

**VOLUNTARY  
NORFOLK**

# NORFOLK VISION FOR VOLUNTEERING

**2023-2026**

**Empowering  
Communities**  
Connect • Collaborate • Champion



Lucy Hogg (Voluntary Norfolk, Director of VCSE Sector Support)  
Nicky Stainton (Voluntary Norfolk, Communities Manager)

Summer 2023

# INTRODUCTION

*Everyone's  
volunteering  
journey is unique  
and their  
motivations  
different, but the  
impact they have  
is universal,  
improving lives and  
building stronger  
communities.*

Alan Hopley - CEO of  
Voluntary Norfolk

Norfolk has a rich heritage of people helping each other and engaging in community life. Over the last few years this has been tested due to global and national circumstances and the people of Norfolk have stepped up in extraordinary numbers and a myriad of ways. They have been supported to do so by the enormous range of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations of all sizes that, increasingly, work together for the common good.<sup>1</sup>

But volunteering is changing, and organisations will need to adapt. Looking forward, there is a unique opportunity to build on our strengths, share recent lessons learned, and find new ways of working together to build more resilient, connected and inclusive communities.

1) Estimated approximately 10,000 VCSE organisations in Norfolk – 3500 registered charities and social enterprises and approximately 6500 'under the radar' groups which do not need to register with the Charity Commission.





# WHY IS VOLUNTEERING IMPORTANT?

Volunteers are the life blood of communities of both place and interest. As advocates for, and stakeholders in their communities, volunteers help those in need and bind together Norfolk's communities.

There is a tendency, in our society, for people to become trapped in age 'bubbles' and bubbles of the like-minded. Volunteering is one way to break out of that.\*

It is the best thing for your mental health and wellbeing.\*

Volunteering can benefit and enrich everyone:

- the individuals who give their time, energy and skills
- not-for-profit and VCSE organisations and their beneficiaries
- society as a whole

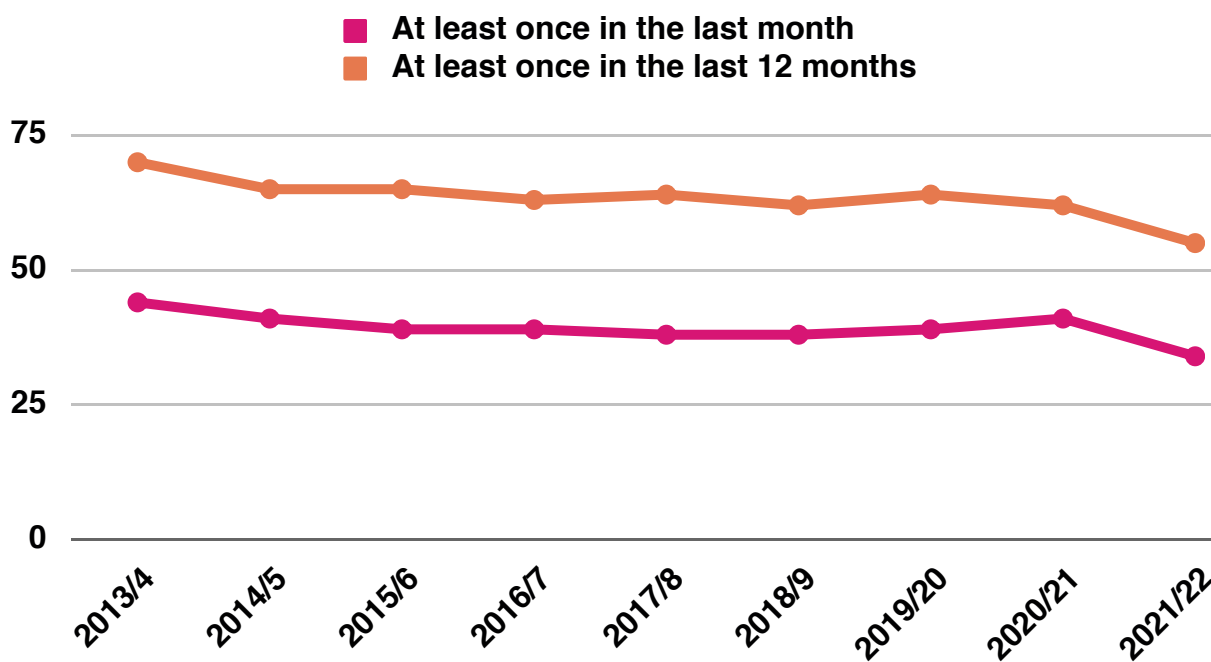
\* Quotations are taken from responses to Norfolk Volunteering Strategy survey 2022

## WHY IS VOLUNTEERING IMPORTANT?

However, the future of volunteering, which adds over £18 billion to the UK economy annually,<sup>1</sup> depends on the enrichment, enjoyment and commitment of the people who give their time, energy and skills for free, in whatever context. And their ongoing support cannot be taken for granted.

Over the past ten years there has been a steady decline in volunteering year on year, apart from a short-lived peak in response to the COVID pandemic, with the sharpest decline in the last year, which saw a 7% drop.<sup>2</sup> In terms of formal volunteering this translates to a reduction of £31 million a year for Norfolk.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there is recent evidence that the average number of hours being given by volunteers has reduced significantly.

### Participation in any kind of volunteering<sup>4</sup>



1) Research in 2022 conducted by the Centre of Economics and Business Research calculated that the annual value of formal volunteering (through a group, club, or organisation) to the UK economy was £18.7bn.

2) Community Life Survey 2021/22.

3) Estimate based on this pattern of decline against the Norfolk population total – a drop from volunteer time worth £105M in 2013/14 to £74M in 2021/22

4) Data from Department for Culture, Media & Sport - Community Life Survey 2021/22

---

# HOW IS VOLUNTEERING CHANGING?

There has been much research at national and regional levels highlighting the decline in overall volunteer numbers and the changing patterns of volunteer engagement.

Driven largely by generational changes, as older volunteers who stepped back during the pandemic have not returned, there have also been wider societal, technological, and economic changes, greatly accelerated by the pandemic and cost of living crisis.

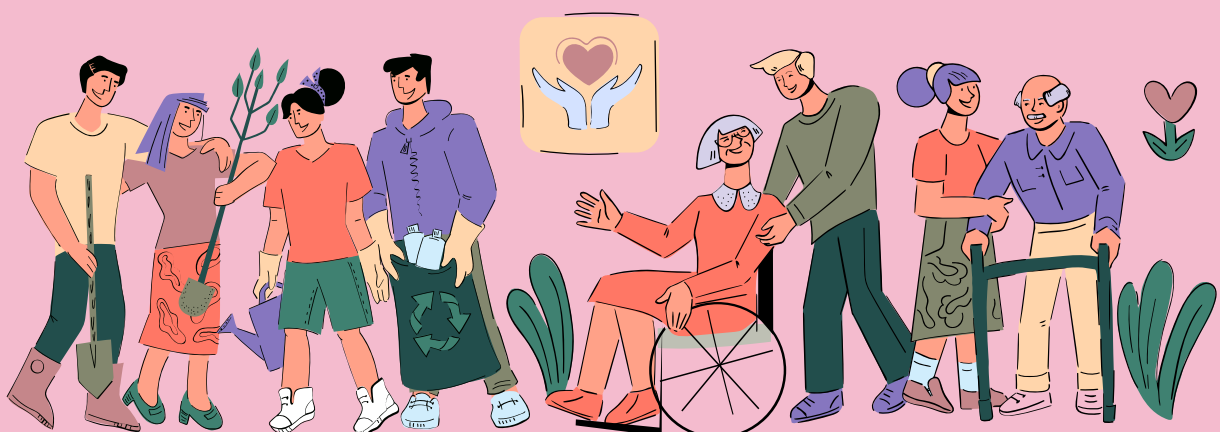
To establish a picture of the true situation in the county, Voluntary Norfolk led a research programme which drew on the experiences of almost 500 people.<sup>1</sup>

---

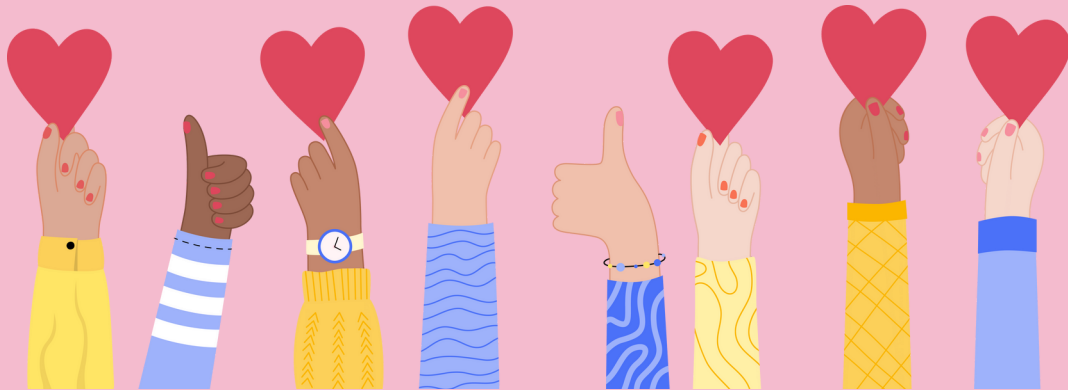
1) The main countywide survey results can be found in the [Volunteering in Norfolk Discussion Paper](#) and more detailed results in this [2022 PowerPoint presentation](#). [Developing Volunteering in Great Yarmouth](#) reports on research carried out during March 2023.

The main themes that emerged were -

- Organisations of all sizes were struggling to fill volunteer vacancies, with larger bodies particularly affected
- Retention of volunteers had been a challenge
- Volunteer 'burn-out' was aggravated by depleted numbers and the challenges of recruitment
- Younger people seem willing to get involved, but their availability, motivations, concerns and interests need to be better recognised
- Less formal and more flexible ways of volunteering have increased in appeal and reach
- Hyper-local volunteering has increased recently
- Demand for volunteers in the health and care system, community resilience and rapid response services, and other statutory bodies has increased



# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



I volunteered as a bridge to getting paid work after a period of sickness. I always wanted to return to work and needed to rebuild my confidence to re-enter the workplace.

Social media has also become increasingly important for communicating messages and community engagement, but we risk some people being left behind, particularly those in our most marginalised and disadvantaged communities, who may struggle to access information and services online.

Not all VCSE organisations have experienced these challenges, with grassroots and more responsive and user-led organisations bucking the trend. There are many examples of good practice in Norfolk which can be shared and built on.

We have also seen a rapid increase in the digitisation of services – and we have seen some volunteer-involving organisations respond well to this challenge, moving services online, adapting quickly and creating remote roles for volunteers.

”

BUILD have the ideal model of volunteering with their signing you up to volunteer per activity. It allows me to make it work around me where previous organisations had asked for too much commitment. It means I have stayed a volunteer for a lot longer than I may have.


”

# WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON THE VCSE SECTOR?


The decline in volunteering capacity is perhaps the biggest challenge that we have ever seen – and it calls for a decisive response.

It comes at a time when society's values and expectations of social justice and equity, particularly amongst younger people, are changing. To stay relevant, and to engage with a much wider demographic of volunteers, 'business as usual' is no longer an option for the VCSE sector.

It is also a time of increasing strain on all funding streams and greater competition for available resources. The squeeze on income, including individual donations from personal giving, combined with increased costs and overheads is impacting on VCSE organisations' resources. The current challenges of filling staffing roles adds to capacity issues in delivering services and the ability to invest in volunteer support and training. Working together more effectively with stakeholders and across the sector will become a more pressing necessity so that we can be smarter with the resources we have.

A decorative quote box with a dark grey border and rounded corners. It features two large, stylized quotation marks at the top left and two at the bottom right. The text inside is centered and in a dark grey font.

Organisations need more access to funding to support volunteers and management of volunteers

A decorative quote box with a dark grey border and rounded corners. It features two large, stylized quotation marks at the top left and two at the bottom right. The text inside is centered and in a dark grey font.

It feels like we are just getting back on our feet and just getting volunteers returning to us after covid. These (increasing diversity and accessibility) are things we would like to do, but practically there are other things we need to do first



# A VISION FOR VOLUNTEERING IN NORFOLK

Our vision is of a county where volunteering flourishes and is supported by vibrant communities and a resilient VCSE sector. A place where everyone volunteers at multiple points in their lifetime and where opportunities are flexible and accessible, and volunteers thrive.

A county able to realise the huge well-being benefits that residents derive from volunteering, enabling stronger more equitable communities and bringing much needed support to those in need, and local charitable and social causes.



---

# WHAT CHANGE IS NEEDED?

To achieve this, we need to challenge our attitudes about who volunteering is for, and what volunteering can deliver.

We need to better understand and respond to volunteer needs and expectations so that everyone can access volunteer opportunities that suit their life. That needs to involve investment in different engagement strategies that bring down the barriers to volunteer recruitment, and appropriate levels of support, training and reward that keeps them engaged. There also needs to be support and guidance to enable volunteer-involving organisations to learn from each other and work together in more creative, cooperative, and innovative ways.

There is much good practice in Norfolk to build on. An increasing number of employers are introducing schemes to support employees to volunteer during their working hours as a way of carrying out their corporate social responsibility.

Volunteering is being widely promoted for improved mental health and wellbeing. Environmental-focused groups are seeing increased support. Good quality online training opportunities are available for volunteer induction and training. Younger people are initiating their own values-led groups and projects. 'Buddy' schemes and ways of building social CVs support those new to volunteering and those trying volunteering as a way to better health or employment.

Volunteering is at a crossroads; there is an urgent need to look at things differently - to work together as partners and stakeholders to build more inclusive and capable communities.





## WHERE DO WE NEED TO BE BY 2026?

- Volunteers, including those in governance roles, are people of all ages, abilities, ethnicities, genders, and backgrounds, who gain mutual benefit by contributing their lived experience and unique perspective to enrich community life.
- The particular skills, interests and motivations of volunteers is recognised and supported so that they can play to their strengths and get satisfaction from their volunteering.
- VCSE organisations are well resourced for their key role in understanding the motivations, needs and interests of all volunteers.
- There are flexible ways to volunteer including remote and in-person opportunities, including through employer supported schemes.
- Volunteers are celebrated and recognised in ways that match their motivations e.g. awards, merchandise, networking events.
- Volunteering is recognised by stakeholders as a key stepping stone into work, with investment in VCSE sector skills pathways.
- A successful public-awareness campaign means that more people understand what volunteering involves, its benefits to them and how to access opportunities.

# HOW DO WE GET THERE?

We believe that building a flourishing volunteering landscape in Norfolk is a shared endeavour, a common cause that all can get behind.

We need stakeholders across the county, including Norfolk County Council, the district councils, Public

Health, Integrated Care System, Adult Learning, the LEP, FE institutions and skills sector, and leading employers, as well as VCSE groups and VCSE sector support organisations to work together to enable and resource the vision for the future of volunteering in Norfolk.





## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT?

We are calling on all stakeholders to act as bold champions and sponsors for volunteering locally, and to do that by:

- Endorsing this Vision for Volunteering.
- Committing to developing their own organisational strategies to support volunteering.
- Working together with other stakeholders to ensure sustainable, collective resourcing of volunteering for the common good.

To support this Voluntary Norfolk will:

- Act as catalyst, facilitator, and critical friend to enable collaboration and innovation.
- Launch the Vision by bringing local stakeholders together to discuss the challenges and shape local strategies.
- Support collaboration and the sharing of good practice and new ways of working.

**VOLUNTARY  
NORFOLK**

Empowering  
Communities  
Connect • Collaborate • Champion

