



FINAL LEARNING REPORT

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Executive Summary

The Active Kindness programme

The Active Kindness (AK) programme was delivered by Community Leisure UK (CLUK) in partnership with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), and with funding from Sport England.

The long-term aim of the programme was to lead to more active and connected communities, and to do this through volunteering within public leisure. The specific aim of the programme was to build Charitable Trusts' capacity for volunteer management within public leisure.

The programme began in 2019 but had to pause because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic which had a massive detrimental effect on volunteering. Trusts were still recovering from this at the end of the programme.

The programme initially worked with five leisure Trusts in the pilot phase, although one withdrew because of the impact of the pandemic. In late 2022 a further ten leisure Trusts were recruited to the programme for delivery in 2023.

About this evaluation

NCVO, as the evaluation and learning partner for AK, supported Trusts to develop their monitoring and evaluation skills and processes from the start of the programme.

A theory of change was developed for the programme with the support of NCVO and the evaluation ran alongside programme delivery.

This evaluation aimed to understand:

- What works in engaging priority communities and relative effectiveness of outputs and approaches?
- Learning about if/how a broader volunteering base leads to a more active and connected community.
- Learning about the benefits and effectiveness of the partnership.
- Learning about creating a positive experience for volunteers.

This report represents the final output from the learning and evaluation partnership between NCVO and CLUK and was based on programme monitoring data, surveys, staff and volunteer interviews and workshops, as well as observations of programme delivery.

Key findings and learning from the evaluation

Building capacity and embedding volunteering within Trusts

- All Trusts interviewed had taken steps to embed volunteering within their organisations although the depth to which it was embedded varied across sites.
- Being close to delivery, ie working directly with volunteers, made it easier to demonstrate the value of volunteering throughout the Trust.
- Buy-in from senior leaders is very important.

Recruiting volunteers from diverse groups and new communities

- There is no single solution for how to recruit from diverse groups and new communities, a range of approaches is needed. Successful approaches have included a combination of:
 - Targeting activities to attract particular groups or communities
 - Linking with other organisations to share information about volunteer opportunities and activities
 - Providing information where they are by holding community engagement events outside of the leisure centres
 - Providing volunteers with the opportunity to gain a qualification
- Ongoing data collection will help to understand volunteers and support targeted volunteer recruitment in future.

Motivations to volunteer



- The four main reasons for volunteering reflected the findings from NCVO’s most recent Time Well Spent¹ survey. These were:

			
Giving back / making a difference	Socialisation	Gaining something (e.g. a skill, experience, confidence)	Interest in a specific activity

¹ <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-2023/>

Benefits from volunteering

- The main benefits identified by volunteers were also similar to Time Well Spent²:

			
Enjoyment	Meeting new people	Feeling like they are making a difference	Sense of personal achievement

- All volunteers who responded to a volunteer satisfaction survey administered by NCVO identified that volunteering gave them an opportunity to meet people they might not otherwise have met.
- Volunteering can provide opportunities to reduce isolation for those who volunteer and for others in the community.
- Trusts benefited from involving volunteers by enhancing the activities offered. Volunteers could bring their personal experiences and insights to develop and improve activities.
- Volunteering was also a way to develop new members of staff for the Trust, and some Trusts provided volunteers with the opportunity to gain qualifications which would improve their employability skills.

Community engagement and involvement

- Trusts must be visible in communities in order to increase engagement, activity and develop a broader volunteering base.
- Volunteers from new communities and priority communities can become involved through engagement with other organisations, and community engagement events away from the leisure centres.

Programme design and set-up

- Trusts learnt from the experiences of other Trusts and valued the opportunities to share learning.
- Funding is important to enable Trusts to sustainably embed volunteering.
- Partnership working among the delivery partners (CLUK, NCVO and Sport England) provided the ability to share knowledge and expertise from three different organisations.
- The establishment of peer networks and a 'community of practice' facilitated informal learning and resource sharing.

² ibid

- The relationship between key staff at the delivery partners and volunteer managers at the Trusts was fundamental to the success of the programme. This included the development of a volunteering toolkit which was developed based on feedback and sessions with Trusts throughout the year.

Recommendations

A learning co-production workshop was held with Trusts and delivery partners in November 2023. Recommendations were developed from that workshop.

For Trusts:

1. Ensure the offer to volunteers is relevant and reflects volunteer skill sets.
2. Consider training and development of volunteers and how to prioritise this within any funding.
3. Have one member of staff responsible for volunteering supported by other staff to embed volunteering across the organisation.

For AK programme delivery partners:

4. Develop guidance on gathering baseline data at the start of their volunteering programme against which Trusts can measure progress.
5. Develop an options menu for use of any grant based on what was useful for previous cohorts.
6. Develop guidance around demonstrating the social impact of volunteering within Trusts.
7. Produce an annual calendar of events for the programme around planning and reporting schedules.
8. Consider ways to maximise engagement across all Trusts, such as having two people appointed per Trust, inviting additional members of staff to relevant learning sessions and linking funding to engagement.

For the legacy of the AK programme:

9. Harness the experiences of the Pilot and Phase Two Trusts to provide case studies for volunteering in the public leisure sector and for any future delivery of the AK programme.
10. Consider how to share learning through the toolkit across the CLUK membership and more widely with the public leisure sector, starting with the evaluation launch in January 2024.
11. Continue research and data collection to identify the longer-term impact of the programme.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The ambitions for the Active Kindness programme – to help Charitable Trusts (Trusts) delivering public leisure services develop their volunteering operations - came at a pivotal time for volunteering in the UK. The NCVO Almanac 2022 noted that levels of formal volunteering (typically accounting for the bulk of volunteering undertaken through Trusts) fell sharply during the Covid-19 pandemic³. Although this event affected many types of volunteering, right across the voluntary and community sector, Sport England’s Active Lives Survey confirmed that sport and physical activity was hit particularly hard: 3.1m fewer adults volunteered between November 2020-21 compared to the previous 12-month period.⁴

The England-wide Vision for Volunteering piece of work, undertaken in late 2021 and early 2022, picked up on many of the trends volunteer-involving professionals are grappling with as they sought to tackle these recruitment and retention challenges.⁵ Sport England explicitly recognised the fundamental importance of volunteers to achieving their vision and mission in their new strategy, Uniting the Movement (2022-32).⁶ They realised that the Power of People and Leadership was one of their five ‘catalysts for change’ through which the strategy focused on supporting the development of volunteering in several areas. These also included:

- working with others to take an honest look at the support and experience for volunteers within the sector
- focusing on what’s needed to make giving your time easy
- meaningful and supported, now and for the future
- reducing drop-out rates.⁷

Against such a backdrop the Active Kindness programme offered the opportunity to step back and consider the role volunteering could play in Trusts’ visions and missions - and develop their capacities and capabilities to achieve this.

1.2 About the programme

The Active Kindness (AK) programme was delivered by Community Leisure UK (CLUK) in partnership with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), and with funding from Sport England. A third organisation, Absolutely Cultured, was originally engaged as a delivery partner but ended their involvement due to the pandemic.

The long-term aim of the programme was to lead to more active and connected communities, and to do this through volunteering within public leisure. The specific aim of the programme was to build Trusts’ capacity for volunteer management in public leisure. A theory of change was developed for the programme with the support of NCVO and is included below and in [Appendix B](#).

³ [NCVO Almanac 2022 - Volunteering](#)

⁴ [Sport England Active Lives Survey 2021-22](#) (slide 26)

⁵ [Vision for Volunteering](#) (2022)

⁶ [Sport England Strategy - Uniting the Movement](#) (2022)

⁷ [Sport England Strategy - Uniting the Movement](#) (Full) (slide 37)

This was based on the initial partnership proposal to Sport England and explored in detail with AK partners and pilot sites through two workshops in 2019.

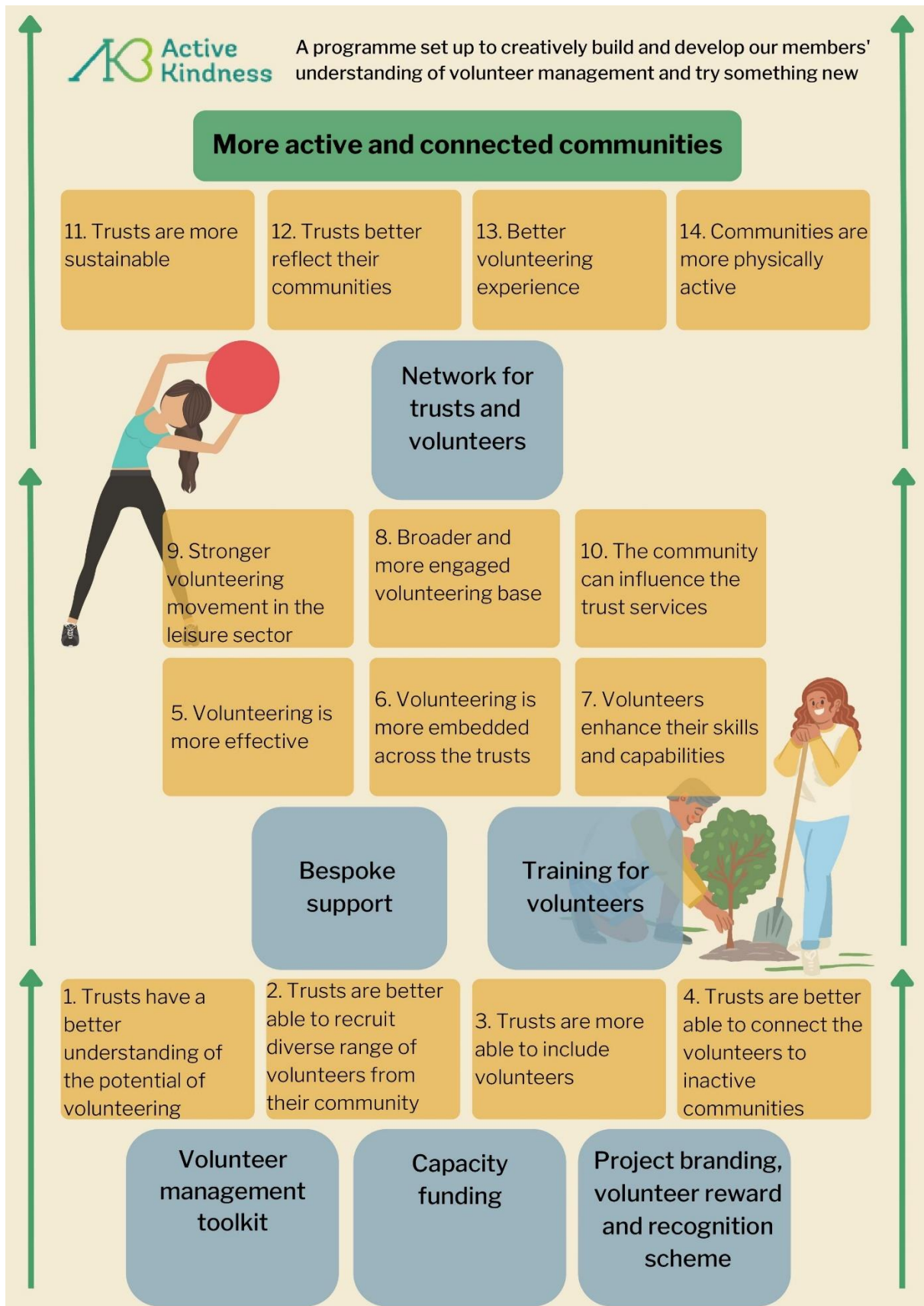
















Figure 1: Programme Theory of Change

The specific activities the programme intended to deliver were:

- Bespoke workshops delivered to support new thinking around volunteer policies, role descriptions, marketing and promotion
- A unique online volunteer programme toolkit for the Trusts
- Resources for volunteer managers
- A network for volunteers
- Funding to support Trusts with the recruitment and training of a new and more diverse cohort of volunteers, including purchasing of a volunteer data management system.

The programme started in 2019 with five leisure Trusts recruited to the pilot phase, though one withdrew as a result of the impact of the pandemic. The programme was paused from 2020 to late 2021 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. A further ten leisure Trusts were recruited to the programme late in 2022, for delivery in 2023.

The participating leisure Trusts were:

Pilot leisure Trusts		Phase two leisure Trusts	
	Active Luton		Everybody Health and Leisure
	Hyndburn Leisure, Accrington		Freedom Leisure
	The Pelican Centre, Tyldesley		Fusion Lifestyle
	Your Trust Rochdale		GLL – Manchester
			HalfFish
			Halo Leisure
			Kirklees Active Leisure
			LED Leisure
			Rossendale Leisure Trust
			Sandford Parks Lido

At the beginning of the programme, each Trust carried out an Investing in Volunteers (IiV) self-assessment and developed an action plan in discussion with delivery partners, which was reviewed with delivery partners at six months. Central to the second phase of the programme was an understanding that each Trust was in a different place with their volunteering, and that they would progress at a rate to suit the Trust.

1.3 Key Performance Indicators⁸

The programme worked towards the following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) agreed with Sport England.

New Support Structures	
①	Production of a Volunteer Programme Toolkit for community leisure
②	Production of a toolkit of resources for volunteer managers
③	Established network for volunteers
④	Established network for volunteer managers
⑤	Fifteen Trusts will be involved in the programme delivery

Volunteers	
⑥	375 volunteers recruited
⑦	20% of volunteers engaged will be from lower socio-economic groups
⑧	60% of volunteers engaged in this programme will be female

⁸ Source for KPIs 1-5: AK programme managers. Source for KPIs 6-8: Data supplied by Trusts.

1.4 The evaluation

NCVO, as the evaluation and learning partner for AK, supported Trusts to develop their monitoring and evaluation skills and processes from the start of the programme. The Trusts participated in a monitoring and evaluation workshops and received one-to-one support from NCVO evaluation consultant to further build their monitoring and evaluation plans. This report represents the final output from the learning and evaluation partnership between NCVO and CLUK and was based on programme monitoring data, surveys, staff and volunteer interviews and workshops, as well as observations of programme delivery. The **evaluation design evolved** because of the changes to the programme and to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.4.1 Learning questions

The programme theory of change, co-created with partners at the start of the programme, included four learning questions for the evaluation:

L1. What works in engaging priority communities and relative effectiveness of outputs and approaches?

L2. Learning about if/how a broader volunteering base leads to a more active and connected community.

L3. Learning about the benefits and effectiveness of the partnership.

L4. Learning about creating a positive experience for volunteers.

1.4.2 Evaluation data





In November 2022, NCVO received data from three pilot Trusts for the programme's interim evaluation. Subsequently, in October 2023 data was received from nine Trusts participating in phase two, along with additional data from three pilot Trusts.

In October and November 2023, NCVO carried out primary data collection with four Trusts from phase two and one pilot Trust. Trusts were selected using sampling criteria agreed between NCVO and CLUK. The criteria used were:

- cohort (ensuring inclusion of both Pilot and Phase Two Trusts);
- the Trust's geographical location (ensuring Trusts from a range of locations were represented);
- Trust size (ensuring a single site Trust was included alongside multi-site Trusts);
- type of Trust (including Trusts that solely deliver leisure services alongside those who offer leisure alongside other services); and
- the Trust's level of confidence and engagement in the programme.

1.4.3 Evaluation methods

A number of data collection tools and evaluation methods were utilised throughout the evaluation, providing both qualitative and quantitative data. Some were existing tools used by the Trusts, others were developed by NCVO as part of the theory of change development. The data for the evaluation was identified and set out in a monitoring and evaluation framework directly linked to the theory of change. The collection of data was undertaken by the Trusts and NCVO. The table below indicates the types of data collected throughout the evaluation and the response number for each source.

	<p>NCVO carried out interviews with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 Trusts • 7 members of staff or volunteer managers • 4 volunteers <p>3 representatives of delivery partner organisation</p>		<p>A volunteer satisfaction survey was administered by NCVO and shared with volunteers by Trusts. These were analysed by NCVO. Results from the survey are in Appendix A.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35 responses
	<p>NCVO carried out observations of activities at three Trusts</p>		<p>Monitoring data gathered by Trusts was shared with NCVO for analysis</p>

1.4.4 Considerations and limitations

There are a number of considerations regarding evaluation findings:

- **Learning focused** – as a formative evaluation, AK has responded to emerging findings and learning throughout the evaluation period. Therefore, improvements and changes were made while the evaluation was still on-going.
- **Recording practices** - volunteer postcode data was incomplete for some Trusts which limited the ability to report against the KPI. Some postcodes were unrecognised by the online tool to identify levels of multiple deprivation and could not be included within the calculation.
- **Sample size** - the survey response rate was 17.34% meaning that the survey will have a relatively large margin of error (17%)⁹. The results are a snapshot in time and will not have captured volunteers who took part in one-off events or who were no longer engaged with the Trust.

⁹ This means that the survey results could vary by up to seventeen percentage points in either direction from the reported numbers. For example, if 60% of respondents agreed with a statement, with a margin of error of 17%, this means that the actual level of support could range from 43% to 77%.

- **Trust participation** - data has been gathered from Trusts that remained engaged throughout the programme. There may be further learning to be gathered from those that did not or were not able to maintain a level of engagement. One Phase Two Trust did not participate in the evaluation due to decreased engagement with the programme over time.

1.5 The report

Chapters two to four of the report comprise of the following:

Chapter 2: Learning from volunteer development - Chapter 2 reports on the learning from Trusts on volunteer development and embedding volunteering within Trusts.

Chapter 3: Learning from programme development - Chapter 3 draws on the key learning from the development of the programme and the peer networks. It also reports on the key challenges faced by the Trusts and delivery partners in the delivery of the programme. Finally, it reports on progress towards programme KPIs and planning for the future sustainability of the programme.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations - This chapter draws together the findings from the evaluation. It also reports on the recommendations which were co-produced in a workshop held on 20 November 2023 with Phase Two Trusts and delivery partners.

2. Progress towards programme KPIs

The programme achieved or made good progress towards all the KPIs. It produced a new toolkit, providing resources for the Trusts to support embedding volunteering in their organisations and established a new network for Trusts to share learning and experiences.

Although the programme fell slightly short of meeting the overall target number of volunteers recruited, it exceeded the KPI on recruiting volunteers from target groups. It must also be noted that the number of volunteers was measured in October when volunteer recruitment was ongoing. The table below provides an overview of the progress made towards AK KPIs set at the start of the programme.

New support structures

Production of a Volunteer Programme Toolkit for community leisure

[A toolkit](#) was developed from the learning from the programme, drawing on the experience of the participants and delivery partners. The toolkit covers both the Volunteer Programme Toolkit and the toolkit of resources for volunteer managers and encompasses six modules, each with three elements: an introductory article, a slide deck which will be produced to accompany each podcast including guidance on the topic and resources that have been developed by Trusts, and accompanying

<p>Production of a toolkit of resources for volunteer managers</p>	<p>podcast episodes which feature guests including Active Kindness participants and experts in particular areas.</p> <p>The topics covered are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to volunteering • Marketing your volunteering programme • Volunteer recruitment • Reward, recognition and retention of volunteers • Broader themes (social value, EDI) in volunteering • Volunteer journeys <p>The toolkit was developed using feedback from Trusts and learning from workshops throughout the year. It has been designed using different formats to make it interactive and accessible</p>
<p>Established network for volunteers</p>	<p>Establishing a network for volunteers proved difficult due to the wider geographical spread of the Trusts. The short timescale of the programme also made it difficult for Trusts to consider this KPI as they were still in the recruitment phase of their projects. Trusts were asked to invite volunteers to the Active Kindness Celebration Gala in December 2023, with all travel expenses paid for by the programme. This provided an opportunity for volunteers at different Trusts to meet each other.</p>
<p>Established network for volunteer managers</p>	<p>Participating Trusts have been invited to attend monthly meetings, generally online but with quarterly in-person meetings. Participants were given the opportunity to shape the content of the monthly meetings. CLUK are establishing a special interest group on the topic of volunteering for their members, and inviting Trusts that have participated in the Active Kindness programme to be founder members of the group. This group will commence in February 2024 and provide the opportunity for the individuals in the Trusts to maintain their network whilst also including other CLUK members and sharing learning and experiences.</p>
<p>Fifteen Trusts will be engaged in the programme delivery</p>	<p>Five Trusts were engaged in the pilot phase of the programme (one withdrew as a result of the organisation ceasing trading during the pandemic).</p> <p>Ten new Trusts were engaged for the Phase Two of the programme from January 2023.</p>

Volunteer recruitment

<p>375 volunteers recruited</p>	<p>309 volunteers were recruited across Pilot and Phase Two Trusts at the time of data collection in October 2023, however recruitment is ongoing.</p>
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20% from lower socio-economic groups
60% of volunteers will be female

30% of volunteers were from lower socio-economic backgrounds¹⁰.

63% of volunteers were women.

3. Learning from volunteer development

This section focuses on learning captured from the programme's success in building Trusts' capacity for volunteer management within public leisure and relative effectiveness of programme activities and approaches.

3.1 Building capacity and embedding volunteering within Trusts

This section addresses the following outcomes from the programme theory of change:

- Trusts have a better understanding of the potential of volunteering
- Trusts are more able to include volunteers
- Volunteering is more embedded across the Trust

Key findings and learning points:

- AK provided a structured approach to volunteer engagement and development, which enabled Trusts to take steps to embed volunteering within their organisations, although the depth to which it was embedded varied across sites.
- Buy-in from senior leaders was very important.
- In smaller Trusts, the volunteering manager being close to the delivery made it easier to demonstrate the value of volunteers throughout the Trust.
- To ensure that volunteering would continue to be important after the programme, the Trusts pointed to the work they had done for example, investing in volunteer management systems or developing steering groups.

To build capacity for volunteer management, the partnership developed a toolkit for volunteer managers in the Trusts, drawing on the experience of the participants and delivery partners. An accompanying podcast featured guests including AK participants and experts.

¹⁰ Defined as residing in postcodes in the top quintile of deprivation as measured by the English Indices of Deprivation 2019. This means that 30% of AK volunteers for whom we have complete postcode data live in the top 20% most deprived areas in England.

The Trusts were at different levels of volunteering prior to signing up for AK. For some, this was rare and ad hoc, with no policies or procedures in place. One organisation used AK to review their entire volunteering programme which had been badly impacted by Covid-19.

All volunteer managers interviewed for the evaluation spoke about the increased focus on volunteering within Trusts brought about by participation in AK, and that, through the liV assessment and support from delivery partners, this helped to develop strategic approaches to volunteering. **AK provided a structured approach to volunteer engagement and development.**

All Trusts interviewed had taken steps to embed volunteering within their organisations. Examples from Trusts of ways they have embedded volunteering within their organisations include:

- **Establishing new governance structures**, such as the introduction of a Trust wide steering group involving staff from across the Trust, and integrating the volunteering programme with existing Trust resources
- **Including volunteering within organisational strategies** and setting targets around volunteering, such as the number of new volunteers, types of volunteering opportunities and volunteering hours
- **Making volunteering visible** – this included volunteer uniforms, featuring volunteering prominently on media within centres, in annual reports and monthly newsletters
- **Developing new infrastructure** to support more volunteering; for example, using grant funding to purchase volunteer management systems and so helping to develop a coherent approach to volunteering across the Trust.

Within single-site Trusts, managers felt that being close to the delivery made it easier to demonstrate the value of volunteers throughout the Trust, and to be nimble in adapting to the needs of the volunteering programme. In multi-site Trusts¹¹, the depth to which volunteering was embedded varied across sites. One Trust addressed this by introducing a volunteering steering group with representatives from across the sites of the Trust. Within this particular Trust, the volunteer manager felt that volunteering was embedded within all but two centres, with some work to be done with those two remaining centres. Other multi-site Trusts concentrated on using one or two sites as pilots to identify how best to embed volunteering and to develop examples of good practice which, once established, could be spread to other sites within the Trust.

All managers interviewed identified the **importance of buy-in from senior leaders** where the volunteer manager was in a more frontline role, **and from colleagues across the Trust** where the volunteer manager was a senior manager. In one Trust, where the volunteer manager was closer to frontline delivery, the project was effectively sponsored by the CEO who championed volunteering across the organisation and the community. Where they were situated close to project delivery, volunteer managers spoke about good engagement with their local community. Managers who held a more senior role had a more strategic approach to volunteer development.

¹¹ Trusts delivering leisure activities across two or more sites as opposed to a single site

Participating Trusts raised concerns over volunteering not being as high profile within the Trusts after the AK programme ends, and the impact this might have on ongoing levels of volunteering. One volunteer manager said:

and the danger is, I guess when it the project finishes is that people then just get pushed back or you get change of staff or whatever

Volunteer manager interview

The Trusts pointed to the work they had done, for example investing in volunteer management systems or developing steering groups, to ensure that volunteering would continue to be important within their Trusts. CLUK are also aware of this risk and are developing a special interest group to focus on volunteering and hope to engage Trusts that participated in Active Kindness as founder members.

Case Study: Everybody Health and Leisure

Everybody Health and Leisure is a health and wellbeing charity based in Cheshire East. They operate 17 leisure facilities and run a range of activities such as sports, health and wellbeing, fitness and community cafes.

Before joining the Active Kindness programme, Everybody had an established volunteering programme which included regular volunteers in their swimming pools and volunteers who supported large events.

The focus for AK was twofold:

1. A new volunteering role for community connectors and
2. Dedicated time to consider volunteering in terms of the wider organisational strategy.

Community connectors provide a social function within the Trust, as well as supporting the running of sessions. They motivate participants, have a meet and greet function and encourage new participants. The community connectors are being incorporated into other parts of the Trust, and the local Active Partnership has been in discussion about how the community connectors can have a wider role.

The Trust invested some of the grant provided by AK in a new volunteer management system. This streamlined volunteer onboarding processes and freed up staff to concentrate on engaging with volunteers. The volunteer management system has also saved time in terms of data collection and management, and allows for more efficient data monitoring.

Plans developed while the Trust was participating in AK will come into effect in 2024 and will continue to benefit the Trust in the future.

3.2 Recruiting volunteers from diverse groups and new communities

This section addresses the following outcomes from the programme theory of change:

- Trusts are better able to recruit diverse range of volunteers from their communities
- Trusts are better able to connect the volunteers to inactive communities
- The community can influence the Trust's services

Key findings and learning points:

- Trusts were at different points in their recruitment from diverse groups and new communities.
- Analysis of data collected by volunteer management systems will support targeted volunteer recruitment in future.
- A range of approaches are needed to recruit volunteer from diverse groups and new communities. From the perspective of volunteers, word of mouth was seen as an effective mechanism to engage new volunteers from diverse backgrounds.

The interim report, published in December 2022, recommended focussing on recruiting volunteers from diverse groups and new communities in phase two of the programme. To build the Trusts capacity in recruiting diverse volunteers, the delivery partners focussed a learning workshop early in phase two on "Social Value, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Volunteering."

The design of the AK programme to develop Trusts' volunteering offer and support their progress at their individual pace meant that success looks different for each Trust. In Phase Two the delivery partners developed learning workshops to develop confidence and to motivate participants.

Each Trust was at a different stage in their volunteering development when they signed up to the AK programme, and the programme allowed Trusts to set their own priorities. Some Trusts were concentrating on setting up volunteering systems, with a focus on diverse groups and new communities coming at a later point. Other Trusts had already had some success in this area.

It was challenging for the Trusts to assess their success in boosting volunteer numbers from diverse groups and new communities due to the lack of data collected at the outset of the programme. Most Trusts used the AK grant to **invest in volunteer management IT systems, which will provide the means to gather information around diversity on an ongoing basis**. Analysis of this information will provide insights so Trusts can understand where to focus their efforts.

"with our new system ... that will be interesting because one of our kind of strategic aims is to engage all the communities and we were talking yesterday about, you know when we do that will we find everybody's white middle class retired or will we find that we've got some diversity of socioeconomic or, you know visible representative of our community and whether we're out there. "

Volunteer manager interview

Examples of success in diversifying volunteers included:

- Concentrating recruitment campaigns on a particular activity with targeted related marketing. One Trust ran two large recruitment campaigns. The first was for volunteers to support a social prescribing scheme. This was advertised in venues such as GP surgeries and libraries, and recruited a largely older group of volunteers (over the age of 50). The second campaign was to recruit volunteers to support a cycling activity, and roles were advertised in bicycle shops leading to successfully recruiting a younger group of volunteers (under the age of 50).
- Inviting people into leisure centres for reasons other than to use exercise facilities, including advertising social and warm spaces and the availability of Wi-Fi. One Trust reported that a person who attended a weekly session went on to volunteer to help organise and ensure smooth running of the session.
- Trusts developing different volunteering opportunities designed to attract different types of volunteers. One Trust established a programme of development for young volunteers which gave them the opportunity to gain skills and qualifications that would help them with employability and their future career.
- Providing clear information about volunteering opportunities and an easy to access application process.
- Linking up with organisations such as GP surgeries, local charities and community groups, religious communities, schools in priority areas, and social housing.

From the perspective of volunteers, word of mouth was seen as an effective mechanism to engage new volunteers from diverse backgrounds. Volunteers reported that they found out about volunteering at their local Trust through word of mouth, with 58% of respondents to the survey agreeing that this was how they found out about their volunteering opportunity. Two of the volunteers interviewed also said that they had found out about volunteering through word of mouth. One volunteer manager suggested that this might be significant when it comes to recruitment of volunteers from diverse groups and new communities and stated:

we're on a journey and I keep on saying to people because it is a bit of a slow burn. You can't ... turn this round immediately."

Volunteer manager interview

L1 What works in engaging priority communities and relative effectiveness of outputs and approaches?

There was no single solution for engaging priority communities. Trusts adopted a combination of approaches which included:

- Targeting activities to attract particular groups or communities
- Linking with other organisations to share information about volunteer opportunities and activities

- Providing information where they are by holding community engagement events outside of the centres
- Providing volunteers with the opportunity to gain a qualification

3.3 Motivations to volunteer and benefits from volunteering

This section addresses the following outcomes from the programme theory of change:

- Volunteering is more effective
- Volunteering is more embedded across the Trust
- Volunteers enhance their skills and capabilities
- Broader and more engaged volunteering base.

Key findings and learning points:

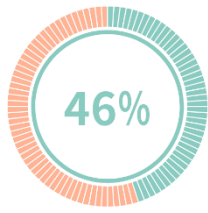
- Volunteers in this sector have the same motivation to volunteer and gain the same benefits from their volunteering as in the wider voluntary sector.
- Motivation to volunteer differs by age; younger volunteers were more likely to be interested in the activity itself, while older volunteers were motivated by ‘giving back’.
- Reward and recognition are an important part of volunteer recruitment.

Data on what motivated volunteers was collected by Trusts using the volunteer survey. The volunteer survey also collected data on the benefits of volunteering to volunteers.

Motivation

From the survey and the data collected from Trusts, there were four high level reasons for volunteering. These were:

			
Giving back / making a difference	Socialisation	Gaining something (e.g. a skill, experience, confidence)	Interest in a specific activity



46% of survey respondents volunteered to “improve things/help people” or because they saw a need in their community. This is similar to the results from NCVO’s most recent Time Well Spent survey, where 42% of volunteers nationally reported the same motivation.¹

Data was not systematically collected on the age of the volunteers, but Trusts reported anecdotally that the motivation to volunteer differed for older and younger volunteers. One Trust interviewed identified that a volunteer recruitment campaign that was focused on a particular activity attracted a younger volunteer base (typically aged under 50) motivated by an interest in the activity itself, while another recruitment campaign aimed at supporting a social prescribing scheme attracted older volunteers (typically aged over 50) who were motivated by ‘giving back’.

Other Trusts reported that younger volunteers were motivated by gaining something, for example employment skills developed through their volunteering. These skills were related to sporting activities, e.g. swimming teaching qualifications, or customer service qualifications and experience.



One volunteer interviewed had gained employment in the leisure centre they had previously volunteered at. The volunteer said that the confidence gained through volunteering had been a particularly important factor in applying for and getting the job.



90% of respondents agreeing to some extent that it was easy to get involved.

Benefits

Through the survey, volunteers identified the top four benefits they got out of their volunteering as:

			
Enjoyment	Meeting new people	Feeling like they are making a difference	Sense of personal achievement

These are also the top four benefits identified through the Time Well Spent survey, indicating similarities between volunteers within this sector and the wider volunteering landscape.¹²



Figure 2: Key features that make up the volunteers’ experience from Time Well Spent

One of the workshops delivered by the programme was focused on the **importance of reward and recognition for volunteers**. Volunteer managers interviewed talked about how they had implemented rewards programmes, including free membership for volunteers, and hosted an awards event for their volunteers. They said that volunteers were excited to be able to attend the AK Celebration Gala event in Manchester in December.

The volunteer survey showed that 68% of volunteers felt that **knowing they were doing something to help others was very important**.

Volunteer managers felt that reward and recognition helped to reinforce this and was a crucial element of retaining volunteers.

Some Trusts provided **specific benefits for the volunteers** they engaged. One programme was aimed at young people and improved their skills for employment by enabling volunteers to gain qualifications and experience through their volunteering.

If you watch the video that they made of [volunteers], you know, they'll tell you what they learned. They tell you how much it's helped them and not prompted at all. We didn't even know that they were going to speak on it.

Volunteer manager interview

¹² <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-2023/>

Volunteers interviewed for the evaluation talked about developing skills in communication, leadership and skills for employment. They also spoke about the enjoyment and fulfilment they get from their volunteering.

I get out of it what other people get out of it so I can see that they're happy. And when they come and they talk about their problems as well ... you know, everyone leaves a lot lighter, including myself. So I feel good. They feel good.

Volunteer interview



Volunteers also made friends and connections from different communities. 100% of volunteers responding to the survey said that volunteering gave them an opportunity to meet new people they might not otherwise have met.

One volunteer said that they had

met a large number of people I now consider to be my closest friends.

Volunteer survey

Volunteers also saw the benefits of their roles for the Trusts. They identified that they brought an additional element to sessions by providing something that paid staff members couldn't.

It started out that I wanted to do it because I saw a need to do it. I wasn't really looking to get anything out of it for myself, but I feel that I do. I enjoy it ... it's fulfilling. It makes me feel good that I'm putting something back ... we fill the gaps.

Volunteer interview

One volunteer manager working with young volunteers also pointed out that, by engaging them at an early stage and **providing qualifications through sports volunteering, it provides a 'hook' for young people to maintain their engagement** and avoid drop-out from participation which can often happen.

There were benefits to the Trust of involving volunteers. One volunteer manager said that volunteers were essential to growing the numbers of people attending activities, while another said that they would not have been able to run certain activities without volunteer support provided to staff.

Volunteer managers also identified that **volunteers were able to share their knowledge and understanding in unique ways** that could not be done without volunteers. For example, in one Trust, one person had volunteered to run a session on nutrition, while another was able to use their experience working in a garden centre to be a lead volunteer on a community garden scheme.

Volunteers offered a distinct and valuable perspective to the Trusts and enabled them to enhance their service offer to better meet the needs of local communities. One volunteer interviewed said that he had suggested a change to the time a session was offered because of conversations he had with attendees. Another volunteer said that, because he was a member of the Trust’s centre prior to volunteering, he knew many of the other members better than staff did and was able to have more informal conversations with them.

Site visits offered the opportunity to observe some of the benefits of volunteers to Trusts. These included:

- an activity being run by volunteers while staff were engaged answering more specialist queries from participants;
- a volunteer checking on the wellbeing of a participant in an activity who had to take a break;
- a volunteer supporting the engagement of a more reluctant participant; and
- a member of staff who had initially developed their skills through volunteering.

L4 Learning about creating a positive experience for volunteers

Understanding what motivated volunteers, and what the benefits were for them helped Trusts to create a positive experience for volunteers.

Motivation

Giving back/making a difference
 Socialisation
 Gaining something (skill, experience etc)
 Interest in a specific activity

Benefit

Enjoyment
 Meeting new people
 Feeling like they were making a difference
 A sense of personal achievement

Other ways to create a positive experience for volunteers were:

- Enabling volunteers to have an identity and pride in what they do
- Making sure that volunteers feel appreciated and supported by all staff
- Providing benefits for volunteering, eg free membership, rewards schemes

Volunteers who only volunteered to make a difference to others found they enjoyed their experience and gained a sense of personal wellbeing

3.4 How the community influences services

This section addresses the following outcome from the programme theory of change:

- The community can influence Trust services.

Key findings and learning points:

- It is important for Trusts to be visible within communities to encourage community engagement and involvement in the Trust services.
- Tapping into volunteers' interests and skills was effective in retaining volunteers, maintaining their interest, and recruiting from a wider range of volunteers.
- Community members volunteering to share their specialist skills is important for volunteer recruitment and shaping services.
- New communities can become involved through community engagement events away from the centres.

The programme aimed to develop stronger links between the Trusts and their communities through bespoke support and training for volunteers.

The level of influence of the community on services varied across Trusts. Each Trust was at a different stage in developing their volunteering schemes in respect to the level of community engagement.

In one Trust, the volunteering project within one centre sat with the community engagement manager. Within this Trust, a member of the community with particular expertise was involved from the early stages of developing a weekly volunteering programme. This volunteer provided access to businesses in the community who were able to donate resources, and the ability to recruit more volunteers from the community. The project was completely volunteer led, allowing volunteers to decide on priorities.

One Trust was developing a Community Connector role based on what prospective volunteers wanted to and were able to do, as opposed to the Trust deciding what type of roles should be available. Prospective volunteers were encouraged to explain their skills and qualities to volunteer managers who could discuss how to use their abilities in a way that aligned with the needs of the Trust and the local community. The volunteer manager identified that **tapping into volunteers' interests and skills was an effective way to retain volunteers and maintain their interest, but also to recruit from a wider range of volunteers.**

it's been a really good addition in helping my community facing work, you know. So it's been really useful and practical actually because it's given me a lot me new insights or ways of thinking about how I can involve volunteers and retain them and all that sort of stuff.

Volunteer manager interview

Two Trusts interviewed were planning to or had already hosted community engagement events at external venues away from their centres. This gave communities an opportunity to engage and discuss the activities they would like to see being offered. It was hoped that this would attract

audiences who would not usually attend leisure centres, and provide Trusts with an opportunity to hear from members of the community who might not otherwise engage with them. A volunteer manager hoped that by ensuring their Trust's provision of activities aligned with the community's preferences, the engagement level with the Trust would increase. This could manifest through attendance at activities, volunteering, or a combination of both.

The **importance of Trust visibility within the community** was mentioned. One Trust spoke about linking in with various groups and organisations, such as organisations working with people with learning disabilities and colleges, at a delivery and a strategic level. They spoke about how important that was for engaging with diverse communities because the Trust was able to share information about activities and volunteering opportunities with groups that they might not otherwise consider. Another related a conversation with a local councillor:

A local councillor recently at an event I was at the other week ... said, 'oh, I've heard about you, and,' he said, 'I've heard about you and your volunteers,' he said. 'And I'm really happy because, you know,' he said, '[the Trust's] reputation in the communities is definitely changed.' He said, 'there's definitely something going on. There's a shift.' And I attribute that to the fact that I've got people now who are, you know, from the community.

Volunteer manager interview

L2 Learning about if/how a broader volunteering base leads to a more active and connected community

There were some early examples of how a broader volunteering base leads to a more active and connected community. Trusts offered volunteering opportunities that enabled volunteers to become active in ways that went beyond traditional sports and leisure activities, such as a community garden.

Volunteers identified one of the key benefits of volunteering for themselves as meeting new people, and they made friends with people they would not usually meet.

Volunteering can provide opportunities to reduce social isolation for those who volunteer and for others in the community.

Case study: Fusion Lifestyle

Fusion Lifestyle is a multi-site Trust with sites in many locations across the country. For AK, the Trust selected two sites to act as pilots within the Trust.

Prior to AK most volunteering activity was concentrated on one site and the intention was to understand how to increase volunteering in other sites.

One Trust developed a project focused on developing a community garden run by volunteers.

The initial plan was to develop an area of waste ground beside the car park. Through word of mouth, a volunteer with horticultural expertise was recruited as lead volunteer. Other volunteers were pointed to the project by a carers' support organisation. Up to six volunteers participate in a weekly session. Sessions are led by volunteers and volunteers plan the programme of work for the community garden.

Volunteers reported that they felt connections with other volunteers and made friends with people they would not otherwise have met. The project also helped to reduce social isolation. Volunteers gained a sense of joy from their volunteering.

The community garden has won an award from the local authority and volunteers are planning to install a shed and raised beds with ramps to make the garden accessible for other volunteers.

4. Learning from programme development

The evaluation explored the efficacy of the partnership including the extent of involvement by participating Trusts, and how successful partnership working has been.

4.1 Programme design and set-up

This section addresses the following outcomes from the programme theory of change:

- Trusts have a better understanding of the potential of volunteering;
- Trusts are better able to recruit diverse range of volunteers from their community;
- Trusts are more able to include volunteers.

Key findings and learning points:

- Trusts learnt from the experiences of other Trusts and valued the opportunity to share learning.
- Funding and a structured programme were important to enable Trusts to sustainably embed volunteering.
- Participation provided delivery partners a deeper understanding of the issues and operational challenges the Trusts face, leading to more focused support.

AK provided capacity funding and resources, including a toolkit for volunteer managers which was developed throughout the project and was not yet delivered at time of data collection, project branding and information about volunteer recognition and reward schemes. Volunteer managers and volunteers identified that the project branding was less important than the other elements of the programme. The programme also provided opportunities for networking through quarterly in-person meetings as well as in monthly learning sessions. Overall, both delivery partners and Trusts were generally positive about the programme.

What we've got out of Active Kindness as a team has been amazing

Volunteer manager interview

The grant funding provided to each Trust was intended as seed funding to support sustainably embedding volunteering and was seen as an integral part for Trusts. **The programme funding enabled Trusts to raise the profile of the programme within Trusts and develop a systematic approach to volunteering.** However, Trusts would have liked more guidance on how the grant could be used.

The monthly learning sessions were appreciated by all Trusts. They valued the knowledge shared by the delivery partners but also the learning from other Trusts. **The links with other Trusts and resources shared were mentioned as key benefits.**

I think the face-to-face [meetings] we've learnt a lot from because we've done a lot of sharing and bouncing about ... just talking when we were together so that really, really works.

Volunteer manager interview

The relationship between key members of staff responsible for delivery, and the balance in their knowledge and experience was identified by Trusts as being very important.

[delivery partners] made everything fall into place. They managed things and gave you the expert input, you know? I think they ... work well together.

Volunteer manager interview

The interim learning report highlighted the need to improve clarity about the time commitment involved in the programme. Learning from this, in Phase Two there was an initial expression of interest form and a webinar setting out expectations. Consequently, Trusts in Phase Two did not see the time commitment as a challenge, and felt that the programme had achieved a good balance.

There were staff changes in both CLUK and NCVO, and a pause in delivery due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in changes in the delivery of the programme between the Pilot Phase and Phase Two. These changes provided challenges initially, but were quickly overcome and Phase Two Trusts were very positive about the delivery of the programme.

In addition to the benefits to Trusts, the delivery partners identified wider benefits from participating in the programme, including increased awareness and knowledge of how best to support the Trusts.

I've had a lot of feedback that the way that the programme been run this year has been helpful for the colleagues in the team in supporting the Trusts and having an awareness of what's going on rather than the project operating in isolation

Delivery partner interview

the beauty of Active Kindness ... it gave structure, it gave priority

Volunteer manager interview

L3 Learning about the benefits and effectiveness of the partnership

Partnership working worked on three levels for the programme:

- the partnership between delivery partners (CLUK, NCVO and Sport England)
- the partnership between Trusts
- the partnership between delivery partners and Trusts.

The delivery partners involved brought their specific knowledge to the programme, and this complementary knowledge enhanced the support for participating Trusts. Communication between key members of staff was very important to ensure effective delivery. By being active partners, representatives from all three organisations were able to gain an understanding of the programme and therefore provide relevant and complementary input into the programme. By working in partnership, the programme was able to draw expertise from all three specialist organisations.

Peer networks were one of the key benefits of the programme for Trusts. This included learning from other Trusts, and sharing resources and templates.

The partnership between delivery partners and Trusts was fundamental to the success of the programme. Trusts felt supported and constructively challenged. The toolkit was developed in based on feedback and sessions with the Trusts throughout the year.

4.2 Peer networks

This section addresses the following outcome from the programme theory of change:

- Stronger volunteering movement in the leisure sector.

Key findings and learning points:

- Informal learning through peer networking opportunities was perceived as effective for developing participants' learning, as participants learnt from sharing challenges and solutions.
- For some Trusts, networking with other Trusts was a new and positive experience.

Trusts interviewed were predominantly positive about the AK programme and did not see participating within the programme as a challenge.

Participants identified **the peer network developed through the programme as a key element**. Participating staff developed their relationships with each other during the monthly meetings, which were primarily delivered online with three in-person meetings, in Birmingham, Leeds and Doncaster. The in-person meetings, in particular, had an emphasis on networking and provided opportunities for informal learning.

Delivery partners talked about witnessing the positive impact of the in-person learning days and the informal learning between participants during unstructured time (i.e. breaks and lunchtime). The peer-learning took place beyond the in-person learning days and a delivery partner said:

we've seen such a positive response to that network, and I think for a lot of those individuals, particularly in the smaller Trust, that's the first sort of foray into that sort of cross Trust network. And it's been really positive.

Delivery partner interview

All Trusts interviewed spoke very positively about the peer network that was developed from the programme. The Trusts felt that they had developed a community that supported each other where they could, at times, feel isolated within their roles.

It's quite it's quite easy to feel quite isolated ... then finding a network of people who are in a similar boat is amazing.

Volunteer manager interview

Trusts spoke about the 'generosity' of other participants who shared their knowledge, experiences and resources. Participants learnt from the challenges that had been faced by other Trusts, and how they had dealt with and were able to get support and advice when they faced challenges. They also shared when they had made mistakes which helped them and other participants to learn about what did not work so well.

I also think [one of the benefits of the programme has been] connecting up the colleagues from other places. Sharing knowledge through the programme has been great. Yeah, and hearing what's going well for others and what some of the challenges have been.

Volunteer manager interview

Sharing practical resources and template documents was seen as very helpful for participants.

One talked about how they saved time by not having to develop a full set of new resources.

People have been really brilliant about sharing experiences sharing practical things like role profiles and you know, application forms and things like that.

Volunteer manager interview

One Trust spoke about the network as a 'community of practice':

that community of practice has been amazing and that would not have happened without Active Kindness creating that because we don't network in that kind of way.

Participants spoke about **the importance of continuing to share the learning and maintain a network.**

It would be great to continue some of the sharing and learning because actually I think it can get a lot done that way.

Trusts have made contacts with others in a similar position to them, so they have colleagues to contact if they are having difficulties.

Meet[ing] people that have been through that same journey. Yeah. I think that fundamentally, that's the most important aspect of.

Volunteer manager interview

One Trust identified that they wanted the programme to run for a longer time-period. They felt that the preliminary stages of the year had involved making sure the volunteering programme in the Trust contained all the elements from workshops, and felt like they were starting from the beginning. They suggested that delivery of the programme would be better with support over three years to develop growth.

Minor issues raised by the participating Trusts included:

- Some Trusts felt that more frequent, structured one-to-one support would have supported implementation within the Trusts. However, other Trusts identified that delivery partners were approachable and willing to provide one-to-one support when needed, and other Trusts felt that the monthly sessions provided sufficient structured support.
- The location of in-person learning days was seen as a barrier by some participants. One participant said that they were unable to participate in these sessions due to their personal needs. However, other participants and delivery partners identified the in-person sessions as most conducive to learning, particularly informal learning through organic conversations.
- The content of the learning sessions was seen as useful but that sometimes it was a challenge to identify what information was needed immediately and what information should be saved for later.

4.3 Wider delivery challenges

The public leisure sector in general has faced considerable challenges this year, and these have had an impact on the participating Trusts. Two of the Phase Two Trusts faced very significant challenges during the year, losing at least some of their centres and impacting on staff. These challenges have inevitably impacted the Trusts' ability to focus on volunteering.

One Phase Two Trust, operating a single site, lost their one centre in August 2023. Despite this major challenge, they have continued to run a volunteer programme and support volunteers. However, the future of the volunteer programme is currently uncertain. The volunteer manager said:

at least they've still got something, you know, and we're travelling some distance for it... but they're together

Volunteer manager interview

Case Study: HalfFish

HalfFish was a community leisure Trust based in Blackburn, Lancashire. It ran two swimming pools which were owned by Lancashire County Council and was home to a number of swimming clubs and a lifesaving club.

Before joining the Active Kindness programme, they had struggled to recruit volunteers, which had a knock-on effect on the throughput of swimming teachers as volunteers often became swimming teachers. Volunteering patterns had also been ad hoc for the existing volunteers.

Through Active Kindness, HalfFish developed the Green Shirts structured volunteering programme for children from aged 14, and subsequently the junior Green Shirts from age 12. The Trust was a certified Duke of Edinburgh centre, and all volunteers were able to gain a Duke of Edinburgh award. Volunteers also worked towards becoming qualified swim teachers and lifeguards. Active Kindness gave HalfFish a structure to their volunteering. This also provided an opportunity for swimming teachers, who were often young, to become mentors to younger members of the team.

The Trust has received awards and nominations for its training programme, including the Armed Forces Gold award because some of the young volunteers were from veterans' families, and community awards from Swimming Teachers Association and Swim England.

About halfway through the programme, HalfFish pool was permanently closed, leaving the Trust without a centre and with a cohort of volunteers who had yet to complete their programme. The Trust was able to use space at another pool which enabled it to continue to support the volunteers. Some volunteers had recently completed qualifications and were in paid work at local leisure centres. Others will be accommodated through HalfFish's Lifesaving club.

Despite losing its pool, HalfFish continued to remain engaged in the Active Kindness programme, sharing their learning with other Trusts and benefiting from their support. The future is uncertain at this point, but staff at HalfFish continue to be keen to share their learning about the benefits of volunteering for children in leisure settings with the wider leisure sector.

4.4 Planning for future sustainability

This section addresses the following outcomes from the programme theory of change:

- Stronger volunteering movement in the sector;
- Trusts are more sustainable.
- Stronger volunteering movement in the leisure sector.

Key findings and learning points:

- Most Trusts used some of the grant funding to purchase volunteer management systems to support the future sustainability of volunteering within their

organisation.

- Participating Trusts have acted as unofficial advocates for the programme, and for volunteering in their particular area of the public leisure sector.
- As a programme legacy, a Special Interest Group for volunteering, supported by Trusts who have participated in AK, will be established by CLUK in 2024 to support the Trusts on an ongoing basis.

Delivery partners have worked with Trusts to develop a volunteering toolkit for the public leisure sector to ensure future sustainability of volunteering within Trusts. The toolkit is comprised of a series of six modules covering the topics:

- Introducing volunteering
- Marketing your volunteering programme
- Volunteer recruitment
- Reward, recognition and retention
- Broader themes (social value, EDI)
- Volunteer journeys

Each topic has an introductory article and slide deck including guidance and the topic and resources developed by Trusts and is accompanied by a podcast episode to add depth to the toolkit. The purpose of the podcast is to:

tell stories of what other people had done in volunteering around these things that we've covered and use that as sort of light touch inspiration

Delivery partner interview

Trusts acknowledged that sustainability of the programme could be an issue. One Trust said:

the challenge there is [to] keep up with everything. Yeah. Keep it up with how fast things go. Time is the biggest enemy

Volunteer manager interview

Trusts were also aware of the possibility of volunteering not being as high profile within the Trusts following the end of the AK programme, and the affect this could have on volunteering. One staff member said:

and the danger is, I guess when it the project finishes is that people then just get pushed back or you get change of staff or whatever

Volunteer manager interview

Most Trusts used some of the grant funding to invest to support the future sustainability of volunteering within their organisation. Many used grant funding to purchase volunteer management systems. Utilisation of the systems was in the initial stages and some Trusts were still in the process of purchasing systems or migrating to new systems so were assuming the system would benefit volunteering within the Trust.

Having it more target specific will definitely help us put the work in now. I think we do that, get that right will help us in when we're recruiting.

Volunteer manager interview

One single-site Trust had conversations with other CLUK member Trusts and encouraged them to either participate in future AK phases, or to adopt a similar approach to volunteering as the Trust has developed through the programme.

Each Trust interviewed was asked what advice they would give to a Trust considering taking part in the AK programme, and each said they would tell the other Trust to 'just sign up' and that

we wouldn't have been in [a positive place in relation to volunteering] without some help from [AK].

Volunteer manager interview

One Phase Two Trust heard about AK from a Pilot Phase Trust and acted as an unofficial 'advocate' for the programme, and for volunteering in their particular area of the public leisure sector.

Although funding from Sport England to support the programme is ending, CLUK has committed to supporting the AK Programme Manager role for at least a further year to allow the learning from AK to be embedded across CLUK's membership and the public leisure and culture sectors.

We'd look to ... facilitate a bit more development wise on the collection of data and the establishment of the networks. I think those two elements are really key to the sustainability of this for each Trust. You know, being able to have the data that shows what they're doing makes a difference, helps them when they're, you know, trying to justify to senior management the time that they're spending.

Delivery partner interview

A Special Interest Group for volunteering, supported by Trusts who have participated in AK, will be established by CLUK in 2024 to support the Trusts on an ongoing basis. The first meeting of the Volunteering Special Interest Group will take place in February 2024.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The AK programme was developed to build capacity on volunteer management with public leisure Trusts. Fourteen Trusts were engaged across the two phases and recruited a total of 309 volunteers across the two years of the programme.

The programme took place against a backdrop of significant and unanticipated social and economic challenges – namely the Covid-19 pandemic, and the energy and cost of living crises – which hit the public leisure sector hard. Despite this, the programme maintained the enthusiasm for volunteering among the Trusts involved, with only a couple of Trusts unable to fully engage with the programme due to unforeseeable circumstances. This was particularly true for the Pilot Phase cohort who returned to the programme despite its delayed start following the unavoidable pause due to Covid-19.

Although the programme fell slightly short of the target number of volunteers recruited, it is important to point out that data was collected in October 2023, at a time when many of the Phase Two Trusts were still actively engaged in the recruitment phase of their programmes. It is also important to point out that the programme took place when there were challenges in volunteer recruitment acknowledged across the nonprofit sector. The limited timescale for the programme and the need for data to be collected before the completion of the full 12 months of participation for the Phase Two Trusts has certainly limited the reported numbers of volunteers that Trusts were able to recruit. It should also be noted that the Trusts managed to recruit a higher proportion of volunteers who were women and from lower socio-economic backgrounds than the KPIs for the programme.

The programme was particularly successful in developing a network of Trusts committed to volunteering within the sector. By participating in the programme, Trusts raised the profile of volunteering within their organisations and communities, and volunteer managers became part of a strong and supportive network. Trusts have committed to continue their volunteer programmes and build on the strong foundations developed through AK. Trusts have, through the grant and the support provided by delivery partners, been able to put systems and processes in place to enable future volunteering. CLUK have committed to continued support for member Trusts in improving their volunteering offers in the public leisure sector.

Trusts really valued the knowledge and support they received from delivery partners.

The programme showed that recruitment from target groups was most successful when activities were selected to reflect the interests and motivations of those groups, and recruitment campaigns were designed to reflect that.

There were numerous benefits both for Trusts and volunteers who engaged with them. Volunteers had a very good experience and were clear that they gained something from their volunteering, whether it was enjoyment, enhanced skills, new friendships or a sense of giving back. While Trusts gained motivated and engaged volunteers to enhance the activities they offered.

5.2 Recommendations

A learning co-production workshop was held with Trusts and delivery partners in November 2023. Recommendations were developed from that workshop.

For Trusts:

12. Ensure the offer to volunteers is relevant and reflects volunteer skill sets.
13. Consider training and development of volunteers and how to prioritise this within any funding.
14. Have one member of staff responsible for volunteering supported by other staff to embed volunteering across the organisation.

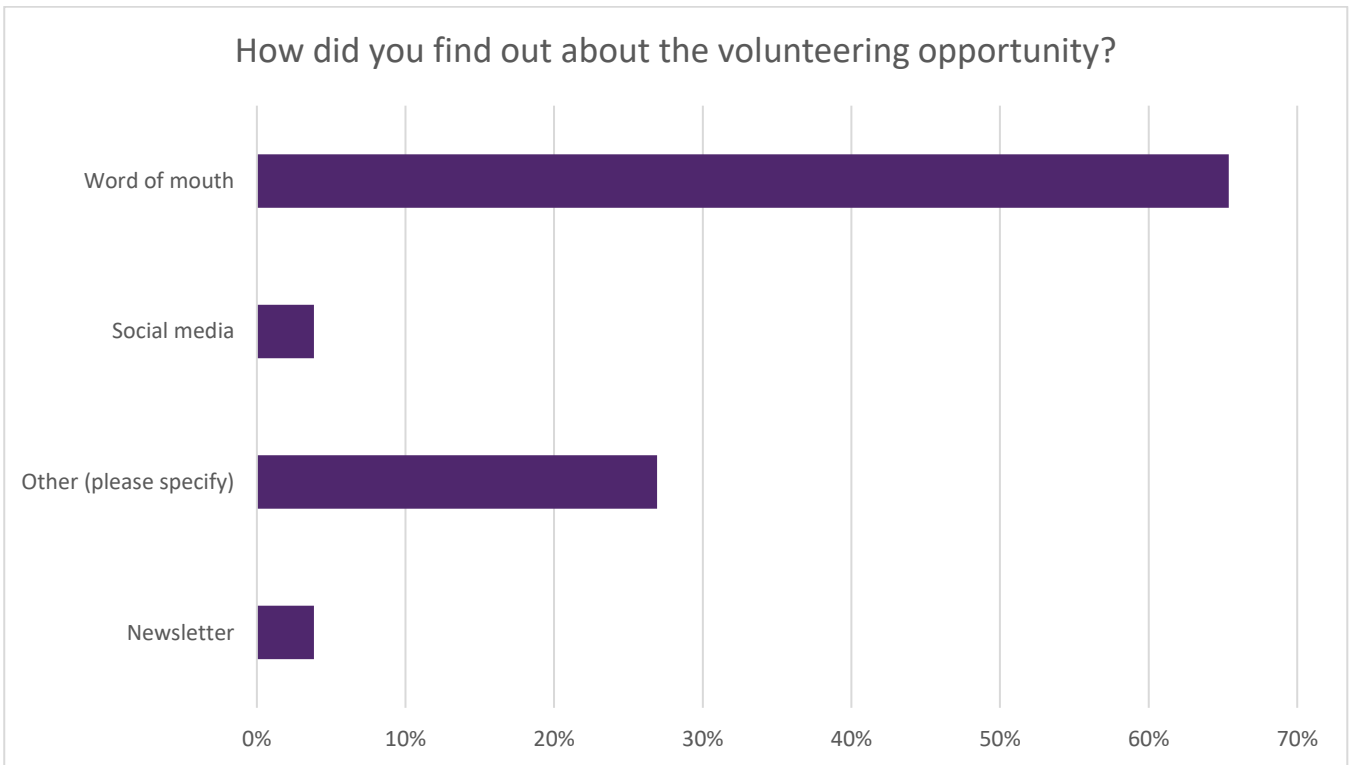
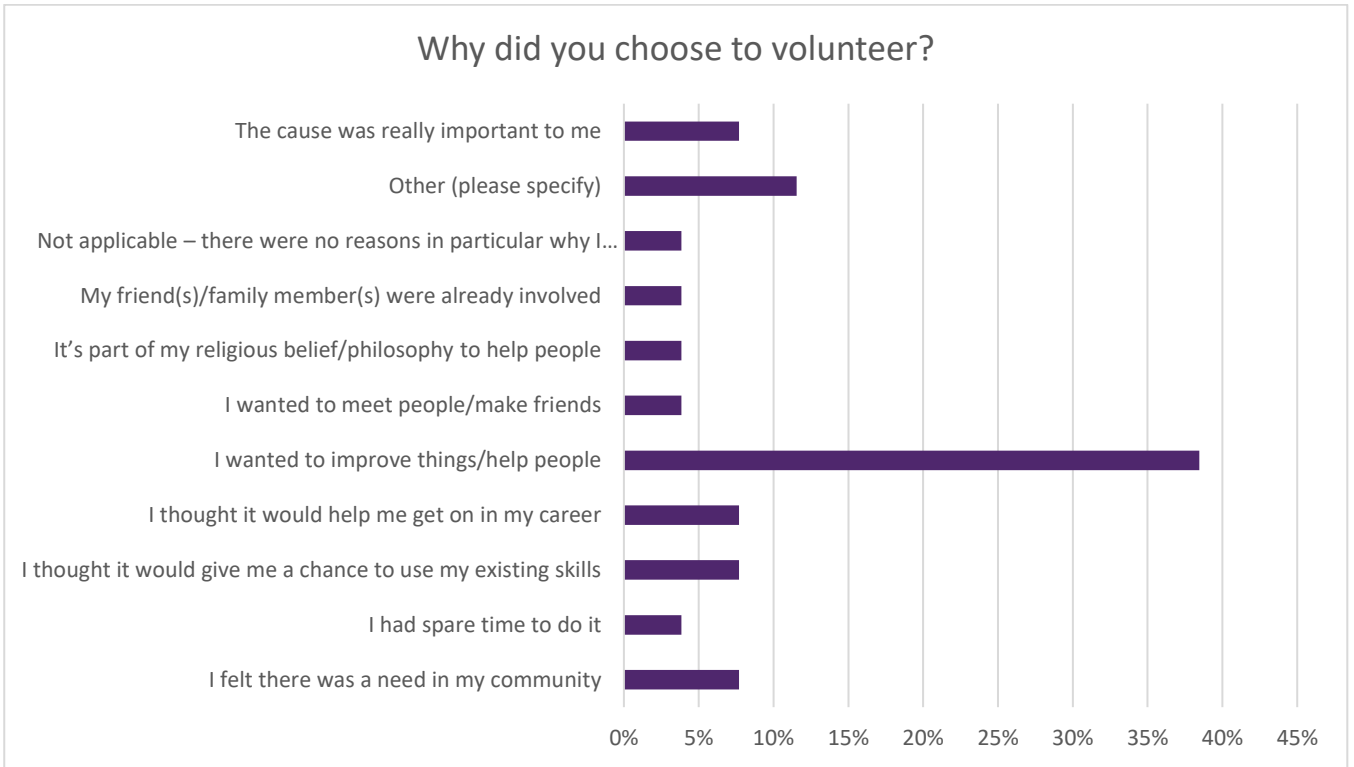
For AK programme delivery partners:

15. Develop guidance on gathering baseline data against which Trusts can measure progress.
16. Develop an options menu for use of any grant based on what was useful for previous cohorts.
17. Develop guidance around demonstrating the social impact of volunteering within Trusts.
18. Produce a calendar of events annually around planning and reporting schedules.
19. Consider ways to maximise engagement across all Trusts, such as having two people appointed per Trust, inviting additional members of staff to relevant learning sessions and linking funding to engagement.

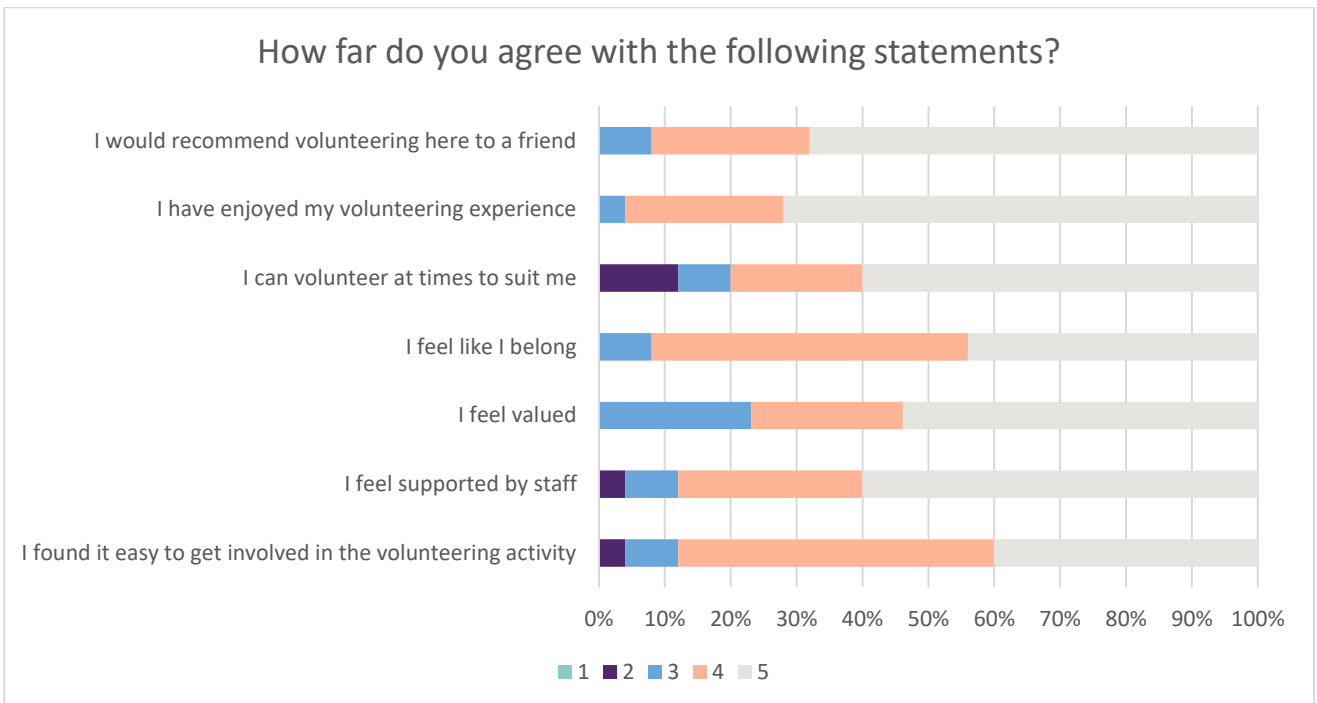
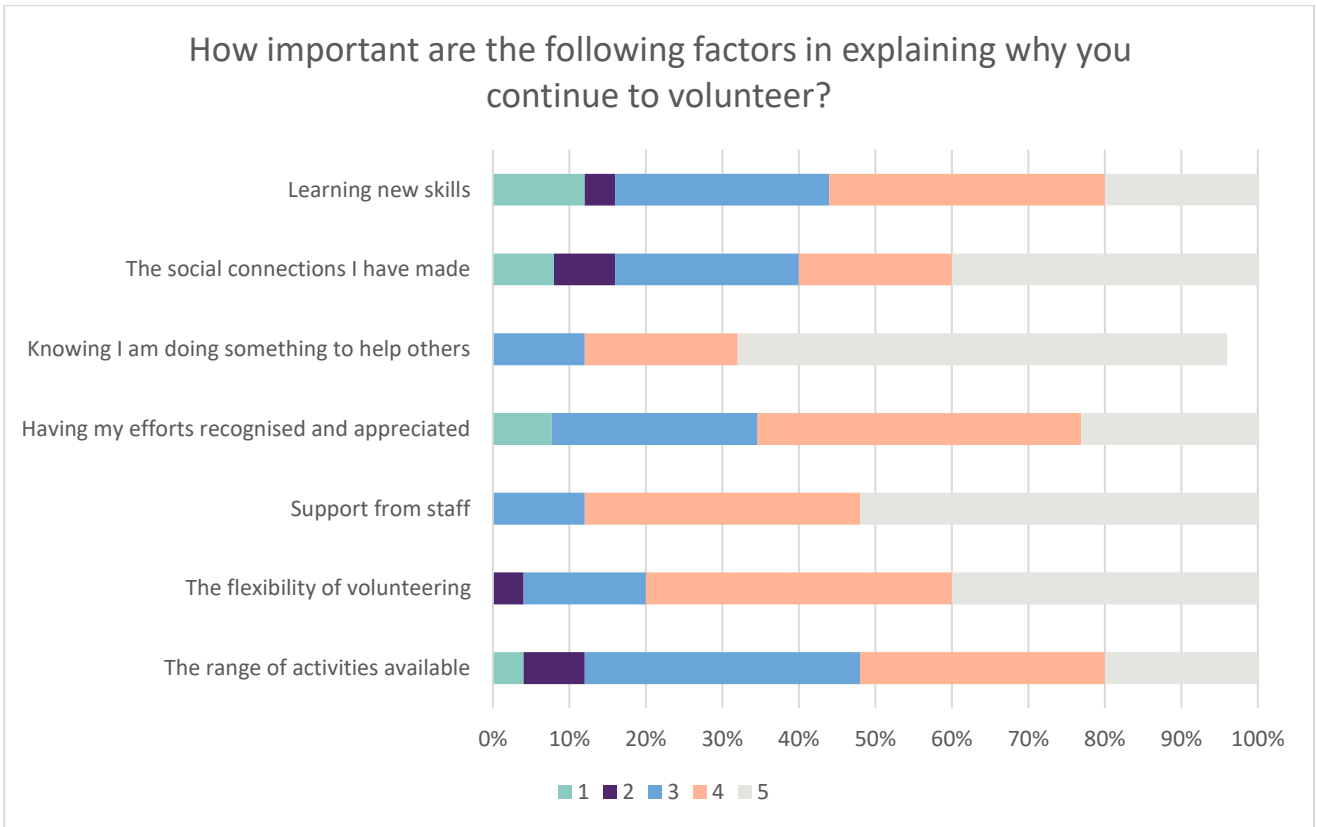
For the legacy of the AK programme:

20. Harness the experiences of the Pilot and Phase Two Trusts to provide case studies for volunteering in the public leisure sector and for any future delivery of the AK programme.
21. Consider how to share learning through the toolkit across the CLUK membership and more widely with the public leisure sector, starting with the evaluation launch in January 2024.
22. Continue research and data collection to identify the longer-term impact of the programme.

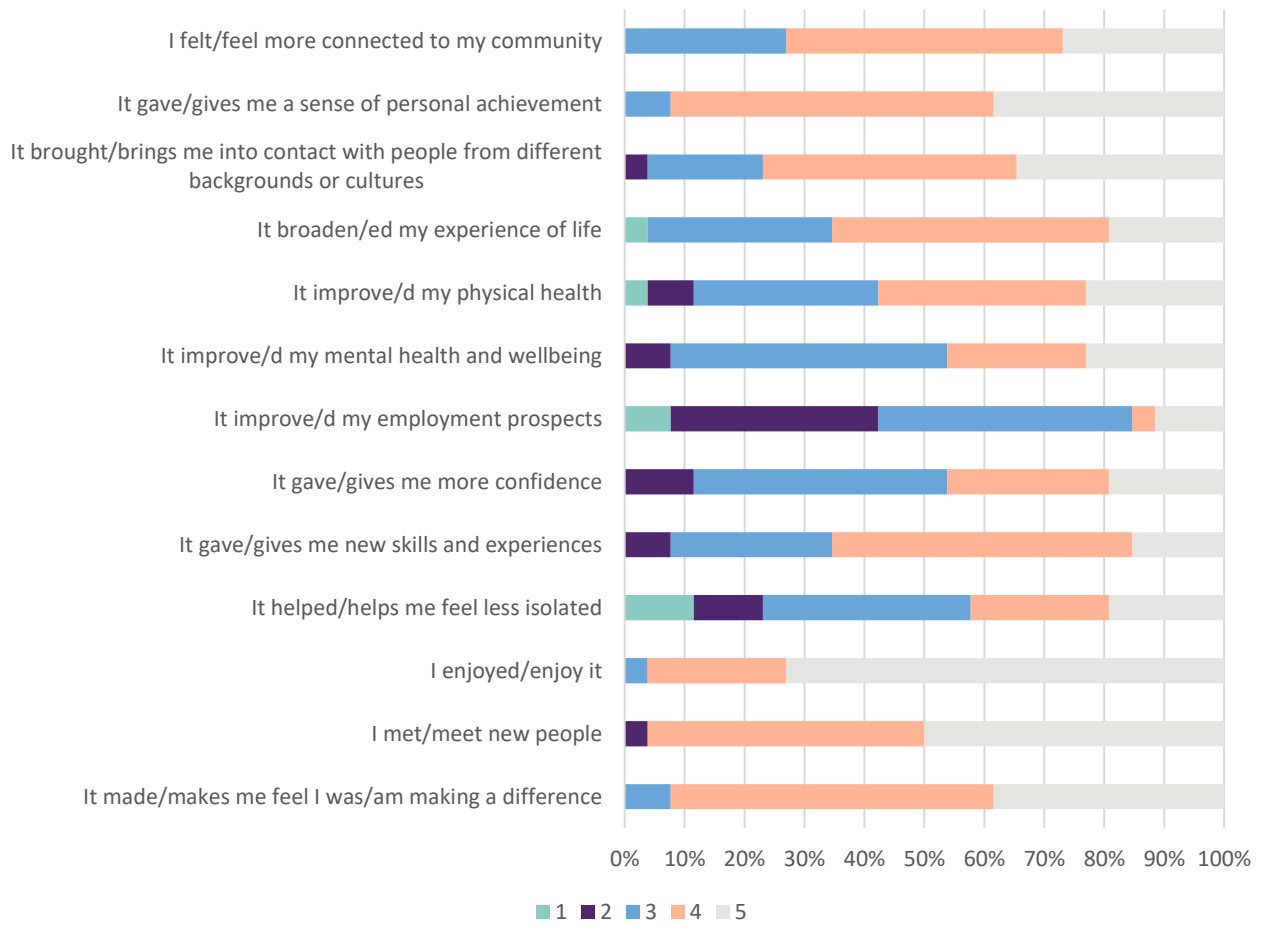
Appendix A: Survey Results



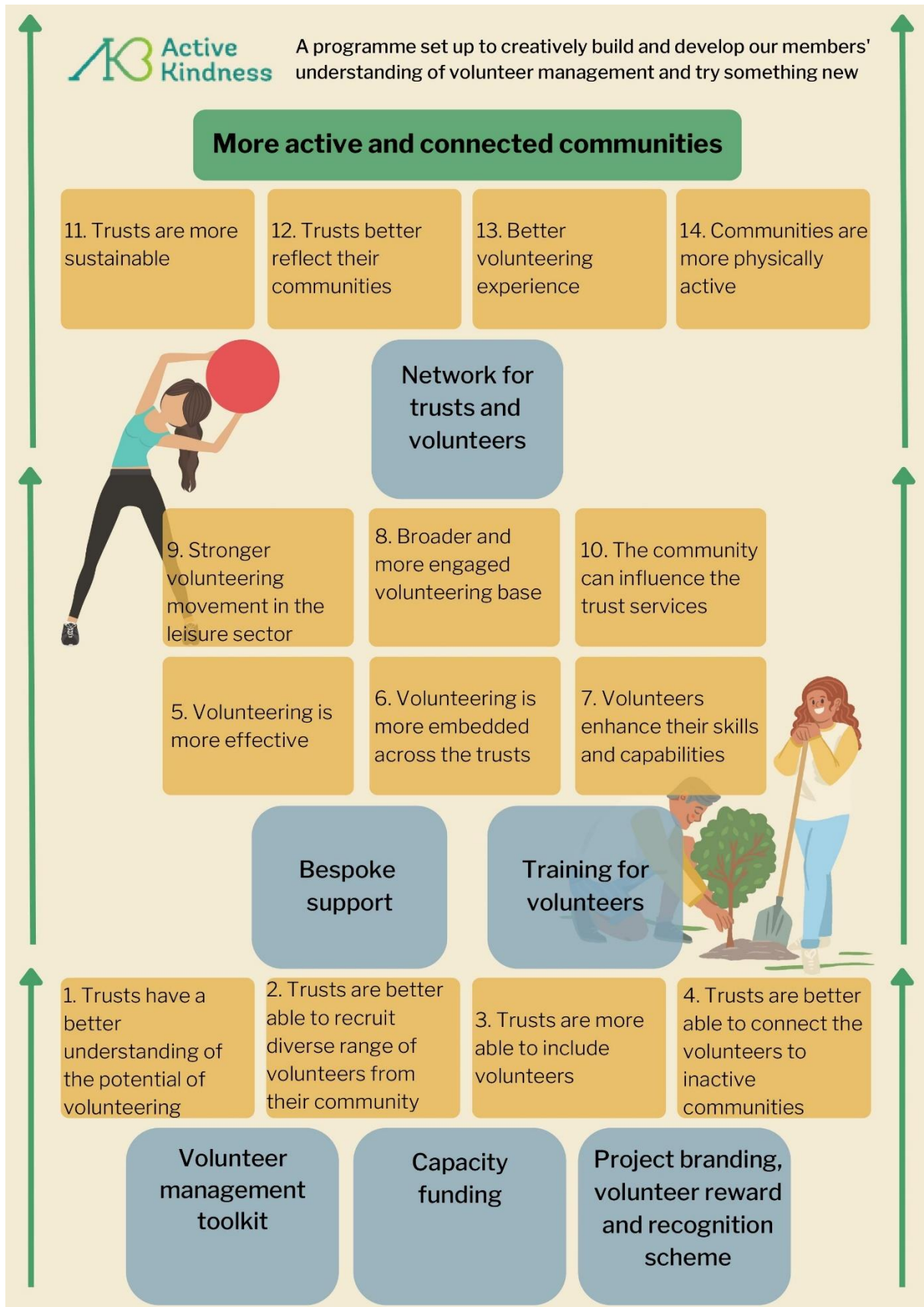
The following charts all use a five-point scale where 1= not at all important and 5 = very important



What volunteers have gained from volunteering



Appendix B: Theory of Change



What else needs to happen?

1. Culture-based programme can translate to leisure
2. Trusts are able to retain and put into practice their knowledge
3. Individuals from target communities want to volunteer
4. The programme is seen as an attractive proposition by trusts and they want to invest in the programme. Trusts are not joining to receive funding as main motivator
5. Trusts see that volunteers could be a significant part of their organisation
6. Trusts want to reflect their community
7. Volunteers have the capabilities, motivation and opportunities to engage local communities
8. Broader volunteering base leads to increased community involvement

What can we learn?

- L1.** What works in engaging priority communities and relative effectiveness of outputs and approaches
- L2.** Learning about if/how a broader volunteering base leads to a more active and connected community
- L3.** Learning about benefits and effectiveness of the partnership
- L4.** Learning about creating a positive experience for volunteers



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