a long way to supporting the needs of volunteers.

- **Create an Access to Volunteering fund for organisations to help them engage and support disabled volunteers.**

Organisations need further support to recruit, engage and welcome disabled volunteers. Funders and policymakers should consider additional project costs related to reasonable adjustments that might be needed to support disabled volunteers. This could also include skills and capacity within organisations.

- **Create a special fund for disabled volunteers' access expenses and/or ensuring that trusts and foundations take into account costs linked to inclusive volunteering.**
- **Support organisations to improve their technology offer and staff digital skills so that they can offer remote and online volunteering opportunities.**

There is still a low level of understanding about volunteering and welfare benefits among volunteers, as well as agency staff and advisors. A key part of removing barriers for disabled volunteers involves ensuring that staff such as Job Centre workers and other benefits advisors are fully aware of and up to date on any limits to volunteering while on benefits and can adequately advise potential disabled volunteers.

- **Develop better information and signposting related to volunteering and benefits, particularly with Job Centre advisors and ensure this information is a key part of their training.**

Referral pathways are an important entry point for some disabled volunteers and there is an opportunity for more joined up working between agencies and organisations such as the NHS, Job Centres or GPs using social prescribing for volunteering.

- **Develop better links between volunteering and social prescribing by working with the NHS, volunteering infrastructure organisations and GP surgeries.**
- **Map out referral pathways to volunteering and facilitate links between organisations and referral partners (key workers, GPs, Job Centre, NHS, etc.).**

The contribution of disabled volunteers needs to celebrated and the stories of disabled volunteers told. Given that disabled volunteers are the most civically minded people of all adults and make a huge contribution to volunteering, we should prioritise removing barriers for disabled volunteers, but also celebrate their current participation more in all sectors of society.

- **Create a national campaign to celebrate the contribution of disabled volunteers (potentially during Volunteers Week) and raise awareness of the lived experience of disabled volunteers.**
- **Ensure that national volunteering strategies include disability as part of their considerations on diversity and inclusive volunteering.**
- **Link with Shaping the Future of Volunteering so it can build on the findings of this project.**
- **Support the development and delivery of a national survey for disabled volunteers to understand fully the experiences and barriers faced by this group.**

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THE QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY (THE UK HOUSEHOLD LONGITUDINAL STUDY)

Understanding Society[33] (UKHLS) is the largest high quality nationally representative longitudinal household panel survey in the UK covering topics such as people's social and economic circumstances, attitudes, lifestyle, health, family relationships, employment, and volunteering. The report uses mainly quantitative data on disability and volunteering, collected in Wave 10 ((January 2018 to February 2020 (i.e. pre-COVID pandemic period)). To examine the impact of COVID pandemic on disability and volunteering we used data collected in Waves 8 and 9 (January 2016–May 2019) and during the special July 2020 and March 2021 UKHLS COVID surveys[34]. Wave 9 data on neighbourhood cohesion index, political attitudes, and behaviours were also used for the analysis on how these factors are related to disabled and non-disabled adults volunteering.

The sample size for Wave 10 (2018–Feb 2020) was 34,318 (adults aged 16+), of which 12,296 reported having a life-limiting long-term mental or physical impairment, illness, or disability that causes difficulties with everyday activities. The sample size in July 2020 was 13,754 and in March 2021 it was 12,680. Corresponding cross-sectional adult main interview weights for each wave were used for the analyses to correctly represent the adult population structure in the UK in a particular wave.

Definition of disability in the UKHLS: People report having a life-limiting long-standing mental or physical impairment, illness, or disability that causes difficulties with everyday activities. By 'long-standing' we mean anything that has troubled one over a period of at least 12 months or that is likely to trouble them over a period of at least 12 months. This definition in consistent with the Equality Act 10.

Types of impairments: All respondents were also given a list of impairments and were asked 'Do you have any health problems or disabilities that mean you have substantial difficulties with any of the following areas of your life?'. The list included: mobility (moving around at home and walking); lifting, carrying or moving objects; Manual dexterity (using your hands to carry out everyday tasks); Continence (bladder and bowel control); Hearing (apart from using a standard hearing aid); Sight (apart from wearing standard glasses); Communication or speech problems; Memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand; Recognising when you are in physical danger; Your physical co-ordination (e.g. balance); Difficulties with own personal care; Other health problem or disability; none of these.

Severity of impairment was measured asking those respondents who reported having difficulties with an area of life: 'How much difficulty do you have with [type of impairment]? Would you say…?' and providing them with answer options: Some difficulty, A lot of difficulty, Unable to do this.

Impairment severity index: We generated a severity index to measure how severe someone's disability is by considering the severity of all different impairments they have. For each area where someone has some difficulties in, we have one point, and two points for each area where someone had a lot of difficulty or is unable to perform that activity. The severity index ranges from zero (no disability) to 24.

Volunteering in the UKHLS in Wave10 was measured as giving any unpaid help or working as a volunteer for any type of local, national, or international organisation or charity in past 12 months. To analyse longitudinal trends in volunteering in Waves 8–10 and March 2020 and July 2021 surveys, we used the question: 'And in the last 4 weeks approximately how many hours have you spent doing unpaid or voluntary work for any organisation?' and coded everyone who volunteered at least one hour as a volunteer.

The names of other variables used in the analyses and any other methodological details are available on request from the authors of the report.

APPENDICES

TABLE A1: LOGISTIC REGRESSION ESTIMATES FOR PREDICTORS OF VOLUNTEERING

	VOLUNTEERED IN LAST 12 MONTHS IN WAVE 10 (2018–FEB 2020) ALL ADULTS	
	b	SE
Disabled (vs non-disabled) people	**0.093****	(0.029)
Disability severity index	**-0.19*****	(0.054)
Whether has a specific impairment (vs no impairment in this area)		
Mobility (moving around at home and walking)	-0.18	(0.11)
Lifting, carrying or moving objects	-0.0099	(0.11)
Manual dexterity (using your hands to carry out everyday tasks)	**0.58*****	(0.15)
Continence (bladder and bowel control)	0.26	(0.16)
Hearing (apart from using a standard hearing aid)	0.15	(0.18)
Sight (apart from wearing standard glasses)	0.11	(0.18)
Communication or speech problems	**0.61***	(0.27)
Memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand	**0.58*****	(0.15)
Your physical co-ordination	-0.060	(0.15)
Difficulties with own personal care	0.14	(0.21)
Other health problem or disability	0.30*	(0.12)
Age	0.017	(0.0099)
Age squared	**-0.00020***	(0.000093)
Woman (vs man)	**0.19*****	(0.044)
Marital status (vs married/civil partnership)		
Never married	0.15	(0.11)
Living as couple	**-0.26****	(0.097)
Widowed, divorced, dissolved, separated	0.12	(0.097)
Ethnic group (vs White)		
Mixed	-0.13	(0.20)
Asian	**-0.67*****	(0.15)
Black	0.038	(0.20)
Does not belong to a religion (vs yes)	**-0.34*****	(0.048)
Level of education (vs Less than A levels)		
A levels or higher	**0.74*****	(0.057)
Labour market status (vs. Economically inactive)		
In labour market (self/employed; unemployed)	**-0.48*****	(0.11)
Retired	-0.025	(0.12)

APPENDICES

TABLE A1: DISABILITY AS A PREDICTOR OF VOLUNTEERING: LOGISTIC REGRESSION ESTIMATES (CONTINUED)

	VOLUNTEERED IN LAST 12 MONTHS IN WAVE 10 (2018–FEB 2020) ALL ADULTS	
	b	SE
Number of people in household (1)		
2	-0.11	(0.10)
3	-0.11	(0.11)
4	0.088	(0.12)
5+	0.24	(0.14)
Children under age of 5 in household (no)	**-0.42*** **	(0.11)
Region (London, SE, SW)		
The rest of England	**-0.13***	(0.058)
Wales	**-0.28***	(0.11)
Scotland	**-0.26****	(0.10)
Northern Ireland	**-0.58*** **	(0.12)
Rural area (vs urban)	**0.19*** **	(0.052)
Has not access to a car/var (vs has access)	-0.12	(0.081)
Internet (no access/never use)		
Once a month or less than once a month and several times a month	0.29	(0.16)
Several times a week or often	**0.48*** **	(0.12)
House ownership (Owned outright)		
Owned with mortgage	**-0.16***	(0.066)
Rent: LA or HA	**-0.41*** **	(0.10)
Rent: private or employer	-0.16	(0.099)
Equivalised household income	**0.0000070*** **	(0.000014)
Has social benefit income (vs no social benefit income)	**0.12***	(0.058)
Has not donated money to charity (vs has donated)	**-0.75*** **	(0.063)
Interest level in politics (Not very/not at all		
Fairly/very interested	**0.36*** **	(0.050)
Buckner's Neighborhood Cohesion Instrument (higher index=higher cohesion level)	**0.25*** **	(0.036)
Constant	-2.48***	(0.44)
Observations	27331	

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

APPENDICES

TABLE A2: PREDICTORS OF VOLUNTEERING AMONG DISABLED AND NON-DISABLED PEOPLE: LOGISTIC REGRESSION ESTIMATES

	VOLUNTEERED IN LAST 12 MONTHS IN WAVE 10 (2018–FEB 2020)			
	DISABLED ADULTS		NON-DISABLED ADULTS	
	b	SE	b	SE
Age	0.0041	(0.016)	0.020	(0.014)
Age squared	-0.00015	(0.00014)	-0.00020	(0.00014)
Woman (vs man)	**0.24*** **	(0.072)	**0.12***	(0.059)
Marital status (vs married/civil partnership)				
Never married	0.12	(0.16)	0.20	(0.14)
Living as couple	**-0.44** **	(0.17)	-0.18	(0.12)
Widowed, divorced, dissolved, separated	-0.021	(0.15)	0.22	(0.14)
Ethnic group (vs White)				
Mixed	0.13	(0.33)	-0.37	(0.26)
Asian	**-0.94*** **	(0.21)	**-0.59** **	(0.18)
Black	0.013	(0.22)	0.082	(0.27)
Does not belong to a religion (vs yes)	**-0.37*** **	(0.076)	**-0.31*** **	(0.066)
Level of education (vs Less than A levels)				
A levels or higher	**0.66*** **	(0.087)	**0.83*** **	(0.082)
Labour market status (vs. Economically inactive)				
In labour market (self/employed; unemployed)	-0.17	(0.15)	**-0.62*** **	(0.15)
Retired	0.26	(0.16)	-0.17	(0.17)
Number of people in household (1)				
2	-0.12	(0.15)	-0.069	(0.14)
3	-0.21	(0.18)	-0.026	(0.15)
4	-0.039	(0.19)	0.19	(0.16)
5+	0.045	(0.22)	0.36*	(0.18)
Children under age of 5 in household (no)	-0.21	(0.20)	**-0.48*** **	(0.14)
Region (London, SE, SW)				
The rest of England	-0.029	(0.087)	**-0.22** **	(0.076)
Wales	**-0.39***	(0.16)	-0.21	(0.14)
Scotland	**-0.44** **	(0.14)	-0.20	(0.13)
Northern Ireland	**-0.58** **	(0.20)	**-0.64*** **	(0.15)
Rural area (vs urban)	0.11	(0.083)	**0.26*** **	(0.071)
Has not access to a car/var (vs has access)	-0.16	(0.11)	-0.061	(0.12)

APPENDICES

TABLE A2: PREDICTORS OF VOLUNTEERING AMONG DISABLED AND NON-DISABLED PEOPLE: LOGISTIC REGRESSION ESTIMATES (CONTINUED)

	VOLUNTEERED IN LAST 12 MONTHS IN WAVE 10 (2018–FEB 2020)			
	DISABLED ADULTS		NON-DISABLED ADULTS	
	b	SE	b	SE
Internet (no access/never use)				
Once a month or less than once a month and several times a month	**0.57****	(0.21)	-0.18	(0.26)
Several times a week or often	**0.63*****	(0.15)	0.18	(0.21)
House ownership (Owned outright)				
Owned with mortgage	-0.034	(0.11)	**-0.25****	(0.087)
Rent: LA or HA	**-0.28***	(0.13)	**-0.72*****	(0.17)
Rent: private or employer	-0.19	(0.16)	-0.18	(0.13)
Equivalised household income	**0.0000052***	(0.000025)	**0.0000076*****	(0.000017)
Has social benefit income (vs no social benefit income)	0.049	(0.095)	0.13	(0.072)
Has not donated money to charity (vs has donated)	**-0.73*****	(0.098)	**-0.75*****	(0.083)
Interest level in politics (Not very/not at all				
Fairly/very interested	**0.40*****	(0.081)	**0.33*****	(0.066)
Buckner's Neighborhood Cohesion Instrument (higher index=higher cohesion level)	**0.24*****	(0.054)	**0.27*****	(0.047)
Constant	-1.97**	(0.68)	-2.41***	(0.61)
Observations	10,652		16,517	

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

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23 Pathways through Participation

24 The question asked in the Understanding Society survey was: Here are some statements about feelings and thoughts. Please select the answer that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks: I've been feeling useful. Answer categories: never, rarely, some of the time, often, all of the time. I divided these into 0-never/rarely; 1-other categories.

25 Supported volunteering refers to volunteering opportunities that have specific support structures in place that respond to identified support needs. See www.bhcommunityworks.org.uk/voluntary-sector/volunteering/good-practice-guide/inclusion/supported-volunteering for more details.

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ABOUT SPIRIT OF 2012

Spirit of 2012 was set up by the National Lottery Community Fund as the London 2012 Games legacy funder. It aims to build sustainable social legacies from the inspiration of events, investing in projects that help people become more active, creative and connected. Over the last eight years, Spirit of 2012 has built up a strong evidence base about the power of events to catalyse social change, drawn from its own and others' research and learning from the projects it has funded.

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