

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE VOLUNTEER SUPPORT POT ON GLASGOW 2014 COMMONWEALTH GAMES VOLUNTEERS



A summary report for



Evaluation of the Volunteer Support Pot

Executive Summary

The Volunteer Support Pot (VSP) was created by the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland in 2013 to support volunteers so that they could complete their roles as Clyde-siders or Ceremonies volunteers at the XX Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in July and August 2014. More than 18,000 volunteers, including 12,467 Clyde-siders, helped to contribute to the success of the 'best Games ever'.

However, for some who were selected from the more than 53,000 applicants, their ability to take part and experience the Games as a volunteer was challenged as they faced hardship or exceptional costs associated with rurality, low income, caring responsibilities or disabilities. The VSP was created to allow them access to a contribution of the costs involved. A simple application process, with support and help available, was provided by Volunteer Scotland (VS) and delivered by the VSP team who assessed 2,632 applications and allocated £554,760 providing support for 2,177 individuals.

The Evaluation

In August 2014, VS commissioned the University of Strathclyde to conduct a review of the support provided under the VSP, with three main objectives:

- to review the efficacy of the funding mechanism and the process of distribution of the funds;
- to determine the impact of the VSP; and
- to give guidance and recommendations on the VSP model, including its suitability for future use and how the funding mechanism and impact could be improved.

As well as secondary data and information gathered by the VSP team, the evaluation contacted more than 2,000 beneficiaries receiving 936 responses (44% response rate) through an online survey which asked about their experiences of the support process, the impact of the support provided, and the experience of volunteering roles completed. In addition, 19 recipients who were unable to fulfil their roles were surveyed and across both groups 27 individuals were interviewed by telephone to provide specific insights and experiences.

Applying for support

In total 3,589 payments were made from the VSP, with only 285 (10.8%) applicants being deemed ineligible and a further 240 (14.7%) who cancelled or withdrew mainly before any funding was provided.

This achievement was managed through an application and support process which 90% of survey respondents found convenient. 87% found the application form easy to complete and 85% found communication with the VSP team effective. Indeed, 86% would recommend the use of the VSP in future events in

"I was surprised at how quickly I did it....I think I managed to do it in under 5 minutes!.. in fact once I had done it myself I evangelised about it and told other people and how simple it had been and advised them to do the same!"

Scotland. Together this was testimony to the robust VSP team and the approach developed by VS with the Big Lottery Fund in Scotland.

Helping volunteers to deliver

Volunteering at a major event such as the Commonwealth Games is exceptional. The volunteer makes a substantial commitment of time, delivered mostly during the relatively short and intense period of the Games. In addition, volunteers commit time and other resources to travel, preparation, training and accreditation. Some volunteers also face exceptional costs that the VSP was able to help with.

“The funding allowed me to pay for my disabled son’s care. I would not have been able to volunteer without the funding” (Ceremonies volunteer)

Unlike most volunteering opportunities, the volunteer does not have the option to vary their commitment. A failure to attend on designated dates, for training, to pick up a uniform or to attend a shift generally results in the withdrawal of volunteer status. When applying to volunteer, many of the costs are unknown.

“So originally I planned to put the money by, so that it was in the bank ready and waiting. But then I lost my job ...”

For some individuals, a lot could change during the 18 month period from when applications opened, to delivery of the Games and some volunteers would inevitably experience problems relating to employment, health and relationships.

Individual experience of VSP funding was diverse, ranging from some individuals who gave VSP sole credit for enabling them to volunteer and others insisting that they would have successfully delivered on their volunteering commitment without any VSP funding.

“I would have volunteered regardless and taken the hit on the cost”

Overall, VSP had a positive role in giving volunteers confidence that they could complete their role for the Games. While, only 1 in 8 (12%) of those supported suggested that they would have withdrawn without support from the VSP, a further 51% reported that they would have been confident in fulfilling only part of their roles – which was not an option open to volunteers.

Helping to generate a volunteer legacy

“It was one of the most awe inspiring experiences I’ve ever done. It was just out of this world. The people I’d met, the different walks of life all coming together for one final big impact at Hampden, it was really out of this world! Such a good exercise for having to deal with different people, different walks of life, people with disabilities, people needing help to continue, it was just like pulling together as one big family.” (Ceremonies volunteer)

Being a volunteer at the Games was for many a special opportunity, both as an event volunteer and to be part of the Games themselves. Many of those supported talked about the people they met, the skills and experience gained, the opportunities provided, and the confidence gained by the experience.

And the telling evidence was that 58% of respondents thought their experience would be likely to increase their commitment to volunteering and 38% continuing to be committed at the same level. This was true even from those who were already involved in volunteering before taking part in the Games – and was even more evident amongst the ‘novice’ volunteers.

Amongst the committed volunteers, 52% indicated that they were likely to do more, with the most common aspects being applying to be part of another major event (21%), getting involved in a local sport or sport club (18%) or involvement in a local event (18%).

For the novice volunteers, the Games experience without exception left them re-defining their relationship with volunteering. This group did not see their general volunteering as supporting local sports clubs, being more inspired by volunteering at another major event (20%) or volunteering in their local community (10%).

Efficacy and impact

Key factors influencing the impact of the VSP on volunteers included the individual circumstances of the applicant highlighted above, the funding structure of VSP (comprising three separate funds), and the principles applied to allocating funding.

Although presented as a single fund, VSP was in reality made up of three separate funds supporting different groups of Games volunteers. The initial fund (VSP1) providing £425,000 from Big Lottery Scotland was directed to supporting Clyde-siders from Scotland. This was later supplemented with £100,000 to support Clyde-siders from the rest of the UK (VSP2, also from Big Lottery Fund) and by a fund to support Ceremonies volunteers (VSP3) from the Spirit of 2012 Trust. Each sought to help address hardship on the basis of need, using largely the same criteria.

The impact of the funds varied. Most volunteers supported under VSP1 (77%) and VSP3 (89%), reported that the VSP support had a major or significant impact on their ability to volunteer. All of these beneficiaries received at least 50% of the amount they requested, and many – especially at Games time – received all the support requested.

The impact of VSP2 was different. With less funding available in relation to demand, support was allocated on a discretionary basis in terms of a contribution rather than proportional amount. This meant that 54% of beneficiaries received less than £50 (although some also got accommodation provided) and few received more than £250. For this group, the impact was less, with only 26% indicating that the VSP support had a significant or major impact, and with 58% suggesting they were confident they could have fulfilled their roles without the funding.

Three factors have been identified contributing to this variation:

- there was insufficient funding available to meet the overall demand for target groups outside of Scotland, especially as these Clyde-siders were likely to have higher travel and accommodation costs;
- the allocation mechanism used to support Clyde-siders in the rest of the UK was different to that already in use in Scotland as part of the earlier funding stream; and

- whereas the allocations made to Clyde-siders from Scotland were proportional to the amount requested, the allocations to the rest of the UK was unrelated to the costs likely to be incurred, but fixed by the type of need (e.g. low income, caring).

Where volunteers were offered small amounts of money in comparison to the total cost of Games volunteering, this had limited impact. For most Clyde-siders based outside Scotland a contribution of £30, based on an assessment of need relating to distance from the Games, was too small to have much impact.

The presentation of the VSP as a single fund raised expectations and meant that during the Games, volunteers were unable to understand the different levels of support provided, which exacerbated a sense of low impact.

“[I received] a very small proportion [of my overall costs]. I’m very very grateful, but there were several people I spoke to during the Games who received considerably more than me, and I don’t understand why they got it and I didn’t.... but I didn’t query it either, I was just grateful that I got it”
(Clyde-sider)

What worked well?

One of the key strengths of the VSP process was the straightforward and simple process of application. The online application process was convenient and the application form was easy to complete. The support provided by the VSP team and their effectiveness in communicating with applicants and recipients was highly commended. Overall, the application process and the associated support mechanisms were very efficiently delivered by a small team of only 3 (full time equivalent) staff within VS for a low management fee to a much larger than expected number of applicants.

Could it have worked better?

Key decisions were made in the operation of the VSP which reduced both its impact and its effectiveness as a fair and transparent process. Recognising that providing only a very small sum was likely to have negligible impact, the retention of the principle to support all eligible applicants (as applied to VSP2), significantly reduced the impact overall. A more targeted approach based on meeting a proportion of costs – used in VSP1 and VSP3 – would have greatly increased the overall impact for those supported.

Such an approach would also have had the additional benefit of enabling more transparent and consistent communication to all beneficiaries of the basis on which they received support and how the funding was allocated.

Conclusions on the VSP Model.....

Five principles were important in developing the VSP approach and the way in which it supported volunteers:

1. applicants had already been selected for a volunteering role at the Games;
2. financial support was targeted to specific areas of need to tackle barriers which might prevent individuals completing their role;
3. individual applicants made the case for support;
4. funding was provided on a discretionary basis, being assessed in terms of four areas of need; and

5. funding was provided on the basis of 'trust' that it would be used to help the volunteer to be involved without auditing or accountability of expenditure.

The evaluation of the evidence gathered about the VSP model as a process of providing support and the impact of this support on volunteering at the Glasgow 2014 Games suggests that:

- the creation of a novel way to provide support, based on trust and a discretionary fund has considerable merit, with the approach devised and administered by the VSP team being strongly endorsed by the recipients;
- VSP achieved its primary objective of helping those volunteers with specific needs to continue to fulfil their roles and to gain from the experience of being part of this major event;
- the approach taken to support Clyde-siders from the rest of the UK was not very effective, with too little targeting of support to those where funding would have greatest impact, and
- improvements could be made around transparency – at the application stage in terms of assessment criteria, in relation to the allocation mechanism used, and in the differences which were required within the VSP.

The experience of the VSP in 2014 suggests that with adjustments and an appreciation of the specific contexts of each event, the model has the potential for use at future events – and this is likely to be welcomed by volunteers. It is also possible to envisage this approach being adapted to help support volunteering at small events, including extending the approach to help recruit volunteers as well as retain them.

In contrast, however, given the specific nature of event volunteering it will be more challenging to find the appropriate conditions which would allow the VSP approach to have wider applicability to other areas of volunteering.