



A RICH RESOURCE

OLDER VOLUNTEERS IN MONMOUTHSHIRE



EUROPEAN UNION
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Article 6 Innovative Measures



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Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations
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1.0 Introduction

Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO) is involved in an international collaboration project called Mature Employment Planning for people aged over 50 - MePlan 50+. The programme is funded under the European Social Fund, Measure 6, Innovative Methods. Local partners are GAVO, Newport and Gwent Enterprise, Prime Cymru and Monmouthshire County Council, in addition to international partners in Ireland and Germany.

As part of the project, GAVO has carried out research into volunteering among people aged 50 plus in Monmouthshire and has developed a number of pilot projects exploring innovative ways of recruiting and engaging volunteers. The initial research findings, presented in this report, were used to develop initiatives to engage volunteers in this age group and to support volunteer involving organisations with recruitment and retention strategies for volunteers aged 50 plus.

This initial research was supplemented as pilot projects/initiatives were developed, implemented, monitored and reviewed. The success of these and other projects were used as the basis of this final research report. In addition, findings were used to provide advice and guidance to volunteer involving organisations wishing to recruit and engage older volunteers. This information will be disseminated through the development of a 'recruitment and retention fact sheet' using information gathered at volunteering events, activities and workshops.

2.0 Research Summary

Background

This research explores the current state of volunteering in the county and the potential to encourage people aged 50 to 70 years to become active volunteers. In addition, it aims to provide volunteer involving organisations with information that supports them to target older volunteers, using a range of innovative methods.

There are approximately 22,000 people in this age bracket living in Monmouthshire. Monmouthshire is likely to have a high rate of volunteering due to a number of associated factors including the rural nature of the county and relative prosperity. However, there will

still be individuals who could benefit from volunteering personally, or who have skills and experience that would be of huge value to organisations.

The following Methods were used:

- Surveys of volunteers through Monmouthshire Volunteer Centre completed in 2006.
- Surveys of volunteer involving organisations through Monmouthshire Volunteer Centre completed in 2006.
- Questionnaires from MePlan 50+ workshops completed in summer 2007
- Interviews with individuals attending the above workshops and pre-retirement courses.
- Case studies of six volunteer involving organisations.

Volunteers

Volunteers gave a wide range of reasons why they volunteer including social contact, helping others, helping the community they live in, personal fulfilment and a sense of purpose. From this and other research a distinction has been made between the 'serial volunteer' and the 'trigger volunteer':

- **'Serial or lifelong volunteers'** tend to have a history of volunteering depending on their circumstances. They largely see it as a process where they are volunteering their services to help others rather than for personal benefit or self development. Serial volunteers are already engaged in volunteering and part of established networks, and therefore unlikely to be recruited to new volunteer involving opportunities, or influenced by promotional activities.
- **'Trigger volunteers'** on the other hand tend to become engaged in volunteering at a specific point in their lives due to a significant event, including retirement, redundancy or bereavement. These volunteers are often actively looking for opportunities due to being economically inactive, which may be voluntarily in the case of early retirement, or involuntary, resulting from redundancy, ill health or disability. However, very specific marketing will be required in order to attract the attention of this group as they are not generally part of existing volunteer networks. Many people in this category will be both unaware of the potential personal benefits available to them through volunteering and the opportunities available. Therefore, targeted marketing in this area is required to recruit trigger volunteers.

Volunteer involving organisations

Volunteer involving organisations had a positive view of older people as volunteers, identifying positive attributes such as their greater knowledge, commitment, empathy and flexibility.

However, it is clear from the research that voluntary organisations are facing severe difficulty in recruiting sufficient volunteers to run front line services. Generally, it is felt that a lot of energy and resources is spent on recruitment, but there is a poor response in terms of new volunteers coming forward. No organisation surveyed had specific strategies to target different age groups or to appeal to older volunteers. Volunteer involving organisations surveyed thought they had limited ability to provide adequate management of volunteers with additional support needs.

Innovative Methods

Innovative methods are required to recruit new volunteers including both creative promotional material and marketing strategies. Examples of methods that might be used, several of which are to be piloted through the MePlan 50+ project, are outlined briefly below and detailed later in the report:

- 50+ Volunteer Networks
- Time Banks
- Employee Volunteering
- Social Enterprises
- Intergenerational Projects
- Flexible Volunteering Opportunities
- Taster Sessions
- Volunteer Champions

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, there is great potential for volunteer involving organisations to access a new and growing source of volunteers. However, in order for this to be successful, they need an approach that is innovative, targeted and provide flexible opportunities tailored to the individual.

They can achieve this through developing marketing strategies and volunteering opportunities that:

- Take into account the demographics of people aged 50 plus, including economic inactivity and trigger points in peoples lives.
- Address the development needs of older volunteers, for example, developing confidence and learning new skills (instrumental volunteering).
- Provide a range of opportunities using innovative methods that are attractive to people aged 50 plus, that can compete with other interests and leisure activities.
- Provide the opportunity for older people to pass on their skills, knowledge and experience.
- Are relevant and reflect the society in which they operate, ensuring policies and procedures for volunteers reflect recent changes in legislation in the workplace. For example, catering for the needs of carers, people with disabilities and those with health conditions.
- Are flexible in terms of job role, time and commitment.

3.0 Background

The aims of the MePlan 50+ Volunteering Research are:

- To consider the current state of volunteering in the county in relation to people over 50, particularly those aged between 50 and 70 years of age.
- To indicate some of the ways that those people, whether employed, unemployed, retired or otherwise economically inactive, can be encouraged (for the benefit of both themselves and the community), to volunteer or to expand their existing volunteering.
- To provide information for volunteer involving organisations that supports them to target people aged 50 plus, using a range of innovative methods.

Older People in Monmouthshire:

There were over 84,000 people in the county at the time of the 2001 census, of which almost 33,000 were aged over 50. More recent figures indicate that over 21,000 are aged between 51-70 years old¹. This group, in the transition period between employment and retirement, have variously been labelled The New Old Age², the Young Old, Third Agers and Empty Nesters³. The younger members of this group fall into the category of 'Baby

Boomers', people born in the post Second World War baby boom, who are now approaching retirement.

Demographic changes, notably a low birth rate and increasing longevity, have put this age group under the spotlight as never before. A 10 year national strategy was laid out in 2003 by the Welsh Assembly Government in 'Strategy for Older People in Wales', followed by Monmouthshire's 'Strategy for Older People' in 2005. Amongst the concerns for the impact on health and social care, transport and housing, is recognition of the contribution to society that can be made by older people, through continued employment or voluntary and community activity. 'The Future of Retirement' survey⁴ showed that 'far from being a time of misery, penury and frailty, life.....is characterised by good health, independence, control and a good quality of life'.

The MePlan50+ project⁵ which started in late 2006, aims to work with the over 50's and local employers in the county to enhance opportunities which will contribute to the increased employment, retention and integration of older workers. It also aims to help older people make use of their skills and experience for the benefit of the wider community through volunteering⁶. The target group was later further defined as people aged 50-70 years who are in the transition period between employment and retirement.

Volunteering is generally described as unpaid activity which benefits others (outside the family), individually or communally⁷. Formal volunteering is seen as being through an organisation (which could be public, voluntary or private sector) and informal is generally defined as unpaid help to others, person to person.

Nationally, there has been much emphasis recently on voluntary activity which is seen as a way of building social capital or community capacity, or re-establishing social cohesion. There is now an Office of the Third Sector located within the Cabinet Office and the Welsh Assembly Government has produced a strategic plan for the voluntary sector⁸. Alternatively, volunteering is increasingly part of the 'work ethic' and is seen as a way of building skills and confidence to enter or re-enter the workforce. MePlan 50+ sees the development of volunteering in both of these ways for the over 50s but they do require different approaches.

Monmouthshire and volunteering

The county of Monmouthshire, relative to most other counties in Wales, is prosperous and rural and these factors alone indicate that the county should already have a high level of volunteering. Recent research⁹ concluded that in England¹⁰ at least, rural counties had higher concentrations of charities and voluntary organisations than urban areas. This was linked to the higher proportion of older people living in the countryside, members of this group being more likely than others to volunteer. Other factors in rural areas which lead to volunteering are a stronger sense of community and a less transient population. According to another recent survey, there is a higher level of volunteering in Wales than in the rest of the UK¹¹.

People in higher income households are more likely than others to volunteer¹². In 2001 57% of households with gross annual incomes of £75,000 or more had volunteered formally in the last 12 months, almost twice as many as those in households with an annual income of under £10,000. People in Monmouthshire are amongst the wealthiest in Wales, though not necessarily from income earned within the county¹³.

Again, people with high academic qualifications are much more likely than others to volunteer, both formally and informally¹⁴. Monmouthshire has the lowest percentage of people with no qualifications in Wales at 15%¹⁵.

Volunteering is associated with employment rather than unemployment or economic inactivity. Monmouthshire has the third highest rate of male employment in Wales, the highest rate for women and the lowest rate for economic inactivity for both sexes¹⁶.

For all these reasons it can be seen that the county must already benefit from a high level of voluntary activity. However, there will still be individuals who could benefit personally from volunteering, or who have skills and experience that would be of huge value to organisations. There are many types of opportunities available. Nearly 200 volunteering involving organisations are currently registered with the county Volunteer Centre, though this probably represents only a small percentage of organisations using volunteers. They range from very small local charities needing perhaps one volunteer for a few hours a week, to county branches of national or international organisations with a wide range of volunteering opportunities. It may be that the image of a typical volunteer is a person working in a charity shop or delivering meals-on-wheels. However, the following activities,

all done by individuals aged 50 and over who were nominated in either the 2006 or 2007 county Volunteer Achievement Awards, give a flavour of the variety on offer:

- driving a community bus service and sitting on the organising committee
- chairing a county wide community recycling facility
- visiting a residential home for elderly people each week, with two trained therapy dogs
- being secretary of a senior citizens association
- police community volunteer
- giving art lessons in a local primary school
- being a good neighbour and frequent visitor to local housebound people
- providing support for victims of crime

Further opportunities arise out of individuals coming together to address local issues in social and community settings, in what may not be thought of as volunteering. The following examples are again drawn from nominations to the Achievement Awards:

- a gardening group who transformed the communal areas of their housing estate
- a project set up to restore links and a sense of identity in a village which has lost its school, post office and pub
- a group which meets weekly at a community centre, providing an afternoon of dancing and socialising for anyone who calls in

Attempts are sometimes made to quantify in financial terms the contributions made by voluntary effort, for example that 1.57 million people in Wales volunteer, contributing 160 million hours per year, equivalent to 90,000 full time workers¹⁷. With government support and encouragement, the voluntary sector is likely to continue growing and with it, the demand for volunteers, increasing the demand for those with specialist and sought after skills¹⁸.

4.0 Method

The following methods were used:

- Analysis of the questionnaires sent in 2006 to all of the organisations in the county, which are on the Monmouthshire Volunteer Centre database and for whom the centre seeks volunteers. There were 36 responses (from 166 on the database).
- 6 organisations that responded to the survey were selected as case studies and the person with most responsibility for volunteers was interviewed face to face. These were:

| Sector | Type |
|---------------|--|
| Voluntary | Environmental |
| Voluntary | Advocacy for adults with learning disabilities |
| Voluntary | Medical support |
| Voluntary | Information and advice |
| Statutory | Youth |
| Private | Residential care of elderly people |

- Analysis of the questionnaires sent in 2006 to potential or actual volunteers who had contact with the Volunteer Centre in the previous year. 140 were sent out and 20 replies were received.
- Analysis of the questionnaires completed by individuals who attended MePlan 50+ workshops in the summer of 2007.
- A small number of individuals in the target age range were interviewed face to face. These were contacted through pre-retirement courses and the MePlan 50+ workshops.

5.0 Research Results

5.1 The views of volunteers aged 50 plus

The older volunteer

Volunteers generally give more than one reason for volunteering, in what has been described as 'a continuum of self-interested motives at one end and altruistic ones at the other'¹⁹.

Volunteers interviewed, who were all aged 50-70 years, were asked to say which of the following list, drawn from a variety of sources, applied to them:

- Filling the time
- Social contact
- New relationships
- Helping others
- Helping the community I live in
- Expanding opportunities to do something different
- Personal fulfilment
- Sense of purpose
- Self esteem
- Sense of identity
- Improved physical/mental health
- Using the skills I have
- Learning new skills
- Leading towards paid work

Typically, people chose around 8 or 9 of these 14 rewards or benefits. In one study of older volunteers a distinction was drawn between lifelong or serial volunteers, and new or trigger volunteers²⁰. For lifelong volunteers, volunteering in retirement was a continuation of what they had done all their lives. In this study, lifelong volunteers did not tend to draw on their volunteering experience for self esteem, nor did they want it to lead into new employment. Serial volunteers were a group who volunteered intermittently depending on life circumstances. New or trigger volunteers typically volunteered for the first time in relation to

a life event, most obviously retirement or the death of someone close and those interviewed expected a wide range of rewards and benefits from voluntary work.

Case Study 1:

Ann is aged 64 years and retiring on her 65th birthday from a post in the NHS

Ann's parents were both active in the community. Apart from fund raising and supporting the chapel, her parents *'did people's shopping, ran errands, took people to hospital appointments. Dad mended people's cars and Mam baked, she always did an extra cake for a neighbour'*. Ann says *'I was brought up in a giving family'*. She automatically joined in and feels that if her values in life now are from her parents, that it wasn't consciously so.

When her children were young, Ann's volunteering activities were around the school and chapel. Her children also joined in when they were small. Her daughter was only 8 when she asked if she could fundraise for Barnardo's. *'We booked the village hall, she raised £90 and a photographer from the local paper took a picture of her presenting the cheque'*. This daughter has made her career in the voluntary sector and is now Director of a high profile Welsh charity for children.

When Ann retires she may eventually expand her volunteering but not in the short term *'I have got a lot of things I want to do, for example family commitments, helping with a business'*. Ann and her husband also take a lot of responsibility for a 90 year old aunt. When asked to rate her quality of life, Ann says that she rates it highly. *'I've been very fortunate. It's a sad life if you are selfish'*.

This case study shows that Ann is clearly a lifelong volunteer, and such volunteers were well represented in this study. Of these 'lifelong' volunteers still in employment, it is interesting that none planned to increase their voluntary activity on retirement. It would remain as part of their lives, as it always had been, but not develop, or might even decrease.

It would seem then that organisations wanting to increase the numbers of volunteers will not do so from targeting lifelong volunteers. However, they may have more success with serial or trigger volunteers. Retirement or bereavement was cited as triggers or the event which re-engaged volunteers. Other triggers could be unemployment or other enforced economic inactivity (maybe because of depression, illness, divorce²¹), wanting to enter the job market or wanting to be more active. In rural areas there is the additional issue of the limited opportunities for social interaction.

Case Study 2:

Jim, aged 59 years, took voluntary redundancy at 58 from his job as a senior manager in a large public company

Jim spent the whole of his working life, 40 years, with one company, working his way up to a senior management post. He put most of his energies into his job, and had never volunteered, though he enjoyed informal activities with older people's groups, when he and his wife had care of elderly relatives. He and his wife planned to retire to Monmouthshire; therefore Jim was relocated to a part of the company in Wales. His move from Head Office disappointed him and he was pleased to accept a voluntary redundancy package nine months previously. However, he found that he had become housebound since. *'I've done a lot of decorating and gardening. I drive down to the supermarket just to find something to do.'*

Jim mentioned that he has suffered a loss of social interaction and was dismayed at his rapid deterioration in confidence. *'I joined the golf club, but I have to force myself to go'*. Jim has taken on a small volunteering role but is keen to expand this. *'I do want to give something back'*.

Jim is an example of a 'trigger' volunteer. At 59, the shock of retirement after continuous employment for 40 years has made him consider volunteering for the first time. He is someone with a massive amount of expertise and energy to give.

The 'instrumental view' of volunteering, whereby volunteering is undertaken 'to help individualistic career aspirations because it involves training, an element of selection, regular commitment and a professional approach'²² may be of lesser importance to many volunteers aged 50+, particularly serial or lifelong volunteers. However, for volunteers who have become economically inactive not through choice but circumstances, volunteering can help build self esteem and self confidence, improve physical and mental health and give people a sense of purpose²³.

Volunteering for instrumental reasons ('it looks good on a C.V') was once largely associated with the young, but this is no longer the case and the New Deal 50+ programme offers volunteer placements alongside job hunting and interview skills. There are many local examples of older people obtaining paid work in an organisation after starting as a volunteer - obviously this is more likely to occur in the voluntary sector²⁴.

Case Study 3:

Jean, aged 66 years, is an administrator in a small voluntary organisation

'I lost my husband in 1998. It was a couple of months later that I saw the volunteering column in a local newspaper. This organisation wanted someone to help out in the office one day a week. I had secretarial qualifications and experience so I thought, why not? It was close to home and it was something to get up for in the morning. So I came in and had a chat with the co-ordinator and then I started. The following year the organisation got Lottery funding for two paid posts and I applied for the administrator's job. Several people were interviewed but I got the job. By then I'd already done a counselling course to improve my skills for the job and eventually I started a University of Newport course at a local college. Two years ago I achieved a Certificate of Higher Education. I failed my 11 plus and although I'd had a lot of good jobs, somewhere inside I felt a bit of a failure. That proved to me I wasn't as dull as I thought I was'.

Jean's volunteering was 'triggered' by her bereavement in 1998 and it led her to a new job in the voluntary sector at the age of 58 and then to a degree level qualification.

However people are not always aware of the place of volunteering in job seeking. One comment from a woman in her 50's seeking employment for the first time in years:

'It's nice to volunteer, do church work and help neighbours. If I was wealthy, I would'.

People who have volunteered on a lifelong basis do not tend to increase their voluntary activity upon retirement, so organisations need to think more specifically how they can recruit older volunteers who have sporadically volunteered in the past or who have never volunteered and tailor their marketing accordingly.

5.2 The views of volunteer involving organisations

All organisations surveyed worked hard to recruit volunteers but most felt that they were not as successful as they would like. Only one of the 36 organisations who responded to the survey had enough volunteers. Methods of recruitment were fairly standard. Apart from hoping to receive referrals from the Volunteer Centre, they tried to keep the organisation in the public eye through press articles, distributing regular newsletters, taking stands at local events, encouraging existing volunteers to recruit others through 'word of mouth', encouraging former clients to become volunteers, putting leaflets in appropriate places and so on.

An environmental organisation which operated in a small geographical area had produced a leaflet appealing for volunteers and put it through every door in the area. Four positive responses were received, which disappointed the co-ordinator, but he felt that once the project was up and running more people would be attracted to join. The co-ordinator at a residential home found that relatives were willing to run stalls, donate bottles and make cakes for the annual Summer Fair (which raised funds to take residents on trips). However, her appeal in the newsletter for friends and relatives to form a Friends group to provide regular social contact for the residents received no response. The advice and information bureau, part of a national organisation, had the benefit of a website and a volunteer hotline, but still needed to use a variety of other methods locally.

All the organisations interviewed were positive about older volunteers, although none made specific attempts to market opportunities to this age group. The following comments about older volunteers were made:

- They have more time
- Flexible
- Knowledgeable
- Have expertise
- Lots of skills
- More confident
- Committed
- Good at team work
- Enjoy social side
- Can distance themselves

Older volunteers were welcomed because of these factors, and in the case of some organisations for other specific reasons. For example, the medical charity felt that older people may have more personal experience of illness and therefore would be empathetic. Whilst the youth organisation felt that older volunteers were excellent role models for their client group, many of whom lacked involved grandparents.

There were a few reservations. One co-ordinator commented, half joking, that creating rotas was difficult because her older volunteers took 'long holidays'. A more serious comment was made by the co-ordinator of the advocacy service for adults with learning disabilities, who felt that older volunteers might be more likely to be patronising, treat clients

as children and talk in a simplistic way. This was because attitudes to people with learning disabilities were once not as enlightened as they are now. She had not had any older volunteers however and did agree that induction and training would help.

Most organisations interviewed put a great deal of effort into not only trying to recruit volunteers, but to selecting appropriate people (interviewing, taking up references and CRB checks), providing induction, supervision and training. The drop out rate was generally low but usually occurred in the early stages, when volunteers began to realise the scale of time or commitment required. Practical barriers to older people’s volunteering have often been mentioned²⁵ but these did not seem to be issues for organisations interviewed, as the following table shows:

| Organisation | Upper age limit for volunteers? | Insurance difficulties with older volunteers? |
|--|--|--|
| Environmental | No | Not aware of any |
| Advocacy for adults with learning disabilities | No | Not known by co-ordinator |
| Information and advice | No | Public liability – no difference Professional indemnity – no difference Personal accident –additional premium for volunteers over 75 |
| Medical support | No | Vols. not insured |
| Youth | No | Refer to policies for individual volunteers |
| Residential care for elderly | No | No |

Not specific to older people but possibly likely to affect them proportionately more were the issues of physical disability and anxiety/depression (one in four people aged over 65 are depressed)²⁶. Several organisations felt that they did not have the right facilities for disabled volunteers. Not so much inaccessible premises, but that the support needs of such volunteers were beyond the capacity of staff or other volunteers to deal with. Another organisation mentioned that ‘volunteering’ had been suggested by a local doctor as an alternative treatment for depression, but the person concerned had not been able to cope with the volunteering tasks available and had dropped out quickly. There is sometimes a marked tension between the needs of the organisation, which requires volunteers to fulfil

certain roles reliably and efficiently, and the needs of volunteers which may be to some extent more self interested.

Organisations in the county which utilise volunteers generally have to put a lot of staff effort and time into the recruitment process, and often perceive themselves as having little success to show for their efforts. There are never enough volunteers to run the service as they would like, or to instigate the future developments they have in mind. Organisations have positive attitudes towards older volunteers, put few barriers in their way and feel they have attributes which benefit the service provided. In other words, they need more volunteers and welcome older volunteers but current methods are not effective.

6.0 Innovative methods of recruiting older volunteers

Organisations typically put a lot of time and effort into volunteer recruitment and retention but do not have enough people coming forward to volunteer. This often puts essential services to vulnerable people at risk. Monmouthshire has all the factors leading to a high number of volunteers, so recruiting extra volunteers is a major challenge. Organisations need to be encouraged to be innovative in marketing and providing opportunities that will appeal to people aged 50 plus. Examples of methods that might be used, many of which have being piloted through the MePlan 50 + project, are outlined below:

50+ Volunteer Networks - the term 'volunteer network' has been used in different ways. For example, some organisations use networks as a way of structuring the management of volunteers all working on the same project for an organisation²⁷. Others use networks as a method of linking volunteers within an organisation, through a newsletter or a section of a website.

What would be innovative is a network of volunteers or potential volunteers aged 50+ who are involved in different organisations but who wish to meet other volunteers, uncover new volunteering opportunities, share skills and expertise. Network members could support or take the lead in other innovative ways of developing volunteering, for example, organising Awards events or becoming Volunteer Ambassadors.

GAVO organised the first Volunteer Network Event at Bridges Community Centre, Monmouth, in November 2007 with 14 volunteers attending. The event was viewed as a

success with positive feedback from those attending. The second event took place at St Michael's Centre in Abergavenny in April 2008 and again was well attended, with a good response from participants. By the end of the project 34 people had joined the network and GAVO are considering possibilities to sustain and develop this initiative in the future .

Time Banks - time banking has been described as 'a new model for volunteering, changing from traditional one-way giving, to reciprocal exchanging of time by participants'²⁸. Services most frequently exchanged include: gardening, giving lifts, befriending, decorating and DIY. Compared with the demographical profile of volunteers described in the largest recent survey of volunteering²⁹, this study found that the time banks did attract the groups who tend to participate least in conventional volunteering and who are regarded as hard to reach, including people who are unemployed, receiving income support, disabled or sick people. Since 2003, the Wales Institute for Community Currencies has been developing projects across the South Wales Valleys, some of which utilise slightly different models of time banking, in which hours credited for volunteering can be exchanged for community organised events (e.g. meals, trips) or goods and services donated by private providers³⁰.

At the other end of the scale, in the county of Hessen in Germany more than 10,000 citizens are registered with Danke, a computerised system whereby volunteering work with organisations can be exchanged for more than 1,000 benefits such as entrance to museums, swimming pools and theatres. The scheme is growing, with private and voluntary organisations continuing to join³¹. One of the keys to the success of the smaller UK time banks studies was their local base, often within existing projects, meaning that participants not only performed useful work for each other but built the capacity of the community to help itself, encouraged active citizenship and improved social cohesion.

Time banks are an alternative way for older people to use their skills, experience and knowledge for the benefit of others.

In Monmouthshire, despite its prosperity, there are pockets of deprivation and low income households. Therefore, it would be worth extending the work already being done by community projects³² with a pilot Time Bank initiative. This could be of direct benefit for example, to the advice giving organisation interviewed in one town which drew most of its clients from the most deprived districts of the town, yet none of its volunteers were from those areas. People who would be unlikely to put themselves forward as individuals with

time and expertise to offer are more likely to do so as part of a local initiative. There do not appear to be examples of previous Time Banks specifically targeting older people.

A time bank is being piloted in the Communities First area of North Abergavenny. Communities First is a Welsh Assembly Government programme developed to tackle social deprivation in the most deprived areas of Wales. This has the benefit of employing a Communities First Team to implement and manage the time bank, supported by the MePlan 50 plus project. The time bank scheme was launched in April 2008 and by the end of the project five members had been recruited. Although no assignments had taken place, interest in the time bank amongst the community continues to grow. It is hoped that Communities First will continue to recruit members and ensure the sustainability of this scheme.

Flexible Volunteering Opportunities - it is clear that there is often difficulty in matching the requirements of an organisation to achieve certain objectives with the ability of the volunteer, especially when the volunteer has additional needs. If volunteer involving organisations want to improve their recruitment of older people, where possible, they need to offer tailored opportunities to meet the needs of the volunteer. Examples of the requirements they need to take into account include long-term limiting illness, disability and responsibilities as carers. As employees rights in these areas are gradually increasing through legislation, so volunteering must reflect these changes in society. Therefore, effective communication must be in place to determine the needs of the individual volunteer, and work arranged, where possible, to make reasonable steps to accommodate these needs. For example, this might mean shorter working hours; fewer long term expectations or more understanding in terms of absence and time keeping.

Employee Volunteering or phased / flexible retirement - volunteering with the support of the employer can be of particular benefit to individuals in the period before retirement (what is more commonly known in the USA as phased retirement) and can encourage those who had not previously volunteered³³ The Welsh Assembly Government has its own Employee Volunteering Scheme³⁴ and encourages public sector employers in Wales to develop volunteering schemes³⁵.

Although there are few large employers in any sector in the county, voluntary organisations requiring volunteers could approach businesses, particularly for 'one-off' large scale

activities, such as an environmental project. The employer can benefit from the activity, not only through the attendant good publicity and development of good community relations, but because such activity can be designed in such a way as to develop team-work, communication and problem solving³⁶.

Monmouthshire County Council are currently developing an employee volunteering scheme for staff aged 50 plus, providing opportunities for the Council to both develop its employees and support key third sector organisations to deliver identified priorities within the County. Employees will be able to volunteer during working hours, as part of medium to long-term placements.

Social enterprises - social enterprises may provide a wide variety of volunteer opportunities, both traditional and non-traditional. A social enterprise can be considered an enterprise where its main aims are to meet social need and not to make a profit. They tend to provide sustainable projects as they do not rely in the medium to long term on grant funding to meet running costs. Their potential, as with intergenerational projects, includes opportunities that may not be seen as traditional volunteering. They draw people new to volunteering, who are often attracted by the focus of the project or the skills required delivering it.

As part of the MePlan project, a community transport service has been developed in the South of Monmouthshire, using older volunteers to support the provision of transport to people with restricted mobility. This service has been very well received, with over a hundred members using the service, on a regular basis, up to the end of the project.

Intergenerational projects - intergenerational practice aims 'to bring generations together in structured, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and help build more cohesive communities'. This is an international methodology and has been supported in the county by the Older People's Strategy Partnership of the County Council through training and development sessions for groups, provision of tools and resources and small grants. Whilst not all intergenerational projects involve volunteering, some do. Examples include:

- A playgroup with older parents or grand parents providing support for young parents.
- Older people acting as mentors to vulnerable young people.

These projects, aiming to bring the generations together, have the potential to attract people who are put off by traditional volunteering, as these projects are rarely associated or use terminology associated with volunteering.

The profile of intergenerational projects is now higher in Monmouthshire, as a result of an initiative by Monmouthshire County Council to raise awareness and give support to intergenerational projects. A number of partners will continue to work with Monmouthshire County Council to aid the development of support, advice and funding in order for new projects to be established during 2008/2009.

Taster sessions - lack of information about what is involved in volunteering for a particular organisation could be overcome by short taster sessions where a potential volunteer could take part in, or just observe, activities. Recruiting, selecting, inducting and training new volunteers is expensive and it could reduce the drop out rate experienced sometimes when volunteers realise their placement doesn't meet their needs.

Volunteer Champions - if most people volunteer because 'someone asked them to', it makes sense to formalise this recruiting method. Poole Volunteer Centre, for example, had a team of older volunteers known as 'Volunteer Centre Ambassadors' whose role was to talk to their peers about volunteering and inspire them to get involved³⁷. There are many promotional opportunities available in Monmouthshire, including groups who have speakers, shows, fairs, workshops, plus informal ways of networking and speaking with older people. However, staff time is limited, so this is an idea that needs further exploration. The organisations studied were enthusiastic about this idea and hoped it was a service from which they would benefit. Recruitment of Ambassadors to the County could be through a variety of means including the 50+ Volunteer Network, newsletters, other voluntary sector publications and the Monmouthshire Volunteer Centre.

Innovative Promotional Activities

Awards for volunteers - in recent years there have been a number of awards schemes which aim to recognise and celebrate individual or group voluntary activity. For example, nationally there are the Nationwide Awards for Voluntary Endeavour, the Queen's Awards for Voluntary Service and the Wales Volunteer of the Year Award. Locally for the last three years, GAVO have held the Monmouthshire Volunteer Achievement Awards. While

previous award winners³⁸ indicated their own pleasure at being so honoured and felt the publicity generated certainly helped to promote their organisation, it is difficult to say whether more volunteers were actually recruited as a direct result.

Inspirational stories / case studies - personal and individual testimonies have great impact and can be used to good effect to promote volunteering, provided the right 'stories' are selected. For example, the 'lifelong' volunteers described in this study are not necessarily the best role models for older people who are seeking, above anything else, employment and who have negative views on volunteering in this context. However, there are many examples of older people who have moved into a paid job in organisations where they have previously volunteered or who have built up sufficient confidence and developed new skills through volunteering to apply for jobs. Even older people who are not seeking employment can be inspired to volunteer as a way of overcoming isolation and loneliness, developing new relationships and increasing social contact.

Several inspirational case studies have been developed (*appendix 1*), based on volunteers who have taken part in the MePlan 50+ project in some way. These will be used to support the outcomes of the project, as well as provide a lasting legacy for GAVO.

7.0 Conclusions

As this study shows, organisations in Monmouthshire value what older people have to offer and they would like more of them to volunteer. However, in order to do so, more innovative, flexible and targeted methods will be required to recruit people aged 50+.

There is low unemployment, some skills shortages, organisations are phasing out early retirement schemes³⁹, the state pension age for women is shortly to start rising until it is at 65 years and people want to keep on working as they are staying fitter and healthier for longer. Older people today have many more choices of what to do with their time and volunteering needs to be relevant and attractive if it aims to compete for people's time and energy.

A growing issue for retired people is having caring responsibilities for family members in their 80's and 90's. Many of the people interviewed in this study had care of one, two or even three older people and mentioned this as a factor that does (or may in the future) affect their ability to volunteer. People of this age also are likely to undertake childcare

responsibilities for grandchildren. Decline in religious observance, changing family structures, geographical and economic mobility have also been mentioned as factors which could lead to the decline of the traditional older volunteer⁴⁰.

Organisations will have to identify specific groups of older people and target them. For example:

- Older people who are unemployed or unwillingly economically inactive and for whom volunteering can be a way back into work
- Older people who are employed but in the run up to retirement and in organisations/companies who are willing to set up employee volunteering schemes
- Older people who have not volunteered regularly or at all and for whom there is a 'trigger' e.g. retirement, divorce, bereavement, illness
- Older people who are disabled in some way
- Older people who have some caring responsibilities
- Older people who need flexibility in volunteering work and who do not want a regular weekly commitment.

The greater numbers of older people in the population (21,000 between 51 and 70 in Monmouthshire) do present a massive opportunity for organisations willing to target specific groups. They can do this by making appropriate use of older people's skills, knowledge and experience; accommodating their needs and aspirations; and by being flexible in their approach to recruitment and retention.

In conclusion there is great potential for volunteer involving organisations to access a new and growing source of volunteers. However, in order for this to be successful, they need an approach that is innovative, targeted and provides flexible opportunities tailored to the individual.

Information about the benefits of volunteering and the range of possibilities available can be disseminated to people over 50 by targeting specific groups of older people. This is likely to be achieved using organisations in contact with potential volunteers, especially those in contact with the over 50's at 'trigger' points in their lives and using targeted publicity materials taking into account the profile and needs of the age group.

Organisations needing to recruit more volunteers can be encouraged to adopt a more targeted approach since standard recruitment methods are mainly 'preaching to the

converted', that is, the lifelong volunteer. They need to be more relevant and attractive, and are likely to benefit from using more innovative and flexible methods of working with volunteers.

There is also an advantage to be gained through working with employers in both the statutory and private sectors. Volunteer involving organisations will be able to access a new source of volunteers if they can demonstrate to employers that there is great business value in employee volunteering alongside demonstrating the benefit to employees in their transition to retirement.

8.0 Recommendations

The research findings point to the need for volunteer involving organisations to develop marketing strategies and volunteering opportunities that:-

- Take account of the demographics of people aged 50 plus, including economic inactivity, trigger points in people's lives and address the development needs of older volunteers, for example, developing confidence and learning new skills (instrumental volunteering).
- Provide a range of opportunities using innovative methods that are attractive to people aged 50 plus to compete with other interests and leisure activities.
- Provide the opportunity for older people to pass on their skills, knowledge and experience.
- Are relevant and reflect the society in which they operate, ensuring policies and procedures for volunteers reflect recent changes in legislation in the workplace. For example, catering for the needs of carers, people with disabilities and those with health conditions.
- Are flexible in terms of job role, time and commitment.

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