



VOLUNTARY ACTION IN IRELAND

FACTS AND FIGURES

APRIL 2004

A. VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE

- **National and Regional Volunteer Centres**

Volunteering Ireland is the national resource for volunteering, established in 1997/8 under the parent organisation Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Groups. It became an independent organisation in 2001 and currently employs 7 paid staff and a number of volunteers.

Volunteering Ireland promotes high quality voluntary activity by encouraging organisations that work with volunteers to adopt good policy and practice and by acting as a link between such organisations and prospective volunteers.

Volunteering Ireland has the following aims: ¹

- To promote volunteering to the general public, the media and policy-makers;
- To support organisations wishing to implement good practice in their involvement of volunteers;
- To match individuals who wish to volunteer with organisations which offer suitable volunteering opportunities.

Volunteering Ireland is the Irish representative of both the International Association for Volunteer Effort and the European Volunteer Centre and is the United Nations Volunteers national focal point for International Volunteer Day (IVD).

At present there are no regional volunteer centres in Ireland.

- **Resources for Volunteering and NGOs**

Funding varies dramatically from year to year and tends to consist of a mixture of:

- Direct statutory funding, both central and local;
- Indirect statutory funding through semi-state agencies;
- Funding through private trusts and foundations;
- Corporate sponsorship;
- Fundraising from the general public (street collections, raffles, sponsored events etc);
- Other ways of generating revenue, e.g. trade, charging for services, etc..

¹ Information from Volunteering Ireland web site: www.volunteeringireland.com

- **The Recruitment and Placement of Volunteers by Volunteer Centres**

Volunteering Ireland organises a volunteer placement service that focuses on central Dublin. In 2003, this service provided placements for about 1800 volunteers with a further 1800 to whom information was provided about volunteering opportunities.

Volunteering Ireland also supports agencies planning to set up local volunteer centres throughout the Republic of Ireland and is a founder member of “Volunteer Centres Ireland” (the network of local volunteer centres) and the “All-Ireland Volunteer Centres Network”. In 2003, it worked with more than 1500 volunteer-involving organisations throughout Ireland.²

B. BASIC FACTS

- **Statistical Data: Number of Volunteers in Ireland**

According to a survey performed by the National College of Ireland, 33% of the adult population volunteered in some capacity in 1999.³

Out of a total population of over 3,900,000, this means that approximately 1,287,000 people volunteered.⁴

C. THE TRAINING OF VOLUNTEERS

- **Volunteer Training: National Volunteer Centres**

Volunteering Ireland primarily provides training for managers (paid and unpaid) of volunteers on the effective involvement of volunteers, but not for volunteers themselves. They cannot provide individual training, as volunteer roles are so diverse. Volunteering Ireland believes that it is the responsibility of the volunteer-involving organisation to introduce the volunteer to the goals and vision of the service, to the work/volunteering environment, to the role requirements and to the health and safety requirements. Volunteering Ireland encourages volunteer-organisations to provide training to volunteers, if necessary, particularly in specific tasks. (Clare McGuinness, 2004)

- **Number of Volunteers that Receive Some Form of Training in Ireland**

Just over 20% of all volunteers in Ireland are given some form of training for the work that they do.⁵

Although this figure may seem low, it should be remembered that many voluntary activities don't require any prior formal training.

In 2003, ten courses were delivered by Volunteering Ireland on a range of volunteer management topics, reaching out to 155 people.

- **Most Common Forms of Training**

² “Annual Report 2003” - Volunteering Ireland

³ “Reaching out: charitable giving and volunteering in the Republic of Ireland”, Ruddle, Helen & Mulvihill, 1999, National College of Ireland

⁴ Information from: <http://www.eu2004.ie/templates/standard.asp?sNavlocator=7,98,113>

⁵ “Reaching out: charitable giving and volunteering in the Republic of Ireland”, Ruddle, Helen & Mulvihill, 1999, National College of Ireland; and “A new civic Europe? A study of the extent and role of volunteering”, Gaskin, K. & Davis Smith, J., 1995, Volunteer Centre UK

No details found.

- **Do Volunteers Want Training?**

There is an obvious desire for training from those who use volunteering as a 'second chance' at education.

Outside this group, there is a wide variation in the interest for training, which can be put down to the wide variation in motivations to volunteer, for example among volunteers with low prospects of employment, accredited training (which involved elements of personal development) is notably sought after.⁶

D. SECTOR AREAS THAT VOLUNTEERS ARE INVOLVED IN

- **In Which Activities are Volunteers Involved?**

Volunteers in Ireland are most strongly involved in the following areas:⁷

| | |
|--|-------|
| • Collecting items to raise money for/give to those in need: | 9.9% |
| • Visiting the elderly: | 9.6% |
| • Helping at a club or with a club activity: | 9.1% |
| • Visiting the sick: | 8.5% |
| • Visiting the lonely: | 5.8% |
| • Serving as a 'church helper': | 4.8% |
| • Serving on a committee for a charity: | 4.6% |
| • Voluntary community work: | 2.2% |
| • Giving blood: | 1.9% |
| • Other voluntary activities: | 43.6% |

Percentages based on responses of 1000 people surveyed.

Further activities include

Conservation of the Environment: More than 10,000 young Irish volunteers, mostly aged 18 to 25, went to North West Spain, at Easter in 2003, to help clean up oil that had washed up onto Spanish shores following the Prestige oil tanker spill.⁸

Involvement in Sports: Volunteers have been responsible for creating most community-based sports clubs, many sports facilities and all of the national governing bodies of sport. The Irish Sports Council classes those individuals who take part in sport, or help to administer it, as volunteers because the individuals enjoy what they are doing, want to do it and aren't required to do it.⁹

- **Impact of United Nations International Year of Volunteers in Ireland**

⁶ "Tipping the Balance: Report and recommendations to Government on supporting and developing volunteering in Ireland", National Committee of Volunteering, 2002

⁷ "Reaching out: charitable giving and volunteering in the Republic of Ireland", Ruddle, H & O'Connor, J, 1993, Policy Research Centre, Dublin

⁸ Irish Times, see: http://www.volunteeringireland.com/Frameset_News.htm

⁹ Information from Irish Sports Council web site: <http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/volunteer.asp>

The United Nation's International Year of Volunteers in 2001 gave a new impetus to volunteering in Ireland, significantly increasing demand on Volunteering Ireland's services.¹⁰

It was used as an opportunity to raise awareness of volunteering in Ireland, to celebrate the enormous contribution that volunteering has made to Irish life, to ask the hard questions about where volunteering is going, and to strengthen, support and recognize volunteering in Ireland. In this context, the various interest groups used the International Year as a chance to ask the Government to further develop its policy towards volunteering. The result of this was the formation of a "National Committee on Volunteering" for the duration of the International Year which researched and published a detailed report entitled, "Tipping the Balance: Report and Recommendations to Government on Supporting and Developing Volunteering in Ireland", National Committee of Volunteering, 2002" (See section G for further information).

E. VOLUNTEER PROFILES

- **Proportion of Men-Women Volunteers**

In 1997/8, 28% of the men in Ireland considered themselves as volunteers compared with 40% of the women. In the age range of 50-59 years, as much as 60% of the female population volunteers!¹⁰

- **Age of Volunteers**

A survey made in 1997/8, which covered the population who were aged 18 or older shows that, in Ireland, the older one gets, the more likely one is to volunteer; until the age of about 60, where voluntary activity declines again.

The survey shows that only 31.1% of those aged between 18-29 volunteer - a proportion that rises to 47.8% participation by those aged between 50-59.¹⁰

- **Education Attainment of Volunteers/Socio-Economic Status of Volunteers**

A positive association is found between volunteer engagement and educational attainment and socio-economic status.

Those that have reached the Third Level Qualification are more than twice as likely to volunteer than those with Primary Certificates (48.6% compared with 23.2%). In addition, statistics show worryingly, that the proportion of those with the lowest level of education who decide to volunteer has dropped significantly in the last decade – by at least 6.7%.

Individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to volunteer than those more fortunate, however these differences have decreased in recent years (44.3% of professionals and managers volunteer, compared to 25.9% of unskilled or unemployed persons).¹⁰

¹⁰ "Annual Report 2002" - Volunteering Ireland

- **Who Volunteers in Ireland?** ¹¹

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Young people and students | (The involvement rate increased between 1992 - 1997 from 40% to 46%); |
| Professionals | (34% of full-time workers and 52% of part-time workers are involved in some kind of voluntary activity); |
| Unemployed | (The involvement rate is thought to be about 18%); |
| Retired | (The involvement rate is thought to be about 28%); |
| People with disabilities | (No figures found); |
| Refugees/migrants | (No official involvement figures, although Volunteering Ireland and local volunteer centres all report major uses of their placement services by new immigrants) |

The typical volunteer is an Irish, able-bodied, single female in her twenties. She is employed, without dependents and has a third level education. ¹²

- **Are Those with a Higher Income More Likely to Volunteer?**

People with a gross household income of more than £15,650 (23,4000 EURO) are more likely to volunteer than people with a lower income according to the 1997-8 survey.¹³ Those with a gross annual income of £26,000 (39,000 EURO) were the most likely of all to volunteer.

F. VOLUNTEERS' MOTIVATIONS

- **Why People Volunteer: Motivations**

According to a survey conducted in 1997/8, the reasons people volunteer included (the percentages refer to the ratio between the number of times a reason was cited and the total number of reasons cited): ¹¹

| | |
|---|-------|
| • Belief in the cause | 15.4% |
| • Asked to help | 12.5% |
| • Wanted to help | 11.5% |
| • Wanted to be neighbourly | 10.7% |
| • Knew or liked those people already involved | 10.3% |
| • Had time to spare | 7.9% |
| • For enjoyment | 7.1% |

- **Have Motivations Changed Recently in Ireland?**

¹¹ "Tipping the Balance: Report and recommendations to Government on supporting and developing volunteering in Ireland", National Committee of Volunteering, 2002

¹² "Annual Report 2003" - Volunteering Ireland

¹³ "Reaching out: charitable giving and volunteering in the Republic of Ireland", Ruddle, Helen & Mulvihill, 1999, National College of Ireland; and "A new civic Europe? A study of the extent and role of volunteering", Gaskin, K. & Davis Smith, J., 1995, Volunteer Centre UK

The proportion of volunteers participating because they ‘wanted to help’ fell significantly during the 1990s. In 1992, this reason accounted for nearly 30% of reasons given, compared to 11.5% six years later.

‘Belief in the cause’ rose in importance as a reason to volunteer, by 8 percentage points over the same period and other reasons, that were less prominent previously, also grew significantly during the mid-nineties, for example neighbourliness, knowing or liking those involved and having time to spare.¹⁴

G. ATTITUDES TOWARDS VOLUNTEERING

• Traditions and Cultural Acceptance of Volunteerism in Ireland

The non-profit sector has a long, rich and diverse tradition in Ireland, forming a substantial element of national economic and social life.

From the medieval era when the concept of Caritas within the Christian tradition encouraged people to give service for the benefit of others, to the 19th century when the Society of St Vincent de Paul began operating in the field of social services. Indeed, the strong association of voluntary organisations with social services can be seen to date from this time.¹⁵

Historically, voluntary activity in sports associations and in rural agriculture-based communities has also helped carve out an identity for Ireland of social solidarity and strength in community.

The second half of the 20th century saw the birth and growth, due to increasing political and financial support, of a community development movement that concentrated on social issues in urban areas and, in time, rural areas too.

The United Nation’s International Year of Volunteers in 2001 also gave a new impetus to volunteering in Ireland, significantly increasing demand on Volunteering Ireland’s services.¹⁶

In summary, volunteerism has a long history in Ireland and is culturally accepted, indeed 65% of people who don’t volunteer at present say they would be willing to use their spare time for voluntary work!¹⁷

There is a slight concern, however, that as Ireland becomes more diverse and the concept of citizenship fades, there may be implications for volunteering because it is closely linked with the idea of citizenship.¹⁴

• Government Policies Towards Volunteering in Ireland

There are no current pieces of legislation that are specific to volunteers in Ireland (although there are a number of “tax breaks” for those that enjoy charitable status), but policies are being developed and the Government is under pressure to deliver support for the sector.¹⁸

¹⁴ “Tipping the Balance: Report and recommendations to Government on supporting and developing volunteering in Ireland”, National Committee of Volunteering, 2002

¹⁵ “The Voluntary Sector in the Republic of Ireland”, Donnelly-Cox G. and Jaffro G., 1999, AVARI

¹⁶ “Annual Report 2002” - Volunteering Ireland

¹⁷ “Civil society and social policy”, Powell, Fred & Guerin, Donal, 1997, University College Cork

¹⁸ “The Legal Status of Volunteers in Ireland”, AVSO and CEV, 2003

In May 1997, a “Green Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity” was published which initiated a consultation process between the Government and the voluntary and community sectors on the measures needed to support the development of the sector.

This paper was followed up with a White Paper in September 2000 that aimed to clarify the relationship between the Government and the voluntary and community sector. It was careful to spell out the importance of the Government *enabling* the voluntary sector to work more effectively, not trying to control, shape or manage it. Indeed, the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, used the paper to make it clear that the Government’s position was not to “...seek to control and be involved in every aspect of voluntary activity... [but to] provide an enabling framework to help this activity.”¹⁹

This commitment to support voluntary activity in Ireland was followed up in December 2000 by the creation of the National Committee on Volunteering (NCV) in preparation of the 2001 United Nations International Year of Volunteers (IYV) and with a view to develop a longer term strategy to promote and expand volunteering.

The NCV recommended that the State use the International Year of Volunteers to celebrate the enormous contribution that volunteering has made to Irish life, to ask the hard questions about where volunteering is going, and to strengthen, support and recognize volunteering in Ireland.

In 2002, NCV carried on its work by publishing an important report: “*Tipping the Balance*” that analyses the sector in Ireland and puts forward further recommendations to the Government about how to support and develop volunteering in Ireland.

Primarily it calls for the development of a national policy on volunteering that is integrated with other social policies and that contains specific strategies. Protection of volunteers and financial support should be provided by the State, as well as active promotion of, and removal of barriers to, volunteering. The report also calls for a Volunteer Charter.

H. ECONOMIC VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

- **Statistical Data: Hours devoted to Voluntary Activities**

People volunteer for an average of 5-12 hours per month, although the range is wide: some give less than one hour, whilst others give over 50 hours.²⁰

- **Estimated Economic Value of Volunteering in Ireland**

The total amount of time given to voluntary work per year is equivalent to approximately 96,450 full-time workers.²¹ According to the most recent figures, this manpower generates in-kind revenue that is worth nearly **€600 million** to the non-profit sector in Ireland.²²

- **Social/Economic Benefits of Volunteering in Ireland**

¹⁹ “Tipping the Balance: Report and recommendations to Government on supporting and developing volunteering in Ireland”, National Committee of Volunteering, 2002

²⁰ “The organisation of volunteering: a study of Irish voluntary organisations in the social welfare area”, Ruddle, Helen & Donoghue, Freda, 1995, National College of Ireland

²¹ “Reaching out: charitable giving and volunteering in the Republic of Ireland”, Ruddle, Helen & Mulvihill, 1999, National College of Ireland

²² “Uncovering the non-profit sector in Ireland: its economic value and significance”, Donoghue F., 1999, National College of Ireland

According to the Government's White Paper on supporting voluntary activity; "*(the) active voluntary and community sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralized institutional administration structures and fosters a climate in which innovative solutions to complex social problems and enhancement of quality of life can be enhanced for all*".²³

I. EVOLUTION OF VOLUNTEERISM IN RECENT YEARS IN IRELAND

Recent developments within the Volunteer Sector, Ireland²⁴

In June 2003, Ireland hosted the Special Olympics World Summer Games for the first time. Over 30,000 volunteers were recruited and trained in preparation for the international event, making it a massive success for all involved!

In May 2003, Volunteering Ireland launched an annual one-day conference of VOLT (Volunteer Organisers Linking Together). The Conference provides an opportunity for paid and unpaid volunteer managers to network and disseminate best practice, particularly in the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

The main aims of VOLT are to:²⁵

- 1) Provide mutual support;
- 2) Share knowledge and experience about good practice in volunteer management;
- 3) Provide a voice for the volunteer coordinator in Ireland.

Other Volunteering Ireland initiatives include:

- 2004: Launch of "Opportunity Knocks", opening doors for volunteers with additional support needs. It is a publication which helps organisations involve volunteers who may have extra support needs;
- Launch of TLC (Time-Limited Commitment) © service for short-term volunteering opportunities;
- 2001-2: "Socialclimbing" programme to encourage younger people to take up the challenge of volunteering;
- 2001: Ireland inVOLved in awareness and recognition campaign.

In recent years, the volunteering infrastructure has seen much growth, starting with the establishment of Volunteering Ireland in 1997, then joined by 9 local volunteer centres. Hopes are that in future, many more volunteer centres will be established.

In terms of activities pursued by volunteers, virtual volunteering has taken off in the last few years, as has the interest in volunteering abroad – an activity traditionally popular with Irish volunteers – which has become more accessible due to the cheaper cost of travelling.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Employer-Supported Volunteering are also big initiatives that are becoming more popular. See Business In The Community Ireland www.bitc.ie. (Sandra Velthuis, 2003 and Clare McGuinness, 2004)

²³ "White Paper on 'Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector' ", Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2000

²⁴ Volunteering Ireland: www.volunteeringireland.com

²⁵ Information on VOLT from Volunteering Ireland: www.volunteeringireland.com/volt.

- **Methods for the Recruitment and Training of Volunteers**

Web sites have become an important method for obtaining information about placement services, and are also a major promotional tool for other aspects of volunteer centres' work.

Volunteering Ireland has also had extensive coverage in the national and local press, local radio, voluntary and community sector media, local authority media and in-house corporate publicity (e.g. Vodafone) - all of which helps in the recruitment of volunteers.²⁶

In 2003, Volunteering Ireland initiated a project to promote volunteering to those who are traditionally under-represented or who may need assistance to pursue and sustain voluntary work. Those being approached include the long-term unemployed, members of the travelling community, asylum seekers and people with physical disabilities, learning difficulties and/or mental illness. The project resulted in the publication of a user-friendly toolkit for organisations and for volunteers entitled "Opportunity Knocks: Opening Doors for Volunteers with Additional Support Needs". Volunteering Ireland is currently the leading authority on supported volunteering issues in Ireland, and continues to promote and assist organisations in becoming more accessible to all volunteers.²⁷

In Ireland, the volunteering sector is increasingly turning to the new information and communication technologies in its recruitment of volunteers, indeed as mentioned above, virtual volunteering is one of the key growth areas.

Also mentioned above, is the impact on the recruitment of volunteers that corporate social responsibility is having on the development of volunteering in Ireland, as more businesses are becoming aware of their social responsibility.

J. REWARDING VOLUNTEERS

- **Common Ways of Thanking/Acknowledging Volunteers**

Recognition comes in many different forms: informal recognition methods include thank-you cards/ letters, certificates of achievement and even car parking places!

More formal methods include award ceremonies and large social events, which can also be used as a platform from which to promote volunteering.

There are three levels of recognition: Community, Organisational and State.

- **Community**

The UN International Year of Volunteers was used as an opportunity to thank people for their volunteering within their communities, especially with a high-profile media event called the "People of the Year Awards".

Other community recognition comes in the form of award ceremonies hosted by various celebrities (run by the sector itself), award ceremonies organised by the local authorities and the annual "Tidy Towns Competition".

- **Organisations**

²⁶ "Annual Report 2003" - Volunteering Ireland

²⁷ Volunteering Ireland: www.volunteeringireland.com

Many organisations award honours or badges to individuals for specific skills they've gained, or for milestones they've reached in their volunteer work. This is particularly obvious in the Irish Scouting associations, but also in a Motor Neuron Association that celebrates volunteers' achievements in their newsletters and during annual events.

- **State recognition**

State recognition is less extensive, but there are some examples including the President's Gaisce Awards, which were launched as part of the UN International Year of Volunteers (for young people aged between 15-25, not exclusively about voluntary community work but this is a part of the awards).

- **Do Volunteers Want Recognition Of Their Work?**

Some volunteers, depending on motivation, are happy to go about their work without recognition of what they've done. However, those participating in a specific programme or competition are obviously glad for the recognition, indeed according to one report, over 20% of volunteers listed the appreciation of their work as one of the benefits of volunteering.²⁸

- **Is It Important to Recognize Volunteers' Work in Ireland? If So, Why?**

Increasingly, there is a feeling that attention should not concentrate solely on volunteer productivity and organisation of the network, but also on providing the volunteer with a positive experience. This is key to recruitment and retention of future volunteers.

There is also a growing realization in Ireland, and abroad, that systems need to be developed of accrediting, in a tangible way, the work done by volunteers.²⁹

K. FINAL COMMENTS/ CONCLUSIONS

Ireland's long and diverse history of voluntary work has given the network a strong culture to build on. Volunteering seems to have grown in popularity and recognition in recent years, helped by the creation of Volunteering Ireland, the National Committee on Volunteering and the United Nations International Year of Volunteers. Furthermore, the diversity in the organisation of volunteer activities and the various motivations for volunteering also add to the strength of the sector.

However, despite this strength and vibrancy, Ireland continues to lag behind in areas such as its volunteer policy and infrastructure development.

The Irish volunteer network is also trying hard to shake-off the image of under-funding and fragmentation, and is continuing to make recommendations to Government to improve conditions for the sector and for the volunteer. Initiatives like Volunteering Ireland's "Charter for Effective Volunteering"³⁰ are helping to take the sector forward and to demonstrate the need for careful consideration about how to support volunteering in Ireland.

²⁸ "Reaching out: charitable giving and volunteering in the Republic of Ireland", Ruddle, Helen & Mulvihill, 1999, National College of Ireland

²⁹ "Tipping the Balance: Report and recommendations to Government on supporting and developing volunteering in Ireland", National Committee on Volunteering, 2002

³⁰ Volunteering Ireland: www.volunteeringireland.com/Frameset_TheBasics.htm

L. USEFUL CONTACTS

Volunteering Ireland
Coleraine House
Coleraine Street
Dublin 7
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND
Tel: 353 / 1 872 2622
Fax: 353 / 1 872 2623
E-Mail: info@volunteeringireland.com
Internet: <http://www.volunteeringireland.com>

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