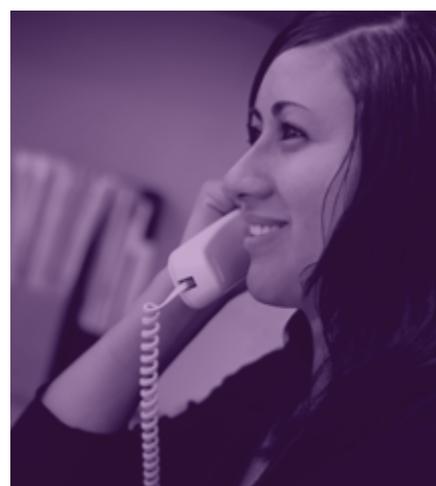
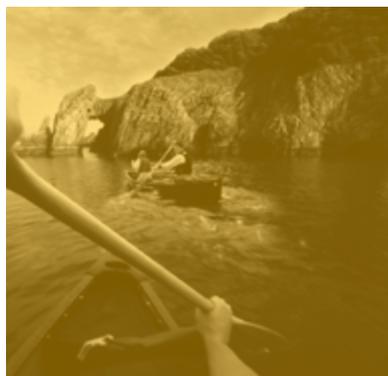


“IT’S WHAT WE DO”:

A STUDY OF CULTURAL VOLUNTEERING IN TORBAY (2015/16)



Enjoy, talk, be
do,



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Enjoy, talk, be
do,

"It's what we do"

**A study of cultural volunteering in Torbay
(2015/16)**

Report by:

**Nicola Frost
Peter Stokes**

Torbay Community Development Trust



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CONTEXT AND AIMS

This study came about as a result of the publication of **Enjoy, talk, do, be...a cultural strategy for Torbay and its communities 2014-2024**, and the desire on the part of Torbay Culture Board and partners to learn more about cultural volunteering in the Bay, in order to extend and support it in the future. In particular, there was a concern to build on existing work, rather than introducing new top-down initiatives.

Enjoy, talk do, be... also advocates wider ownership of the cultural strategy through the recruitment of 'Torbay Cultural Ambassadors' - volunteers ranging from guest house owners to taxi drivers, neighbourhood champions to young activists and housing officers to local celebrities, who will champion culture in the Bay with their colleagues, customers and communities. This cultural strategy recommendation sits alongside important existing cultural volunteering opportunities in the Bay, particularly in libraries, heritage facilities (notably through Torbay's accredited museums); Torbay's forthcoming hosting of the 7th UNESCO International conference on Global Geoparks in September 2016 (signalling a step-change in volunteering and 'ambassadorial' activity); work by the Youth Cultural Partnership, Torbay; initiatives like Ageing Well (a six-year Big Lottery funded project to reduce isolation amongst the 50 plus generation in the Bay); and the launch of a Volunteer Centre under the auspices of the Torbay CDT.

With these elements in mind, our report does three things. First, and most importantly, it provides a sketch of cultural volunteering activity in the Bay, from the perspective of volunteers, and the organisations that work with them. It describes the joys and motivations that animate successful cultural volunteering, and identifies the frustrations and challenges that prevent its full fruition. Second, it suggests some immediate, practical ways in which support for these organisations and their volunteers can be improved and extended, to develop the potential for volunteering in this sector still further. Third, it looks at some medium-term proposals for the development of different forms of volunteering opportunities, and some different ways of thinking about volunteering as a whole.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was commissioned by Torbay Culture Board (through TDA) and funded by Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts scheme, in support of the **Enjoy, talk, do, be...** delivery plan. It was conducted by the Torbay Community Development Trust, with guidance from a steering group representing key institutions in the sector: Torbay Council (including Libraries and Torre Abbey), the English Riviera Global Geopark, Torquay Museum, Brixham Heritage Museum and Doorstep Arts. Special thanks to all research participants, who were characteristically generous with their time, and thoughtful in their responses.

For further information about this report and all other aspects of, **Enjoy, talk do, be...**, please go to: www.torbayculture.org

SUMMARY

The study aimed to scope the range of cultural volunteering in Torbay, and to understand its strengths and challenges. We found that:

- **Cultural volunteering in Torbay is thriving.** The range of organisations working with volunteers, and the range of activities they are involved in is impressive, as are the numbers of individual volunteers. The sector is dominated by a small number of very large organisations, while the majority are much smaller, and many are entirely voluntary-run.
- **The volunteer base is very stable** – volunteers have long-term relationships with organisations, and commit substantial numbers of hours. Volunteers are passionate about their involvement in cultural activity. It is this that drives such a variety of initiatives around the Bay, and is a cause for great recognition and celebration.
- **Recruitment relies heavily on word of mouth**, and previous connections with an organisation. This makes for close-knit teams and strong working relationships, but can make it harder for new arrivals to fit in. There is a need to recruit more volunteers into the sector, especially committee members, and fundraisers/bid writers, which may necessitate casting the net slightly wider.
- **Sustainable cultural volunteering is about building long-term relationships.** Becoming a volunteer is often a gradual, individualised process, and one size does not fit all. People can shift roles, dip in and out of volunteering and paid roles, and be connected with an organisation in a variety of other ways over time.
- **Volunteer coordination is a skilled, but often lonely business.** Understanding the skills, interests and needs of volunteers takes time, sensitivity, and plenty of face-to-face contact, backed up by good administrative systems. There is no right way to do this, but a number of different approaches. Volunteer coordinators can be under-recognised by their organisations, and become isolated as a result.
- **Cultural volunteering can have seasonal peaks and troughs.** Given the one-off, seasonal or occasional nature of some cultural activity, it can be difficult to recruit enough volunteers for busy periods, and equally difficult to occupy volunteers in quieter ones.
- **Volunteers like to be appreciated.** Thanking volunteers is important, and can take many forms. Opportunities for saying thank you can also be very social occasions, where volunteers can feel part of a larger whole.
- **Cultural volunteering is an unpredictable partnership.** Volunteering is a journey of discovery and exchange for both individual and organisation. Understanding and accommodating volunteers' motivations and interests and how these change over time is the key to a successful and sustainable partnership.

As a result of these findings, we have made a series of recommendations (explored in more depth further on) for future work to further strengthen and extend cultural volunteering in the Bay:

- Organisations develop multi-faceted relationships with individuals
- A broader approach to volunteering
- Shared resources and increased networking
- Supporting the development needs of volunteer coordinators
- A clear and positive message promoting Torbay's cultural sector and the part volunteers play in its success

LITERATURE AND RESOURCES

The focus of this study was on empirical research, rather than an extensive literature review. However, it is useful to situate this research within a broader empirical and conceptual context.

Studies and Sources of Support

This project is unusual in combining a particularly broad definition of culture (see below) with a study of a particular geographical area, with the aim of developing an overview of cultural volunteering in a local context. In this sense, it bridges a number of traditional boundaries between areas of cultural activity, and related organisational structures and associated literature.

A number of national organisations support various forms of cultural volunteering, through the provision of definitions, or advice on volunteer recruitment, retention, and supervision. An example is Voluntary Arts (www.voluntaryarts.org), which has practical resources and advice for organisations focusing on participation in the arts. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (www.ncvo.org.uk) has a more general focus on volunteering, and a range of resources, including a well-established research programme, the Institute of Volunteering Research.

There are relatively few recent studies examining volunteering from this broad perspective. Most look at either all volunteering in an area, or consider a specific sector nationally. For example David Chambers' 2002 study looked at volunteering nationally in museums, libraries and archives, which necessarily takes a more survey-led, quantitative approach.

The Mayor of London produced a toolkit guide to cultural volunteering across the capital in advance of the London 2012 Olympics, featuring case studies aimed at showcasing good practice and highlighting the variety of volunteering opportunities. Although this guide did not have as broad a definition of culture as we are working with in Torbay, the emphasis on communication with volunteers, effective support across the organisation, and partnership working are all relevant to the Torbay context.

A more recent piece of work from the cultural consultancy BOP for the Heritage Lottery Fund (2011) considered the impact of volunteering within a sample of its projects over a three-year project. The resultant detailed report suggests that volunteers in this field are generally pursuing an existing interest or passion, seeking (and finding) a community of interest, rather than a geographic connection, and that therefore any impact is primarily on the individual rather than the community. It also noted a degree of 'obliquity', a sense in which the aims of a project (for community engagement through volunteering, for instance) might be best achieved through indirect means.

THIS PROJECT IS UNUSUAL IN COMBINING A PARTICULARLY BROAD DEFINITION OF CULTURE WITH A STUDY OF A PARTICULAR GEOGRAPHICAL AREA, WITH THE AIM OF DEVELOPING AN OVERVIEW OF CULTURAL VOLUNTEERING IN A LOCAL CONTEXT

Thinking it Through: Ecology and Flow

Beyond individual empirical studies, some recent work that looks at participation in cultural activity (though not specifically volunteering) from a more conceptual perspective has a bearing on this study. John Holden's recent report for the Arts and Humanities Research Council, *The Ecology of Culture* (2015), takes the established anthropological idea of cultural ecology, which refers to human adaptations to social and cultural environments, and applies it to an understanding of the network of relationships that constitutes the cultural sector. He argues that such an approach can reveal a more holistic picture of how different elements of the sector are interdependent. Holden identifies a category of 'homemade culture', as distinct from public and commercial versions, but points out how mutually dependent are amateur and professional creative endeavours, as projects and ideas, as well as people, constantly slip between these categories.

Although there is a naivety to Holden's ideas about the relationship between culture and community in this context, his understanding of cultural activity as a dynamic social process, and his emphasis on the qualitative as well as the quantitative is helpful (as is his enthusiasm for taxonomies of cultural activity that extend beyond the economic). It is possible to extend the ecological metaphor to a consideration of cultural volunteering activity, by looking at it as a network of links between paid and unpaid opportunities, between members, participants, staff and volunteers and with multi-directional connections between professional expertise and amateur organisation, collaborative projects and individuals. The advantage of this perspective is that it reduces the danger of isolating people's volunteering activity from the rest of their personal and professional 'selves'.

In her ground-breaking study of the Manchester Parade, Jess Symons looks at the way in which parade coordinators manage, and indeed embrace the unpredictability of working with diverse community organisations to develop artistic creations to participate in the parade. She suggests that we think of this process of planning, doing, adapting, and contingency as a 'flow', which gathers layers and contexts as it moves forward towards the parade date. There are strong synergies here with the way in which organisations and volunteers develop and change their relationship as they go along, making a creative virtue of the bumps and diversions along the way.

Both Holden and Symons see uncertainty, or unforeseen outcomes within the context of cultural activity as an advantage, rather than an inconvenience to be minimised. This chimes strongly with the findings of this study, which identified a willingness to be flexible and open to moments of serendipity to be important characteristics of successful volunteering relationships.

**OUR PRIMARY EMPHASIS HAS BEEN ON UNDERSTANDING QUALITATIVE
ASPECTS OF CULTURAL VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE IN THE BAY**



METHODS

Mirroring the scope of the Cultural Strategy, which in turns draws on the definition used by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, this research uses a particularly broad conception of cultural activity, which includes:

- Visual and performing arts
- Heritage, libraries, museums and archives
- Media and design
- Tourism
- Sport and informal leisure pursuits
- Play
- Festivals and events
- Built and natural environment

The DCMS definition also emphasises the ‘value dimension’ of culture, which encompasses:

- Relationships
 - Shared memories, experience and identity
 - Diverse cultural, religious and historic backgrounds
 - Standards
 - What we consider valuable to pass on to future generations.
- Creating Opportunities* (UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2000)

The research included upwards of 50 individuals (of whom at least 30 were volunteers), involved in 29 organisations in Torbay (a list of participating organisations can be found in the appendices; individual responses are treated confidentially). Around 100 organisations were identified and given the opportunity to participate. ¹With a limited time frame, our aim was to be representative rather than exhaustive in our sampling; participants represented a variety of organisational size and structures, as well as a wide range of activities.

²Our aim was to combine in-depth qualitative data collection with less detailed survey responses, in order to capture both the range and the texture of volunteering experience in the Bay. The majority of the research was therefore conducted through one-to-one conversations (semi-structured interviews), or small-group discussions, and nearly all of it was face-to-face. Twelve organisations and the same number of individuals completed questionnaires.

Given the relatively limited sample size, and, more importantly, the huge variety of scale and type of organisation, extensive quantitative analysis of the research data is both difficult, and of limited value. We have given numerical representations of research findings where appropriate. Our primary emphasis has been on understanding qualitative aspects of cultural volunteering experience in the Bay.

¹ An acknowledged limitation of the study is the low response rate among those involved in sporting activity.

² This research was conducted between August and November 2015. The researcher, Nicola Frost, worked two days per week on the project.

CULTURAL VOLUNTEERING IN THE BAY

This study began by attempting to identify organisations across the Bay that fell within the cultural definition, and were likely to include volunteers in their ³work. The result of this initial scoping revealed around 200 organisations, around half of which were sports clubs. The areas in which the former are involved include, but are not confined to:

- **Theatre**
- **Community radio**
- **Gardening**
- **Historic houses**
- **Museums**
- **Libraries**
- **Circus skills**
- **Children's play**
- **Zoos, farms, aquaria**
- **Natural environment**
- **Festivals**
- **Film clubs**
- **Craft clubs**
- **Friends of Parks**
- **Choirs**
- **Dance groups**

Given this variety of activities, it is not surprising that the range of roles volunteers undertake is equally extensive, and the value they add to cultural life in Torbay, for locals and visitors alike, is impressive. Volunteers step in and run services when the state retreats. They support other public amenities, such as libraries, parks and gardens, through fundraising, face-to-face work with clients, horticultural work, and more. They enable museums to host loans or touring exhibitions by providing invigilation services. They run sports clubs, and organise sporting events and competitions. They animate and engage local communities through staging, stewarding and promoting festivals and events, involving schoolchildren, older people, and everyone in between. Volunteers also support fundraising efforts, through providing match funding for grants, contributing to funded projects, and themselves writing the applications. They enhance tourist experiences by welcoming visitors to attractions and sharing their enthusiasm.

³ We understand volunteering to be 'any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to close relatives... volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual.' (www.ncvo.org.uk)



Most of those organisations surveyed were either relatively informal community groups, or charities, with a few public bodies (such as libraries). Most income was through grants, local fundraising, or local authority funding. One was a commercial organisation with a charitable arm running a Heritage Lottery programme. They ranged from sections of large national organisations to tiny two or three-person bands. Just under half were entirely volunteer-run.

The 29 organisations involved in the research together currently work with over 1600 individual volunteers.⁴

This total is impressive, and is testimony to the tremendous energy and commitment surrounding cultural activity in the Bay, despite the relative lack of infrastructure for such activity. However, this activity is very unevenly distributed. The largest five organisations in terms of volunteer numbers account for around 70% of individual volunteers. Over 80% of the remaining organisations have 50 or fewer volunteers, and of those some have only a handful.

The large majority of cultural volunteers in Torbay are aged 50 and over, and are retired or semi-retired.

Exceptions tend to be those involved with organisations specifically working with younger people. Several organisations have particular volunteer programmes aimed at the under 25s (including Duke of Edinburgh Award candidates, but excluding work experience placements, which are universally seen as a community service offered by the organisation, rather than a volunteering opportunity), but the numbers involved are usually relatively small, as shorter-term and less-experienced volunteers require much more supervision from staff/coordinators. One organisation working with children and young people attracted a substantial number of working-age volunteers, partly because it was an obvious choice for mothers thinking about returning to work having been at home with children.

Cultural volunteering in the Bay is a remarkably stable business. Of those who supplied this information, just over 70% reported the great majority of their volunteers had been associated with the organisation for three or more years, though of course individuals may well have filled a number of roles within that period. Most commonly people volunteer for between two and fifteen hours a week, but many organisations have a handful of individuals who commit far more time than that.⁵

This is a very positive picture: cultural volunteering is thriving, involving large numbers of people, doing a variety of things, in a very wide range of organisations. The following sections explain in more detail how this situation has come about.

⁴This total includes some conservative estimates for organisations who did not supply adequate figures.

⁵A number of the larger organisations work with volunteers from overseas, placed for a period of between three weeks and three months by a Torquay-based organisation called the Training Partnership (<http://www.ttpl-uk.com/>). These can often be very productive relationships, with motivated volunteers often keen to gain administrative experience, and working often for four days a week.

RECRUITMENT: SECURING 'QUALITY NOT QUANTITY'

Nearly all the organisations consulted said they would like more volunteers than they currently had working with them. Sometimes the limitation was in the capacity to manage extra people. But more often the problem was in finding appropriate people in the first place. Nearly all, even those organisations most in need of additional volunteers, emphasised the need for **'quality not quantity'**, they were not keen to take on extra people at the expense of standards. For most organisations, 'quality' means reliability, and a sense that the individual 'gets' the organisation and its aims. It does not necessarily mean volunteers need to arrive highly skilled or experienced, although there are more-or-less specialist roles for which it can be harder to recruit. The problem of recruitment is more severe for some than others: one theatre group has just decided to move from an amateur to a profit-share model for its productions, so all involved stand to gain financially from a successful production, after near-catastrophic issues with volunteers in recent years.

The large majority of successful volunteer recruitment within the cultural sector comes through **word of mouth**. It is very common for a would-be volunteer to have had

NEARLY ALL, EVEN THOSE ORGANISATIONS MOST IN NEED OF ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEERS, EMPHASISED THE NEED FOR QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

some previous connection with the organisation, or to have been introduced by someone they know. Within sports clubs this is overwhelmingly the case. One respondent said in

35 years of association with a local cricket club, he'd come across only one volunteer who was not a player, ex-player or relative of one. Sports clubs volunteers' involvement was exclusively as a result of a passion for the sport, or a desire to support someone with that passion. This can make it more difficult in an era of relative scarcity to find volunteers to take on some of the more generic roles not necessarily related to the sport itself.

Even very small organisations now have some kind of online presence, and a **website can play a role in volunteer recruitment**. For some of the larger organisations, this is quite a sophisticated business, with a list of currently available volunteer roles to be filled, and the days on which they can be done, as well as online application forms and information on what is expected of the volunteer, and what they can expect in return (see for example Paignton Zoo Trust, the National Trust, the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust).

A relatively small number of organisations have used **online volunteer recruitment portals** such as Do It, and for those that have, it has tended to be a mixed experience. One small theatre company commented that the people they were put in touch with through the portal had a poor understanding of the aims of the organisation, and/or had additional needs that had not been communicated to them at the outset. They suggested that

they suffered slightly from the appeal of theatre as an activity, in that they had a plentiful supply of enquiries, but found it harder to convert

THE LARGE MAJORITY OF SUCCESSFUL VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT WITHIN THE CULTURAL SECTOR COMES THROUGH WORD OF MOUTH

these into reliable, committed company members. Those introduced by friends, for example, or who had been audience members, had a clearer idea of the nature of the organisation, and tended to fit in better, and stay longer. The exception to this was when an organisation was trying to recruit a volunteer with a specific skill, or for a particular role, for instance digital media, or theatrical lighting. Then, advertising on Do it, or through the Creative Torbay newsletter was seen to be an effective method.

Experienced volunteer managers emphasise that **becoming a volunteer is often not a single moment, but an organic, often a gradual, and therefore a highly individualised process**. A woman who runs a small children's club explains how her assistant came along originally to help her for a single session, then another, and has stayed several years. Her other main helper is a man who is happy to drive the children on outings, but would rather not do anything else. She says she never asked them to 'volunteer', but waited until they suggested it themselves. Others agree: 'I never do the hard sell – they don't stay,' says an experienced youth worker.

So recruiting volunteers is in part a technical issue, but it's also very much one of matching individuals' skills, interests, and values with an organisation, and a role within that organisation. It's therefore important to understand who those individuals are, and why they are interested in volunteering.

CASE STUDY: FUNDRAISERS FOR HIRE

Challenging external contexts have compelled some organisations to alter their way of working, which in turn can affect the range of volunteer roles that need filling. In some instances, such changes can represent the practical limits of volunteer activity. This has become a particular issue in recent years for local sports clubs. As local authority funding for sport is becoming scarcer, and income from commercial sponsorship is falling as a result of the recession, it is incumbent on sports clubs to seek funding through grant applications to trusts and foundations. In addition to the traditional roles of chair, treasurer, secretary, etc, there is therefore added that of fundraiser. Clubs do not always have the skills and confidence to take on this new demand. A few years ago Torbay Sports Council recruited a bank of bid-writers (mostly retired professionals, but not necessarily people with a close association with a particular sport) who would work with sports clubs to produce grant applications. It was considered necessary to entice such people by giving something in return, and while this might at club level have involved in-kind benefits such as access to club facilities or dining rights, as centralised Sports Council recruits it was judged more appropriate to offer them a small percentage of any successful grant funding. In this case, shifting demands on volunteers has taken organisations not only outside their traditional constituency, but outside of voluntary participation altogether.

CASE STUDY: VOLUNTEERING AS PARTNERSHIP

Maria's⁶ role includes a variety of outreach and community engagement work, as well as coordinating volunteers. She's out and about giving talks and raising awareness of the organisation all the time, but explains that she can rarely predict what will come of these connections – it's an organic process. Maria gives an example of a father who came to drop off a child at one of their playgrounds. She stopped to chat with him, as she'd not seen him before. As they were talking, a boy came up and asked Maria to tune his guitar. It turned out the father was also a skilled musician, who not only tuned the guitar, but performed a song for a girl who was usually painfully shy. Maria shared a short video of this encounter through social media, which resulted in a potential booking for the musician, who also offered to run some musical workshops for the playground.

Maria explains that a trustee recently asked her about volunteer retention rates, but she says this is a red herring: many people who volunteer with them move into work, either with this organisation or another, then there are others who will be involved for a bit, then go away, and return when circumstances are right for them. 'We're the first door they knock on', she says. The organisation invests in long-term relationships with individuals, who may be at various times beneficiaries, parents, volunteers, and staff members.

The volunteering experience is tailored to the individual. 'We've got to give at least twice as much back. I've got to find out what that might be', says Maria. 'They think they know what they want', she explains, 'but it's as much about self-discovery as service. We don't use language like "we need you", because actually it's an exchange, but we couldn't do this without them.'

⁶All names are pseudonyms

THE JOY OF VOLUNTEERING

All the volunteers involved in the study were asked the question 'why do you do it?'. The answer to this question changes over time – the reason someone began volunteering with a particular organisation is often not the reason they continue to do so for several years.

Volunteers' initial impetus can be divided very broadly into two types: those motivated by **generic** factors, such as a desire to meet new people, gain administrative experience, or give something back to the community; and those motivated by an existing interest in the **specific** activity of an organisation – either for personal or career-development reasons - and even by a particular location.

Many people spoke with real **passion** about an aspect of the organisation they worked with. Maybe they had fallen under the spell of a particular historic house or garden; perhaps they were thrilled by the idea of working with young people and theatre; or they were an incurable film buff. If this was

the case, exactly what they did for the cause was less important than that they were involved. Indeed, for some, the question appeared perplexing, as if they couldn't imagine not doing it: 'it's just what I do', said one person.

Participation in cultural activity was frequently described **as a way of life**. For some, if they could be paid for doing it, so much the better, but

PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL ACTIVITY WAS FREQUENTLY DESCRIBED AS A WAY OF LIFE

they'd be doing it either way. **For others, their volunteering role is precisely NOT work**; these people are either retired, or work in another sector. They engage in volunteering because it offers an alternative way of being for them, with people they might not otherwise meet, doing things they might not otherwise do. 'We're all very different', says a film club committee member, 'but somehow it works.'

One size, however, definitely does not fit all. During a group discussion, one woman observed how well-to-do women are happy to volunteer in a charity shop, whereas they'd never dream of taking a paid retail role. Another woman, closely involved with cultural initiatives in the Bay replied that she'd stay up half the night working on a grant proposal, but would never volunteer in a shop: 'There are things I'd do for free because I'm passionate about it, but you'll never see me behind a till.'

For many people, their life in volunteering is a **constantly evolving journey**.⁷ Often, these twists and turns are unanticipated, but can be deeply satisfying. One room guide at a historic house had ended up producing films about volunteering for his organisation. 'It's far and away the most rewarding job I've ever done,' he says. For him, as with others, there are important benefits of participating in whatever way in cultural activity. In the cultural sector, when it works well, the volunteering relationship is less one of service, and more of partnership, of mutual benefit and exchange.

CASE STUDY: 'IT'S WHAT WE DO!'

Roger is vice-chair of an all-volunteer organisation devoted to maintaining and restoring a scheduled monument from the Second World War. As a retired artillery soldier himself, with a passion for the 1940s, when he moved to Torbay this was an obvious home for him – he's been involved for 12 years, though his participation has varied depending on other things happening in his life. The organisation has a membership of around 200, with about 15-20 active committee members and other volunteers. It's run on a shoestring, and struggles to find enough volunteers to open the buildings to the public as much as they'd like.

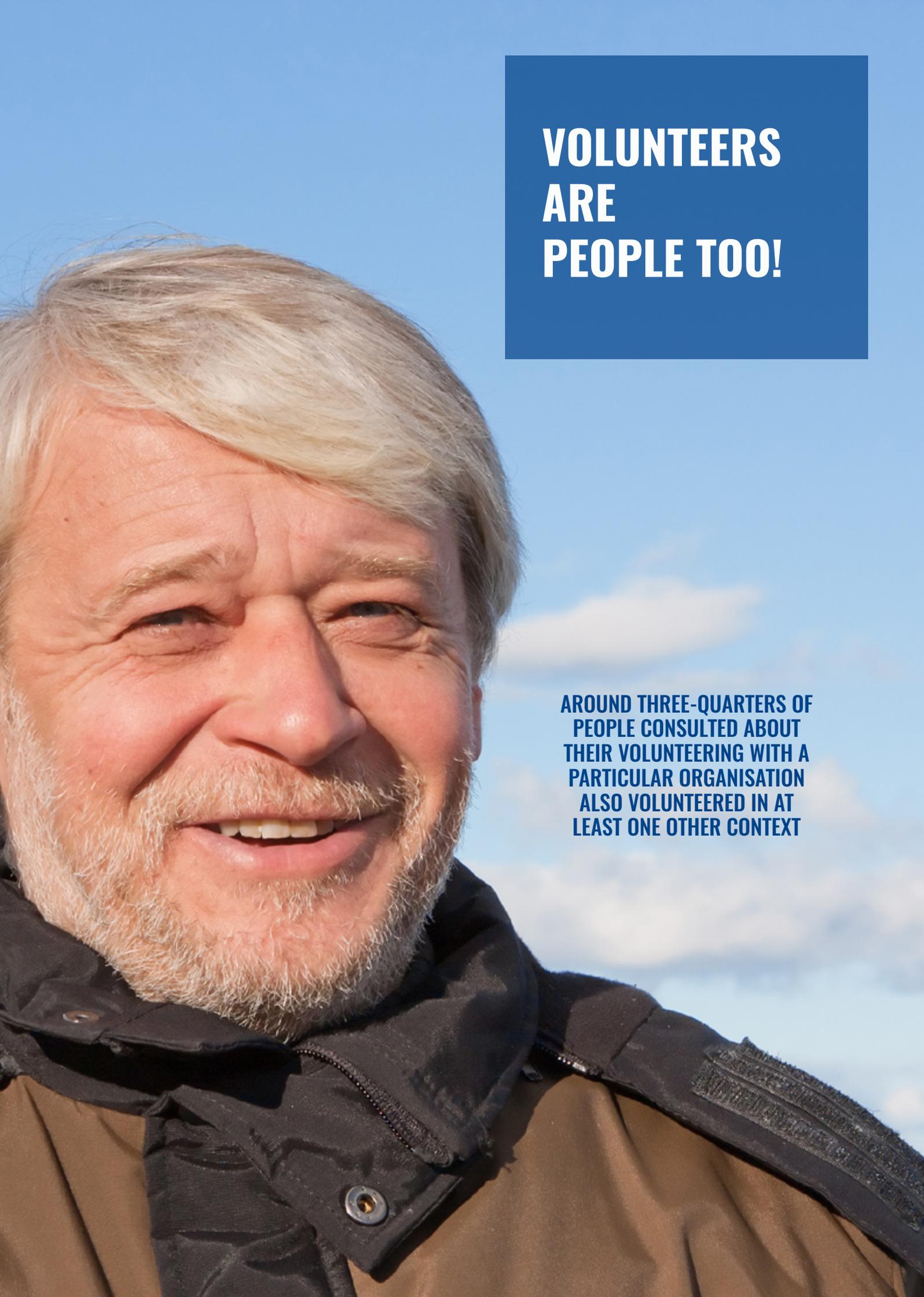
Roger says he'll probably only do a single one-year term in post, though he'll certainly remain involved. 'I do easily 30 hours a week for the organisation, one way and another – I'm busier now than when I was at work', he says. And the sense of responsibility weighs very heavy. He sees his other weekly volunteering commitment as 'a day off'.

But with all the challenges, it remains tremendous fun. 'We do it because we love this place,' he says. Two of his fellow volunteers are hard at work renovating a store room. 'We call them the Sawdust Squad', he laughs. It's a very sociable set-up – several couples are involved (his wife used to be secretary, and they often host a barbeque for volunteers in the summer). For open days everyone comes in costume, complete with historically accurate personas. 'Even those who are not so into it will dress up – it's what we do!'

⁷Indeed, the National Trust recently brought out a new volunteering strapline: 'Life is one long adventure and we'd love to join in with your next one'.

A photograph of an elderly woman with short, curly white hair, wearing a red headband and floral-patterned overalls over a grey long-sleeved shirt. She is smiling warmly at the camera while working in a garden. She is wearing green gardening gloves and using black-handled shears to trim a pink rose bush. The background is a soft-focus green garden under a clear blue sky.

**“THERE ARE THINGS I’D DO FOR
FREE BECAUSE I’M PASSIONATE
ABOUT IT, BUT YOU’LL NEVER SEE
ME BEHIND A TILL”**



**VOLUNTEERS
ARE
PEOPLE TOO!**

**AROUND THREE-QUARTERS OF
PEOPLE CONSULTED ABOUT
THEIR VOLUNTEERING WITH A
PARTICULAR ORGANISATION
ALSO VOLUNTEERED IN AT
LEAST ONE OTHER CONTEXT**

I'M A VOLUNTEER AND...

Around three-quarters of people consulted about their volunteering with a particular organisation also volunteered in at least one other context. A woman who runs a film club also walks ex-guide dogs; a director of an outdoor swimming pool also helps at a memory café; a committee member at a historic site takes a disabled man fishing once a week. Of those working with volunteers as part of their paid role, a large proportion volunteered as well. Sometimes this was in a context connected with their paid work: a gardener helps maintain a local churchyard; a library services worker volunteers with a community group using library facilities. In other cases, their volunteering role was quite different: a volunteer coordinator with an animal charity volunteered at a National Trust house.

For some, the line between paid and volunteering roles is not a clear-cut one. One woman who runs a coffee shop and catering business, is on the committee of an annual festival. The coffee shop acts as an important hub for meeting people and building relationships with potential festival volunteers. Equally, coffee shop staff were happy to manage the substantial additional workload over the festival period as the owner was busy.

There are unsurprisingly several examples of people who have moved from a volunteering role into a related paid one, either with the same organisation, or another similar one. This is after all one of the reasons some people volunteer in the first place. Less obviously, there is a significant group of people who move repeatedly between volunteering and paid work. This is often related

to the precarious nature of contracts in the voluntary and cultural sectors. One man originally contracted to manage volunteers as part of a fixed-term project, continued to fulfil much of this role after the contract had ended, as there was no provision for the role to be covered by other means. It also reflects the educational and career development aims of some cultural organisations. One theatre organisation, for example, has a long-term relationship with a small cluster of young volunteers who are hoping to build careers in the field, with the informal understanding that they were given the option of occasional paid work when it was available.

ONE MAN ORIGINALLY CONTRACTED TO MANAGE VOLUNTEERS AS PART OF A FIXED-TERM PROJECT, CONTINUED TO FULFIL MUCH OF THIS ROLE AFTER THE CONTRACT HAD ENDED

All of these various stories demonstrate clearly that **it is not sensible to consider 'volunteer' and 'paid staff member' as discrete categories of people**. It is true that there are significant qualitative differences between the two types of role, but it is important to recognise the permeability of this boundary (and others) for the individuals involved. Successful relationships between organisations and individuals are more properly seen as **multi-dimensional, and dynamic**. This is a significant shift from more compartmentalised conceptions.

THE PROBLEM OF LABELLING

It became increasingly apparent over the course of the research that the use of the terms 'volunteer' and 'volunteering' can have drawbacks, and that there was some lack of clarity in definitions of what constituted 'volunteering'. First, only some forms of unpaid participation tend to be considered as volunteering. Working as a steward at an event is widely seen as volunteering, while being on the board of trustees of the organisation hosting the event might not. Some interviewees even considered the term slightly derogatory, potentially devaluing an individual's contribution.

Second, with many activities in the cultural sector, there is some blurring of the divisions between organisers and participants. Volunteering is generally defined as involvement in an activity that is of benefit to others. This is clear enough for someone running a craft session for elderly people, but less so in the case of an amateur actor, or member of a choir. These latter two could be said to be simply pursuing their hobbies, although an audience member at a performance in which they were involved would surely benefit from their efforts.

Both of these issues point to the limiting effects of labelling an individual's relationship with an organisation: being a trustee does not prevent someone from being an audience member, or from volunteering in another capacity; being a club member does not mean someone couldn't become treasurer, or a paid staff member. Individuals can and do slip between roles, and between organisations.

MANAGING VOLUNTEERS, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The research revealed some dramatic variations in approaches to managing volunteers. Some, but not all, can be attributed to the size of an organisation and the numbers of volunteers involved. Much however is simply a question of differing styles. This pair of case studies illustrates just two examples:

CASE STUDY: THE INTUITIVE APPROACH

The organisation runs a historic house as a community centre and events venue, as well as gardens and a café. As a charity and a Community Interest Company its structure is unusual in that the chair of trustees also acts as general manager. There are 20-25 regular volunteers, plus a bank of around 50 people who help out at events, either as volunteers or casual staff. Volunteers are not advertised for, but 'they tend to rock up at the right time', says the manager. Some come through community payback programmes,⁸ others through a gardening scheme for people with learning difficulties. Prospective volunteers fill in a form and have a chat with the manager, and if she judges that they'll fit in they then choose the area in which they'd like to volunteer. It's a very flat structure, and while people have their own roles, everyone is happy to muck in where needed. 'It shouldn't work but it does', says the manager. 'People think we're irresponsible, but actually we're very financially stable.'

It was commonly recognised that **managing volunteers differs subtly from managing paid staff.** 'If they don't like it, they can leave', as one coordinator put it. Another said 'you have to take them with you, as you don't have the authority'.

Problems tend generally to be dealt with more informally; one organisation aims to address issues through a general morning briefing session, rather than singling out and criticising an individual. This was not universally the case – one coordinator said firmly that 'volunteers need to be treated like unpaid staff'.

PROBLEMS TEND TO BE DEALT WITH INFORMALLY

A good volunteer coordinator is a sensitive judge of people. Often a would-be volunteer will arrive with an idea of what they would like to do, but an experienced coordinator will judge that they'd be better suited in a different role – possibly one they didn't know existed at the

CASE STUDY: THE SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

This large organisation with a substantial paid workforce worked with 160 volunteers this year, over two sites, contributing over 26,000 hours. If a potential volunteer opportunity is identified, a role profile is drafted, and posted on the website, which displays all current role vacancies, and which days they are available (because it's such a large operation, volunteers need to make a regular weekly commitment, however small). New volunteers receive a comprehensive handbook detailing all policies and procedures, as well as regular newsletters specifically for volunteers. There are certificates for different lengths of service, and organised Christmas and summer parties. Great care is taken to differentiate between staff and volunteer roles, down to the language used: volunteers have chats rather than interviews and sign agreements rather than contracts. This is intended to avoid any suggestion that volunteers are replacing paid staff.

outset, as there are many such roles within cultural organisations.

They will be adept at ferreting out skills and interests the volunteer didn't know they had. One coordinator described how it was his job to catalyse, facilitate and inspire, but not to micro-manage: 'I just light the blue touchpaper and run away.'

Above all, coordinators, and, crucially, the culture of the organisation with which they work, should be comfortable with uncertainty, and willing to embrace unanticipated consequences. This is not a chaotic state of affairs (one volunteer coordinator at an organisation running children's playgrounds, an ex-lawyer, is military in her organisation, but she explains that this allows her to

embrace serendipity), but one firmly anchored in considered principles and ways of working. It involves a shift of focus from a particular role to a relationship with an individual.

Supporting and managing volunteers necessarily involves finding appropriate ways to thank them for their contribution. Understanding volunteers' motivations can help in devising suitable forms of recognition.

VOLUNTEERS LEADING THE VOLUNTEERS?

Given how time-consuming it is to do this job properly, it is not surprising that many of the larger organisations have discussed the idea of delegating the coordination of volunteers to another volunteer. Very few organisations actually do this at present. One conservation charity plans to use long-term 'volunteer apprentices' to help manage the more casual volunteers. A widespread concern is that volunteers do not like being managed by fellow volunteers, especially younger ones. This is a structural difference between a paid and an unpaid context. Authority and hierarchy do not operate in the same way among unpaid participants, which can make such relationships difficult.

⁸ It is recognised that participation through community payback cannot be considered voluntary. But some individuals who arrived at an organisation through such schemes may stay on as volunteers beyond the period required.

CASE STUDY: THE GARDENS

Until recently, Megan was the only paid staff member at the gardens of a historic building in the Bay. She manages a team of around a dozen volunteers, many of whom have been with her for four or five years. Individuals have a variety of health conditions and additional needs (one is profoundly deaf, another has Alzheimers), but everyone has great enthusiasm for the garden, and is thrilled when it wins awards. 'It's a good place to take a small step into the world again,' says Megan. One of the volunteers, Fred, is living with cancer. He volunteers every Wednesday and when I meet him has just been tackling an unruly hedge. He and Megan joke together as he explains what they've been doing: 'I'm the only one who does any work around here!', he says.

Megan explains she has very high expectations of her volunteers, and while she doesn't demand as much as from paid staff in terms of productivity, she does expect the quality of work to be high. 'Volunteers are a gift', she says. With a background in HR from a previous career, her approach is actually very organised and strategic, but the atmosphere is relaxed and her team is 'very loyal'. She says it takes her some time to get the measure of a new volunteer, to discover their personal strengths and skillsets. She quietly manages team dynamics by rostering the chattier, social people on the same day, leaving other days free for those who prefer a more peaceful environment. 'Horticulture lends itself to a volunteer workforce, because its very nature demands flexibility', she explains. 'We're more-or-less at capacity now, but if Monty Don walked through the door I wouldn't turn him away.'



VALUING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers need to feel appreciated. How this is most appropriately done varies according to the type of organisation and to the role of the volunteer. Some organisations give certificates marking a certain number of hours' or years' contribution, often presented at a collective event. Many hold social gatherings at various times throughout the year, especially at Christmas, and organise outings, or exchange visits with other organisations. Many of these are held specifically for volunteers, but several organisations make a point of including volunteers and paid staff in the same social activities.

EATING TOGETHER IS A POWERFUL ASSERTION OF THAT COLLECTIVE PURPOSE, AND CAN CONNECT PEOPLE AS PEOPLE, RATHER THAN VOLUNTEERS' OR 'STAFF

Valuing volunteers can be done on a day-to-day level as well. One volunteer coordinator in an organisation that employs a large number of animal-oriented staff, said he spent a lot of time trying to encourage them to make eye contact with their volunteers, and to smile at them. A festival organiser explained how she made sure there was always someone to greet volunteers arriving for their shift.

The collective nature of much of this recognition activity is important. It is no accident that food features strongly in volunteer 'rewards' – either the provision of food for those working, or celebratory meals. Many volunteers value the social aspect of their volunteering role. Even those who find this less important need to feel part of a larger whole from time to time. Eating together is a powerful assertion of that collective purpose, and can connect people as people, rather than 'volunteers' or 'staff'.

Saying thank you to volunteers is extremely important. Using material incentives as a recruitment tool is however misguided. Benefits in kind, such as free entry to a site, or discounts in shops and cafes, are popular, but can be difficult to withdraw from if circumstances change. That said, nearly all volunteers consider such incentives non-essential, and would continue to volunteer without them. One organisation issued food vouchers valid in local cafes for volunteers at an event who committed a certain number of hours. A substantial number of people did not actually use them, but appreciated the sense of being valued that they represented.

There is certainly room for **broadening the range of ways in which volunteers' contributions are recognised.** One well-established organisation which places an emphasis on volunteer training and development had instigated a Skills Bank scheme whereby an hour of volunteer time equates to a credit of £10 in a volunteer's personal account, which could then be 'spent' on relevant training. The resulting 'statement' of volunteering time and skills acquired can then be used to accompany a reference for job applications. Another organisation had a special personalised uniform made for one particularly committed volunteer. One public-sector volunteer coordinator suggested that if there was a form of periodic appraisal for volunteers this would be another way to show recognition.

SAYING THANK YOU TO VOLUNTEERS IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT

How volunteers are valued of course is often dependent on how they are regarded by the organisation, and the extent to which volunteering priorities are integrated into organisational culture and planning. This is explored in the following section.



A majority of organisations working with volunteers have a written volunteer policy, and systems in place to deal with problems or grievances relating to volunteers. Most who don't recognise its importance, and are working towards it. **Administration doesn't appear to be too burdensome.**

There is considerable variation in levels of record-keeping relating to volunteers; some organisations count the number of hours each volunteer works, sometimes to report to funders, sometimes for internal use. Others didn't have a clear idea of the number of volunteers they had, or of the gender balance. Obviously this often relates to capacity to collect this data, but it also says something about the centrality of volunteers in organisational thinking.

Despite fairly comprehensive policies and procedures on paper, **a focus on volunteers cannot be said to have**

VOLUNTEERS AND ORGANISATIONS

THE PUBLIC DOES NOT TEND TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

infused all organisations equally. Regardless of how effectively volunteers are recruited and managed, or how central they are to the activities of an organisation, several volunteer coordinators in organisations with paid staff regretted the lack of interest in and concern for volunteers throughout their organisation.

Few volunteer coordinators considered there was full integration of volunteering into organisational strategic planning, and even fewer said there was a trustee or board member within organisations with paid staff with specific responsibility for ensuring volunteer coordination

is properly supported. Understanding of the importance of volunteers, where and how they might best be used, and how best to manage them,

was uneven among paid staff in some organisations. Some volunteer coordinators felt that a significant part of their job was to educate staff in this respect.

In some cases, this resistance reflected concern on the part of paid staff that volunteers were taking over an increasing number of previously paid roles, or were monopolising the more interesting, public-facing activities, but this resentment was not widespread.

The post of volunteer coordinator can be a lonely one, heavy with responsibility, yet sidelined by senior management. As a result, even where volunteer coordination is a paid role, it is rarely more than a part time adjunct.

Although, as we have seen, managing volunteers requires a substantial input of face-to-face time, those with a responsibility for volunteers often have to combine this role with others, and struggle to squeeze their volunteer work into the hours available, especially if volunteers are working outside

of regular office hours. If there is limited organisational enthusiasm for volunteering, this problem can be greatly compounded. One part-time coordinator wondered 'if I'm not there, do they just sit on their own in the corner?'

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS IS HARD WORK

Possibly as a result of these pressures, there are remarkably **few horizontal connections between organisations** with regard to volunteers. Organisations do not regularly refer volunteers between themselves if an appropriate role cannot be found.

What communication there is tends to be ad hoc and opportunistic (between individuals who happen to know each other, for example), rather than institutionally embedded.

An exception to this is the Youth Cultural Partnership, a group of over 40 organisations working with young people in the Bay, which does facilitate some referral of volunteers between members.

In some instances organisations perceive themselves to be in direct

ORGANISATIONS DO NOT REGULARLY REFER VOLUNTEERS BETWEEN THEMSELVES IF AN APPROPRIATE ROLE CANNOT BE FOUND

competition to secure the best volunteers. In others, the picture is slightly more nuanced. One festival volunteer coordinator explained she'd been contacted by another festival organiser and asked for the names of potential volunteers for his own event (not held over the same period). She explained that she objected to this, partly because recruiting volunteers is hard work, and she didn't see why her efforts should benefit another event.

Continued...

Continued...

But part of her discomfort was a sense of responsibility towards her volunteers, and the fear of negative repercussions for her own work if they had a bad experience with another organisation she'd put them in touch with (and by implication endorsed). She circulated the other organiser's request, but left it up to individuals to decide to contact him. So there are concerns about responsibility and 'quality control' with regard to closer collaboration between organisations.

Unsurprisingly, given Torbay's importance as a holiday destination, a substantial number of organisations noted the **seasonal nature of their activity**, and the implications this can have for volunteers. First, increased activity, and therefore increased demand for volunteers, generally results in less time available to properly induct and manage them, which in turn can reduce retention rates. Second, once the busy period or event is over, it can be difficult to find things to occupy volunteers, who will then move on, leaving the necessity of recruiting all over again for the next event/during the next busy period. This is extremely resource-intensive, and obviously entails losing both the volunteer and their accumulated experience. The other part of this vicious circle is of course that without maintaining the post-event volunteer-force, there is little chance of achieving sustainable development of one-off efforts, which has been identified as a problem for cultural initiatives in the Bay.

It is commonly recognised that **volunteers represent the public face of many organisations**. I heard repeatedly that volunteers 'are our ambassadors'. In many instances, volunteers have the lion's share of outward-facing roles, meeting and greeting, stewarding, staffing box offices, receptions, etc. It was also commonly agreed that, whatever the organisational position on this, the public does not tend to distinguish between staff and volunteers on the ground. Reputations are built and maintained by volunteers, and expectations are accordingly high: 'our customer service standard is the same for everyone', says one volunteer coordinator.

The position of volunteers and volunteering within organisations is a central issue. Sustainability of volunteering activity, and high quality support for volunteers can only be achieved where there is institutional integration of volunteering activity, and where the priorities of volunteering are included at a senior level, and at the outset of organisational planning.

I HEARD REPEATEDLY THAT
VOLUNTEERS
'ARE OUR AMBASSADORS'

GROWING CULTURAL VOLUNTEERING IN TORBAY

CULTURAL VOLUNTEERING LANDSCAPE IN TORBAY

From the research carried out, cultural volunteering in Torbay shows clear strengths and areas for development. Word of mouth is the most successful recruitment method within the sector, which is a strength given that the process is organic and cost-effective. It also addresses the need/desire of most organisations for 'quality not quantity' and for people that 'get' the organisation. Given the low turnover of volunteers and general longevity of service in the sector, this is clearly a successful strategy.

However, there are potential challenges in maintaining an organisation in this way. Word of mouth may simply not reach enough people to adequately service the organisation's needs. If an organisation is permanently understaffed, volunteers find the burden too heavy, and there is a risk of 'burn-out'. In order to achieve sustainable levels, there is a need in many organisations to reach out to new groups of potential volunteers, without compromising the culture and values of the organisation.

Having close-knit, long-serving volunteer teams is another feature of cultural volunteering, and again could be seen as both a positive and a negative. A closely bonded and dedicated team can create a positive, pleasant and fulfilling environment, and this will certainly play a part in high retention rates. But it may also create an intimidating, rather exclusive environment for newcomers, which could create a barrier to recruiting volunteers from outside of the 'usual pool'. Any attempts to expand volunteer bases should be carefully managed, and the positive aspects of closely bonded committees respected as a strength, so the answer here is certainly not to indiscriminately flood organisations with new people.

A striking difference between cultural volunteering and 'general volunteering' is the blurring of boundaries between participants, customers, supporters and volunteers: there is clear evidence of each being a fruitful route into the other areas. For this reason it might be helpful for organisations to avoid 'silo-thinking' and consider every interaction with individuals as the start of a multi-faceted relationship.

Overall the position in Torbay appears fairly strong. Few organisations are facing severe challenges in finding volunteers, although it is widely stated that more would be useful. There are certain volunteer roles where there is greater demand, especially fundraisers/bid writers and committee members/trustees. **Finding the right volunteers** is therefore an issue, which would suggest the need to be proactive in seeking out volunteers with specific skills/experience, probably from a wider pool than is usual. Other areas for development are **capacity building the sector** (support for volunteer coordinators, networking, sharing of resources), **integrating volunteers more thoroughly into organisations** (more opportunity to input, 'buy in' at board level, recognition of the contribution they make) and **flexibility to cope with fluctuations in demand** caused by events/festivals and seasonal variations.



FINDING THE RIGHT VOLUNTEERS

There are, broadly speaking, two approaches organisations take to recruiting volunteers. One is a more reactive way: put out a general call, see who responds, and find something for them to do. The other is more proactive: identify what you need and search accordingly. Volunteers who come via word of mouth are more likely to fit into the former category, and this method also helps to build a team with shared values and a common interest in the organisation or cause. For more specialised roles the latter approach is more likely and more fruitful, although it becomes more likely that those volunteers recruited do not necessarily share the same values or interests. One way to marry the two approaches would be to see the more general roles as “cause based” (attracting those with an interest in a specific organisation, activity or location) and the more specialised roles “skills based” and/or “task based” (attracting those with an interest in sharing and developing particular skills). The former would be more likely to be ongoing, regular roles, while the latter could be ad-hoc or time limited. This also gives scope for sharing volunteers between organisations. For example, someone with the skills to develop a website need not necessarily have an affiliation with the organisation in question, but their skills would be useful. Their involvement is also likely to be short-term or ad-hoc, meaning those volunteers may be free to share their skills with another organisation that needs them. The principle of sharing volunteers and shared recruitment and training between organisations is explored further below.

CAPACITY BUILDING THE SECTOR

Given the current economic climate, this is a slightly trickier area. It is also somewhat tied in with integrating volunteers more thoroughly into organisations and valuing their input (see below).

There is generic support locally for volunteer coordinators, primarily through the Torbay Community Development Trust (the Torbay Volunteering Forum, volunteer management workshops, funding advice, the planned development of a resource library), but this is not the case for support specific to the cultural sector.

A potential strength of the cultural sector in Torbay is that there is huge diversity in terms of size, operating models and experience. If organisations can be encouraged to collaborate and remove barriers, then a resource sharing facility (e.g. sharing examples of volunteer policies, induction programmes etc.) would be a cost-effective way of achieving this. It could be done online and possibly through an existing resource.

A sector-specific grouping of volunteer coordinators is another possibility, especially if a collaborative approach was taken to running it (e.g. organisations with space to host, provide the rooms, organisations without space to host look after other aspects such as arranging invites, running sessions, doing the basic admin), and this would help to provide greater networking opportunities and the chance to share best practice.

If there are common training needs for volunteer coordinators or volunteers themselves, these could be bulk purchased in partnership, or other methods of peer-to-peer learning (such as Action Learning Sets) could be explored.



INTEGRATING VOLUNTEERS MORE THOROUGHLY INTO ORGANISATIONS

One of the features of the cultural sector can be that the focus is strongly on a specific outcome/event (e.g. a festival or sporting event) or a customer experience (an exhibition, a tourist attraction), whereas with more service-focussed volunteering the volunteers are more likely to be closely aligned with the 'end product' (i.e. the service user or beneficiary). Where this is the case it is easy for the input of cultural volunteers to be less noticeable as it may be further removed from the 'outcome'. In some organisations, more needs to be done to bring volunteers and those who manage them into the mainstream of organisational strategy.

One way of ensuring volunteering issues remain at the heart of organisational planning in an organisation with paid staff, is through having a board member specifically tasked with supporting volunteer coordination. When coupled with increased awareness of the value and contribution of volunteers, such an appointment can send a powerful message, both internally and externally, about their importance. This can also be useful in terms of recruiting volunteers and fundraising more generally.

FLEXIBILITY TO COPE WITH FLUCTUATIONS IN DEMAND

This study defines culture in its broadest sense, and within this broad definition there will be those organisations/groups that experience fluctuating demand for volunteers more regularly and acutely, but it is likely to affect most organisations to some degree. Improving mechanisms for volunteer mobility within and between organisations could help counteract the effects of seasonal activity, and could also offer solutions to other issues, such as the difficulty of matching available volunteers to a role with which they are happy, while satisfying the organisation's need for particular skills. The potential difficulties with this approach are the tendency of volunteers to have allegiance to a particular organisation/cause and the concerns of organisations around losing "their volunteers" to other organisations. The former is likely to be less of an issue where volunteers are recruited for task- or skills-based rather than values-based roles.

Another possibility is for organisations to collaborate in the recruitment and selection of volunteers. This would be particularly beneficial to smaller organisations who may find it difficult to do this in isolation. If several organisations could agree on shared standards, outputs, skills required and training for certain roles, this would enable them to pool resources and recruit and train volunteers jointly. This would be especially helpful in terms of training as organisations could run these sessions on a rota basis meaning new volunteers could be trained promptly, possibly within another organisation, rather than being kept on hold (which is a common reason for volunteers leaving).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking the areas for development (outlined previously) together, what follows are some immediate, practical ways in which support for Torbay cultural organisations and their volunteers can be improved and extended, in order to develop the potential for cultural volunteering still further. Then, the report looks at some medium-term options for the development of different forms of volunteering opportunities, and some different ways of thinking about volunteering as a whole.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS INVOLVING VOLUNTEERS:

1.1 MULTI-FACETED RELATIONSHIPS

Because of the unique relationship and engagement cultural organisations have with customers, participants, donors and volunteers (and other people they engage with, terminology aside), there is a great opportunity to broaden the support they receive, through interacting with people to whom they are already connected. This is all about 'making the ask' (one of the most common reasons people give for not volunteering is that they have not been asked). A helpful way to look at it is this: a donor is a volunteer waiting to be asked, a volunteer is a donor waiting to be asked, a participant is a donor waiting to be asked, a participant is a volunteer waiting to be asked etc. In terms of volunteer recruitment this would retain the beneficial aspect of "word of mouth" recruitment, while increasing the number of mouths spreading the word. Tied in with points below, if there were more flexible, ad-hoc and skills focussed volunteering opportunities available this would be likely to get more people on board.

Key learning:

- **Reach out to existing 'friends' of the organisation and encourage their participation in a different way.**
- **Think about different forms of volunteering opportunity, and different ways to facilitate contact with your organisation, for example through family volunteering days or open days.**
- **Remember, becoming a volunteer is often a gradual process, so give people plenty of chances to see you in action.**

1.2 A BROADER APPROACH TO VOLUNTEERING

Making a distinction between skills-based (or task-based) and cause-based volunteers (if only internally) will enable greater flexibility and the scope to play to the strengths of both types of volunteers. Both have their value to organisations, and both can be approached slightly differently. The potential for sharing volunteers who are skills/task-based could be a positive development if organisations are willing to collaborate (see 2. below).

Key learning:

- **Consider the different roles within your organisation and which are suitable for "skills/task-based" volunteers and which are suitable for "cause-based" volunteers (some will be both). Are there different places to look for different roles and different methods of recruitment to try?**

2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER COLLABORATION:

2.1 SHARED RESOURCES AND INCREASED NETWORKING

There should be greater sharing of resources (e.g. policies, templates for application forms, induction etc.) whether via an official online portal or through more informal sharing. Primarily this would see larger, better resourced organisations supporting smaller organisations. But it should develop into mutually beneficial relationships which develop, bond and up-skill the sector.

There is clearly demand for greater networking between volunteer coordinators. To achieve this, a mixture of formal and informal routes should be taken. Torbay already has a Volunteering Forum (convened by Torbay CDT), which meets every three months to share ideas and experiences. There seems little point in replicating this structure, though more could be done to signpost those involved in cultural organisations to attend the Volunteering Forum, and a cultural volunteering discussion group could find a home there. Likewise, there is potential for a Torbay Culture Forum event (a quarterly gathering of those interested in furthering different strands of the Cultural Strategy) to be organised around the topic of cultural volunteering, the results of which could include concrete actions to further shared development needs.

On a less formal level, this research has revealed examples of activity which work towards greater sharing and engagement between organisations. For example, the cross-referral of volunteers between members of the Youth Cultural Partnership, Torbay shows how existing networks and associations can be built on to promote volunteer mobility. A number of organisations run volunteer exchange visits as a way of thanking volunteers. These could be excellent opportunities for both volunteers and coordinators to learn about new or different volunteering contexts, and to build connections and relationships. Developing such existing activities works towards organisations beginning to feel part of a larger cultural sector and cultural volunteering community across the Bay. These pragmatic steps form helpful interim stages towards the more advanced sharing of ideas discussed here.

Key learning:

- **Future Torbay Culture Board Forum events on different Cultural Strategy-related topics should include volunteer coordinators and volunteers as prospective attendees**
- **Torbay Culture Board should investigate resources through which:**
 - (a) **organisations can be invited to submit examples of policies and forms available to other organisations as examples of good practice. This could be limited to more generic policies (e.g. Data Protection, Equality and Diversity) in the first instance.**
 - (b) **a more formalised Exchange Visits scheme could be piloted, for both volunteers and volunteer coordinators, ensuring that participation by smaller organisations is encouraged and supported (see the Big Assist scheme run by NCVO).**

2.2 SUPPORTING VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS

A more detailed identification of the common development needs within the sector (specifically around volunteer management) should be carried out to see if shared/pooled training is a realistic possibility.

Key learning:

- **Further training and support for volunteer coordinators (or whoever fulfils this function) would identify gaps in skills/knowledge and most desired themes for, and methods of training and development. This would help to target further support.**

3 A CLEAR AND POSITIVE MESSAGE PROMOTING THE CULTURAL SECTOR IN TORBAY AND THE PART CULTURAL VOLUNTEERS PLAY IN ITS SUCCESS

Underpinning all the recommendations, and any future direction, there is a need to develop a stronger message about culture in Torbay. Despite the existence of the Cultural Strategy, the volunteers surveyed didn't readily recognise that there is a cultural sector in Torbay; that it is as lively and healthy as it is; and that what they do is a significant part of that – over and above their involvement in a single organisation. Not only will a strong and succinct message/story (including evidence of impact, preferably) be useful for attracting 'new blood' into volunteering, it will also help with fundraising and attracting new audience members, participants and visitors, reinforcing Torbay's growing reputation for doing 'more, different and better' together.

Key learning:

- Torbay Culture Board (as the body charged with ensuring effective delivery of the Cultural Strategy) should consider the best means of collating key, positive messages to form a 'rallying cry' to promote the benefits and impact of the cultural sector, including cultural volunteering in the Bay.

**THIS RESEARCH HAS REVEALED
EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITY WHICH
WORK TOWARDS GREATER SHARING
AND ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN
ORGANISATIONS**



OPTIONS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

1. A SHARED RECRUITMENT PORTAL/SYSTEM

There is a possibility for cultural organisations to recruit in one, sector-specific place. This could be through Torbay CDT, or another existing portal, or through a bespoke version of an existing resource such as Do-It. There is also the option of something completely new, although this is likely to be costly and time consuming. To develop this idea further, there could also be a shared cultural volunteering development worker for a partnership of organisations (a number of smaller ones?) if funding could be secured.

2. SHARED VOLUNTEER ROLES

Organisations could collaborate to identify volunteer roles where common recruitment and training procedures could be agreed. This would enable the workload involved to be shared. Organisations could set up a joint e-mail address and/or mailing address to handle applications, while sharing the responsibility for checking and responding to these. This would enable response rates to be quicker, and could also work for training as outlined above. This could perhaps be piloted with a group of willing organisations for a limited number of roles initially.

3. SHARED VOLUNTEER ROLES WITH 'VOLUNTEER MOBILITY'

As above, there could be the option for volunteers to move between organisations if they wish. This would enable volunteers with specialist skills to be involved more regularly and have greater impact across the sector, and would help to meet fluctuating demand and the issue of volunteers not being kept occupied all year round. A directory listing volunteers and their availability, interests and skills could be developed to facilitate this mobility.

4. TORBAY CULTURAL AMBASSADORS SCHEME

This study set out to provide some empirical basis to inform the development of the Torbay Cultural Ambassadors scheme, as outlined in the Cultural Strategy and as referenced at the start of this report. This section outlines one possible way in which this might operate, and sets out some points to bear in mind, drawing on the research. One option could be to develop an umbrella training programme which informs participants about all aspects of cultural activity in Torbay, the better to advocate it to others who live, work or spend time here.

The funding, development and recruitment of a comprehensive Torbay Cultural Ambassadors scheme is likely to take some time. In particular, the process of building a sense of pride in the cultural activity in Torbay as a whole, and beyond the particular organisations volunteers are currently connected with, is likely to be a gradual process supported by the implementation of many elements of the cultural strategy. In order for an eventual Ambassadors scheme to be successful and sustainable there needs to be a degree of "test and learn", trialling ways to include as wide a range of people as possible, and the best form for recruitment, orientation and training to take.

One significant upcoming event in the Torbay will be the UNESCO Geoparks conference, in September 2016. This large international event will require a team of 20-30 skilled volunteers, with a deep understanding of Torbay, and very significantly, the Geopark. In many respects they could be Torbay Cultural Ambassadors in the making. Given that the Geopark conference is less than a year away, this could be a way of scoping and piloting broad-based 'ambassadorial' training as part of the process of preparing Geopark volunteers for the conference.

Suggested action:

- Torbay Culture Board to identify resources to support the 'ambassadorial' element of volunteer training for the Geopark Conference as a jointly agreed research and development exercise, the findings of which would usefully inform the best way forward for an eventual Torbay Cultural Ambassadors scheme.

APPENDICES

1. PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Babbacombe Cliff Railway
Brixfest
Brixham Battery
Brixham Cricket Club
Brixham Museum
Circus Torbay
Doorstep Arts
Ellacombe All-Star Kids Club
Friends of Brixham library
Friends of Paignton Library
Kents Cavern Foundation
Lupton Trust
National Trust
Paignton Pantomime
Paignton Zoo/Living Coasts
Play Torbay
Riviera FM
Robert Owen Communities
South Devon Players
Sports Council
Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust
Torbay Festival of Poetry
Torbay Film Club
Torbay Library Service
Torquay Museum
Torquay Operatic and Dramatic Society
Torre Abbey
Torre Abbey gardens
Youngs Park People

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Enjoy, talk, be
do,

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