

Reimagining Volunteering, The Role of 'Community Helpers'

In the context of the King's Coronation

A toolkit for volunteering organisations
to use to mobilise '**Community Helpers**'



Introduction to this toolkit

We received funding from Spirit of 2012 to understand how people across the UK help out in their local community, especially in the context of national moments like the King's Coronation.

We wanted to explore what 'helping out' looks like from the experience of those taking part in it, and what can be done to encourage more people to get involved.

This toolkit is relevant for three key reasons:

1. The legacy of the pandemic and Cost of Living crisis:

Informal volunteering rose to prominence during the pandemic. Millions of people stepped up to help others in the form of hyper local support networks and we're continuing to see a need for this because of the Cost of Living crisis.

2. Decline of formal volunteers:

The rate of people formally volunteering has been declining. Volunteering organisations are having to think about how they can get more people to give their time, and to think of different ways to recruit volunteers.

3. National moments:

Key national moments are heavily reliant on volunteers to be successful. They're often inherently place based and are open to anyone in the community to participate in.

This toolkit is designed for organisations that use and recruit volunteers. To support you to breathe fresh life into your volunteer recruitment strategies and to motivate and mobilise those seeking to help out in their communities.

It aims to help you take stock of how you are currently recruiting volunteers and encourages you to take the learnings from a national moment like the Coronation to support your organisation.

About this toolkit

This toolkit has been developed with people who help in their community and have helped out in a national moment like the King's Coronation.

We captured the perspective of **those already participating in helping out in their community, those aspiring to do so and also people who were formally volunteering for a charity or organisation.**

This is an easy to use resource that can inform your recruitment strategies, help facilitate workshops or be used as a conversation starter for your team or other partners in the sector.



Introduction

Did you know that there is a huge underutilised helpforce of two types of volunteers?

1. **'Community helpers'**, people who already contribute and help out in their community in an ad hoc way
2. **'Community helper aspirers'**, people that aspire to help out in their community, perhaps have done so in the past, but aren't yet currently.

Our research has discovered that there are far fewer formal volunteers when compared to community helpers and aspirers.

So, these two helper categories are making up the bulk of the helpforce, rather than formal volunteers.

Did you also know that these helpers make up the majority of the helpforce for some national moments?

- Over 80% of those who helped at either the Coronation or the Big Help Out were community helpers or community helper aspirants.
- By comparison formal volunteers made up 11.6% of the Coronation helpforce and 13.7% of the BHO helpforce.

Given the decline in formal volunteers taking part in national or regular events, Community Helpers can make up that shortfall. But, in order for them to do so we need to know how to attract and mobilise these Community Helpers.

So, we have developed **5 key pillars** that organisations using volunteers can adhere to, in order to attract and mobilise community helpers:

We will explore these 5 key pillars in detail now, that can form the framework for you to reimagine how to harness local support for your organisation.

1 Lean into place based opportunities

2 Focus on what motivates people to help out

3 Mitigate the barriers that prevent people from helping out

4 Diversify communications methods

5 Make use of formal volunteers skills and experience

1. Lean into place based opportunities

Interestingly, we discovered that helping out has a positive relationship with a sense of belonging. Current community helpers, aspirants and also formal volunteers strongly relate to feelings of belonging to their local area.

Many Community Helpers reflected similar sentiments of: **"This is my area, I was born and bred here. Whatever I can do for the area, I'd love to"**.
(Man, Community Helper, Shaw)

By comparison, those not interested in helping out in their local area are **not as likely to feel a sense of belonging to their local area.**

A strong explanation for this is that people's greater sense of belonging is one of the reasons that makes them want to help out, especially in tight knit communities.

This means that feeling a sense of belonging is an **important motivator** for people to want to get involved in helping out locally.



Case Study: Sophie, Community Helper, Water Orton

Sophie moved to her village about 10 years ago. **The area has a really nice feel to it because everyone knows everyone.**

She set up a village choir about 1 year ago because it's something she enjoys, but also because she wanted to do something positive in her community. The choir now has 45 members, every member lives in the area.

It has become more than a choir, it has become an outlet for them to do something positive in the community.

Recently they raised £1,500 for a local school that needed support. They also supported the King's Coronation street party by performing a song. Also, a lot of the members helped it in other ways, like supporting in the set up of the event, providing food and inviting others in the community to help out.

Ultimately, in their tight knit community the choir contributes to people feeling a stronger sense of belonging.



How to lean into community based opportunities:

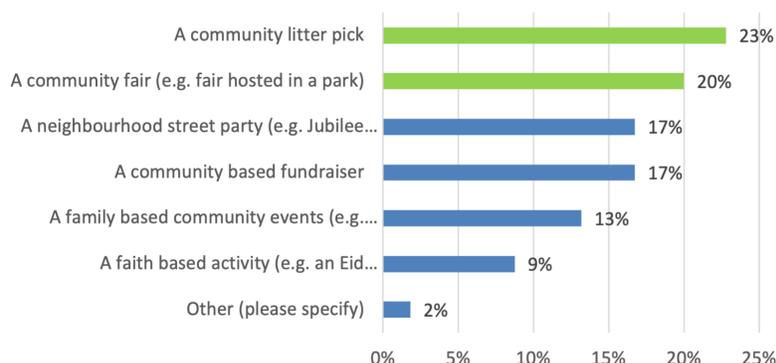
Helping out has a positive relationship with a sense of belonging. So, local place based opportunities are likely to be a significant enabler to get

people involved in helping out, especially within tight knit communities.

For instance, we found that **Community Litter Picks** were the most common activity for people to want to help out at, as they provide an opportunity to do something positive in the community and contribute to their place.

In order to lean into place based opportunities volunteering organisations should:

Which events are respondents most likely to help out at?



- 1. Ensure that your opportunities have a place based element to appeal to those who want to connect with their community.**
- 2. Utilise hyper local networks for recruitment,** or individuals who are strongly embedded in the area to reach out to those aspiring to help out.
- 3. When advertising opportunities focus on how it is likely to help or support the local area.** It will motivate more people to help out.

Things to think about:

1. What role does your organisation currently play in local communities?
2. How can you play more of a role in local communities through your volunteering opportunities?
3. How are you collaborating with other local organisations?
4. How many local channels or hyper local networks are you connected to?
5. Are there opportunities for you to review your current comms and marketing strategy?

2. Focus on what motivates people to help out

People’s motivations to help out are not always altruistic, they need to find it rewarding to get involved. Fundamentally, it has to benefit those participating in it as well as those receiving help.

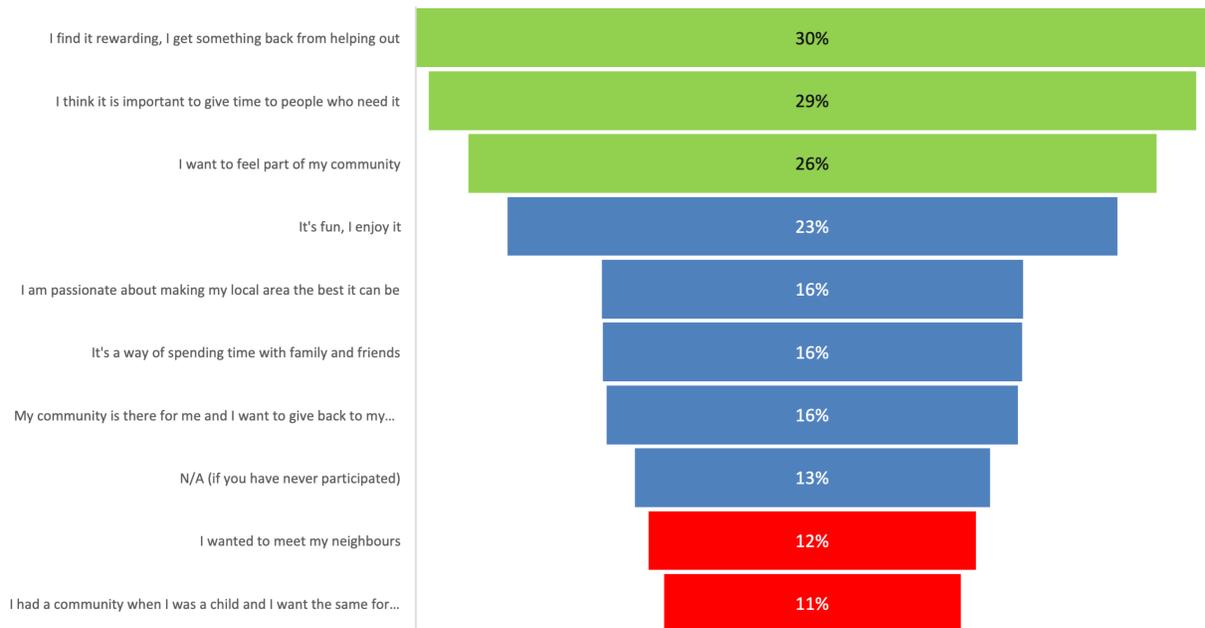
“There has to be a reward for everything that you do. I’m part of a church band and my reward is giving back to God. There always has to be some sense of reward and that doesn’t have to be financial.”

(Man, Formal Volunteer, Wythenshawe)

Helping out is also about **having fun**, helpers want to enjoy what they’re doing and they are more likely to take part if they’re going to have fun doing it.

Other common motivators relate to wanting **to feel part of and giving back to the community**. As well as wanting **to give back to others who need it**, so they feel like they are getting involved in something that is **rewarding**.

Why do people help out in their local areas?



Case Study: Farah, Formal Volunteer, London

Farah received a Cancer diagnosis about 6 years ago.

She was in hospital for a long time and felt really supported by hospital staff and other patients.

She is now fortunately in remission. But, when she was in Hospital somebody said to her when you're better you'll be able to support other people who are going through something similar. You'll be able to relate to them, feel a sense that you're giving back, but also get something positive out of it yourself.

This is what she does now, she supports Cancer fundraising events but she also supports people that have just received a Cancer diagnosis to know what to expect. It's something that she'll keep doing forever because of the positive effect it's had on her and the people she has been helping.



How to motivate people to help out:

People are most likely to give their time to something that they find rewarding and for an initiative or activity that they will get something positive out of.

In order to motivate more Community Helpers volunteering organisations should:

1. **Root people's motivations into the development and delivery of opportunities.** Ensure that you're always listening to what participants want to get out of these opportunities, especially as opportunities/events change or alter overtime.
2. **When advertising opportunities highlight these key motivations.** Share the clear benefits that

participants will receive, as well as how their time will be used valuably.

3. **Always remember that participants want to have fun** and their motivations aren't always altruistic, so ensure that their perspective is at the forefront.



Things to think about:

1. How are you positioning your opportunities for people to help out at?
2. What are your expectations for people who can help out and how does that match with their expectations?
3. How flexible is your offering, are you able to give people different options to get involved in helping out?
4. Have you asked people what is motivating them to help out?
5. Can you use people's motivations to help out as hooks, in the development of opportunities?

3. Be flexible, accommodate those who don't want to commit

We found that over half of respondents want to help out when they can but not regularly. People are happy to give some of their time, but they don't want to make huge commitments.

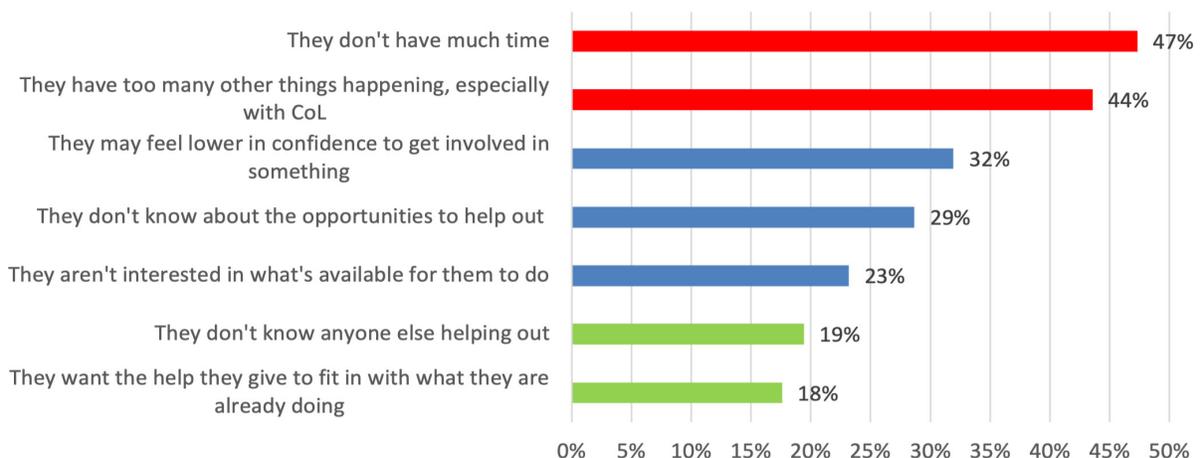
In fact, lack of time and other conflicting priorities are huge barriers that prevent people from helping out.

“Time is the ultimate gift, once you give it, you can't give it back.”
(Man, Formal Volunteer, Wales)

This is especially true at the moment due to **conflicting priorities and the squeeze caused by the CoL crisis**, which has made helping out without financial compensation difficult.

With this need for flexibility, people's volunteering journeys are not always linear; they don't always want to work their way up the ladder to gain more responsibility, skills or experience and volunteering organisations need to be accommodating of that.

What do people think the biggest barriers to helping out locally are?



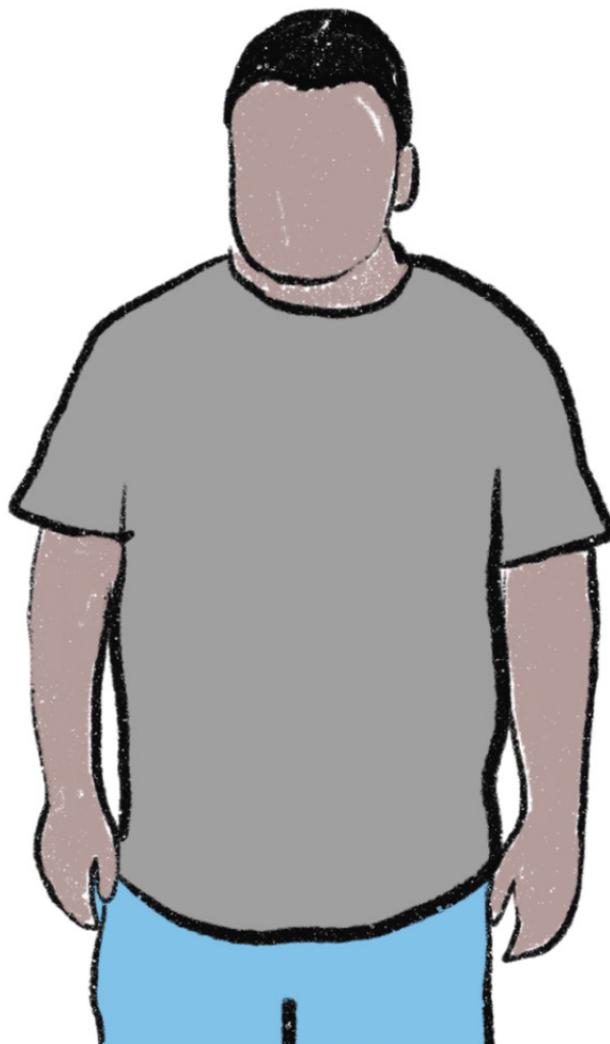
Case Study: Omar, Community Helper, Shaw

Omar has three kids and a full time job. At the moment he's really busy and his main priority is supporting his family.

He is happy to give some of his time as and when he can, especially if it's for something that he cares about or that his kids can get involved in.

But, he doesn't want to be overly committed when it comes to helping out.

He's helped out a few times, like for the Eid event in the park where he brought food and drink, which he really enjoyed doing, but for him that's enough. He just doesn't have the time to be organising events or for it to become a regular thing in his life.



How to be flexible to those who don't want to commit:

For those who want to help out, flexibility is key and the way that volunteering infrastructure is set up needs to be accommodating of that.

In order to accommodate this need for flexibility volunteering organisations should be mindful to:



1. **Set up timetables and structures that allow people to fit helping out into their schedules.** I.e. they don't have to help out on the same day every week or an initiative or organisation for a set amount of time.
2. You can **over recruit** community helpers so that your event is well supported by those who are motivated to help out in an ad hoc way.
3. From the outset ensure that **community helpers are clear on their roles and what they are offering** so they don't feel that their time is being wasted.
4. You don't have to factor in giving community helpers more **responsibility, skills or experience** as they are likely to **not want to work their way up the volunteer ladder.**

Things to think about:

1. How is your current volunteering infrastructure set up?
2. What support are you offering for community helpers to get involved and how can that benefit them?
3. How much commitment are you requiring of people to get involved?
4. What things need to stay the same, and what can change?
5. What could the benefits be for your organisation in shifting how your volunteering infrastructure is set up?

4. Diversify communications methods

There are lots of fantastic opportunities to help out and many platforms that host and advertise them. **However, a huge barrier that prevents people from helping out is simply not knowing about the opportunities.**

"In my Church we have a great platform to disseminate opportunities for people to help out, but a lot of people aren't aware of that."

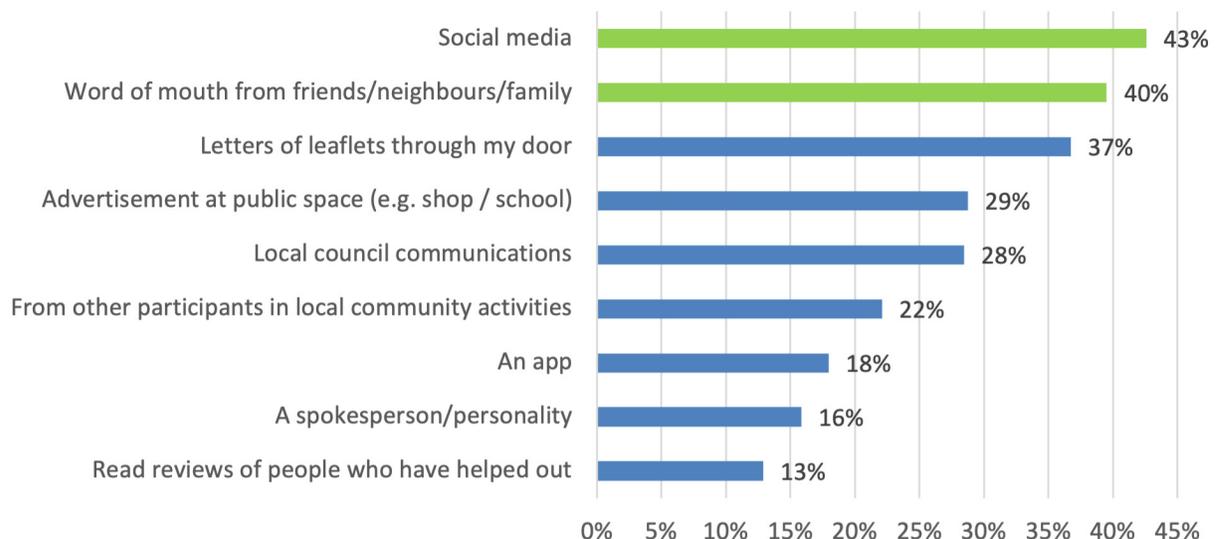
(Man, Community Helper, Birmingham)

Social media was noted as the best way to find out about opportunities like neighbourhood communications groups on Whatsapp or Facebook. Especially to get the younger generation involved.

Others reflected on the power of word of mouth through friends, family or neighbours.

Tools like leaflets or flyers being posted through people's doors or hung up in community spaces were also seen as valuable.

What is the best way for respondents to hear about opportunities to help in their local communities?



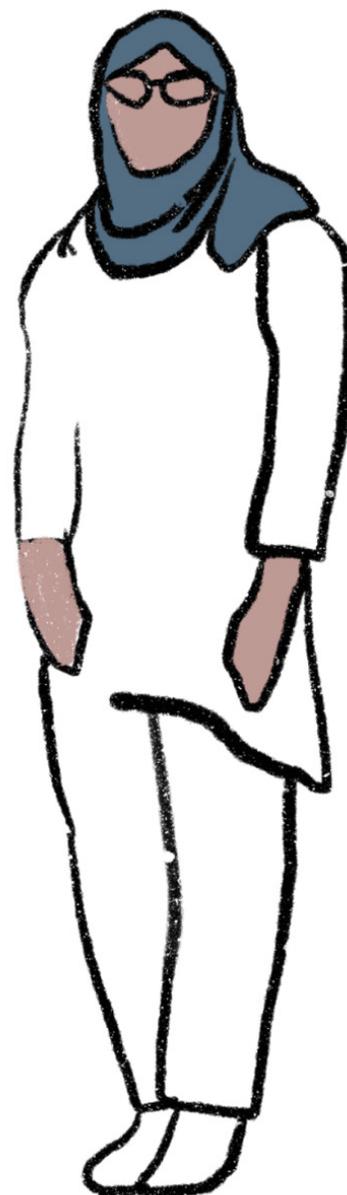
Case Study: Maryam, Community Helper, London

Maryam lives in quite a tight knit community in London. Her community is based on an estate where everybody sort of knows everyone, and they regularly do events or activities in the park around the corner.

The community really came together through Covid, a lot of them went through hard times so they supported each other.

Her upstairs neighbour Phyliss, was the one that really instigated all of this. She started a neighbourhood WhatsApp group, so now anything good or bad that's happening within the community gets posted on the WhatsApp chat, so no one ever really goes through something alone.

Recently, they had a Coronation street event, again that was instigated by Phyliss, but everyone got involved bringing food, drinks, seating and the music of course. It turned out to be a really good day with a huge turnout mainly supported by the WhatsApp group and then just word of mouth.



How to diversify communications methods:

Given the large proportion of people who are prevented from helping out because of not knowing where to look for opportunities it is integral that volunteering organisations have a diverse strategy to reach out to people.

To diversify their communications methods volunteering organisations should:

1. **Utilise multiple forms of social media.** Advertise opportunities on Instagram and Facebook that many people will use, especially young people.
2. **Make use of communications platforms, like Whatsapp.** Either by encouraging people to set up neighbourhood communications groups, or identify key people in an area to advertise opportunities on their neighbourhood groups.

3. **Connect into hyperlocal groups or community organisations to encourage communication via word of mouth.**

4. **Develop leaflets or flyers** for these events or opportunities to put through people's letterboxes. Or place them in community spaces like Supermarkets, Post-Offices or Parks.



Things to think about:

1. What communications platforms are you relying on, are there other platforms you could be using to reach out to people?
2. Are you relying on people to find you, or do you have an outreach strategy?
3. Have you identified any champions or key groups to share your opportunities?
4. Are you using leaflets and flyers to advertise opportunities?
5. Are you using everyday spaces like supermarkets, faith spaces, parks, to help reach out more diverse communities?

5. Make use of formal volunteers skills and experience

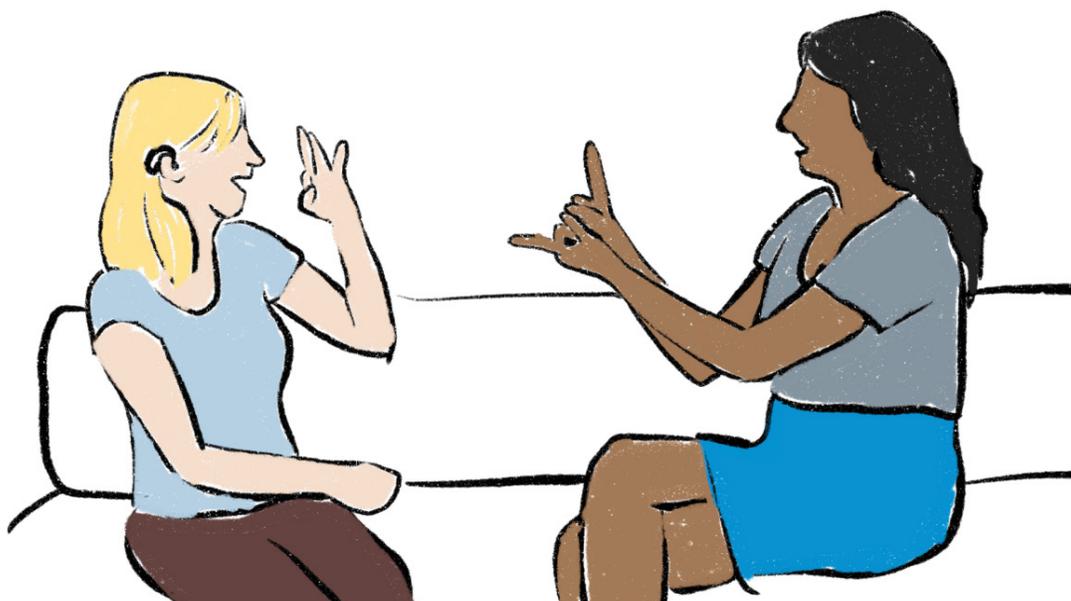
Although, there are a far larger number of informal volunteers that help out in their communities and for national moments.

Formal volunteers remain an integral part of volunteering infrastructure and volunteer recruitment strategies.

Formal volunteers are far more likely to want to work their way up the volunteering ladder, to develop new skills, take on more responsibility and to take on a larger time commitment.

They are also likely to have a huge passion or interest in the event or cause to want to give a portion of their time towards it.

Without formal volunteers an event or opportunity is likely to suffer, as formal volunteers are more able to take on more responsibility, including more of a managerial role. By having both community helpers and formal volunteers, events are likely to be well managed, and also have enough people contributing.



Case Study: Ben, Formal Volunteer, Whythenshaw

Ben helps to run a homelessness hub at the local church. He works part time so he is able to contribute quite a lot of time to support at the hub.

They support about five people a week, helping them to find shelter/ accommodation, access to food and any practical support that they might need like debt advice or support to find work or additional skills.

There are a few other people that help out at the church but because of his time and relative experience, **Ben has been able to take on a more managerial role**, to keep the hub running and ensure that they are supporting enough people.



How to make use of formal volunteers skills

There is massive value in community helpers, but there is also huge value in formal volunteers from a managerial perspective.



So we believe that volunteering organisations should cater to both community helpers and formal volunteers in their management structures by:

1. **Developing a two tier structure** when it comes to your volunteer helpforce. With formal volunteers taking on the more managerial roles and community helpers providing a support function.
2. Focus your recruitment strategy on a **smaller number of formal volunteers and a larger number of community helpers**. So that you have less people taking on large commitments and ultimately a more balanced helpforce.
3. **Dedicate your recruitment of formal volunteers to those who want to work their way up the volunteer ladder**. Those who are able to take on more time, responsibility and want to build up their skillset to support your organisation or event.

Things to think about:

1. How often do you check in with your volunteers and their specific needs?
2. How much are you supporting them with their aspirations for working their way up the volunteer ladder?
3. Are there ways to encourage your volunteers to engage with and support those currently or aspiring to help out?
4. What would your ultimate support structure look like from volunteers and to volunteers?

National Moments

A focal point for helping out

National moments are an interesting lens to discover how people are helping out in communities.

They are often heavily reliant on volunteers to be successful whether that be formal or informal volunteers.

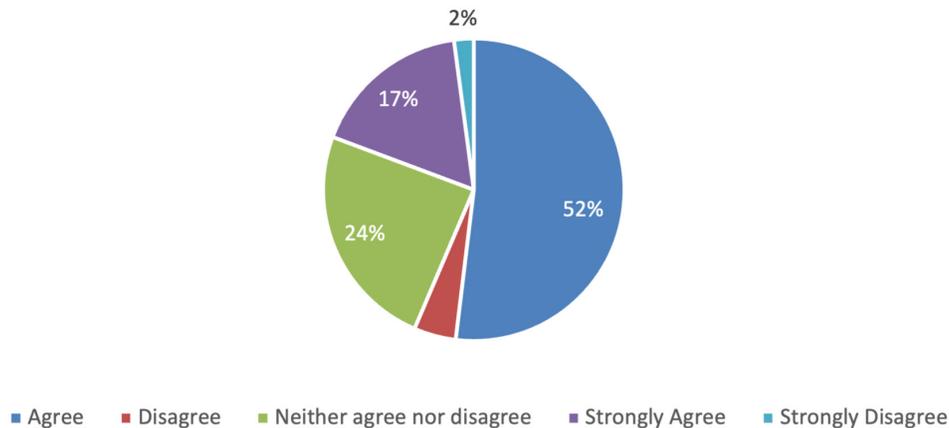
They are also usually place based, hosted in one location or tied to our experiences as a community or nation. They can also be a catalyst for people to get involved in helping out especially for a short period of time.

The majority of people do feel that big national moments are a good focal point to get people involved in helping out.

However, for most it's not about the national moment, it's about using it as an excuse to get people together and to create a platform for people to help out.

As well as meeting new people in the area, contributing to people's sense of belonging to the community.

"Big National moments are an important focal point to encourage people to get involved in things happening locally and helping out"



Case Study: Linda, Community Helper, Caerphilly

Linda helps out at the Community Workmen's Hall, **for the Coronation they put on a community event.** Reflecting on the event, it was an **amazing day.**

Even though the event was for the King's Coronation it was about **more than that.** It was about celebrating the Hall which is now in its centennial year. They were able to raise funds for the Hall and made people aware of what they're offering there.

Most importantly people across the community had the chance to come together.

The youngest person there was 1 and the oldest was 97. The younger people were chatting with older groups. People were sharing their stories, **one person was even reflecting on having seen Queen Elizabeth's Coronation.**

You could see the happiness and the joy in the room, she thinks it'll be something that no one will forget.



How to make use of national moments:

As we know community helpers and aspirers made up the **bulk of the helpforce** for the King's Coronation and the Big Help Out, ultimately contributing hugely to a historic national moment.

This shows that, if event organisers **focus on recruiting these types of helpers**, they will find it easier to fill their quotas. Volunteering organisations can use the learnings of this national moment in their own work by:

1. That **everyone has a part to play in national moments**, people can get involved across the volunteering spectrum. From ad hoc informal support to more involved formal volunteering.
2. Organisers can ask for a **little bit from everyone** rather than a **lot from a few people**.
3. Organisers can be working **across local communities** including the VCSFE sector, local government and businesses to promote and play a role in supporting national moments.
4. Organisers can harness the power of national moments to **bring people together** and feel a sense of community to encourage more people to help out.

Things to think about:

1. What can your organisation learn from the way in which community helpers mobilised for the Coronation, to form part of your volunteer recruitment and engagement strategy?
2. How can you leverage national moments to focus on communities and bring people together?
3. What assets in your organisation or community can be used to host national moments?
4. How can you motivate those who may not be interested in national moments, like the Coronation, to see it as an opportunity to help out in their community?

Thank you

To get in touch and hear more about how you or your organisation can make use of these insights please email:

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