VOLUNTEERING: A FAMILY AFFAIR?

FULL REPORT

PART 3

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September 2020

SUPPORTED BY
MAYOR OF LONDON

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Key findings

- Volunteering can make a considerable difference to those families that get involved.
- It can deepen bonds between family members by being a source of enjoyment, point of commonality, way to spend meaningful time together and route to new opportunities, experiences and skills.
- It can add to the stresses and strains of family life.
- It can have considerable impact on organisations, whether by design or by default.
- It can help organisations to meet their mission and boost volunteer recruitment, retention and resource. It can also create challenges for volunteer managers.

When it came to the outcomes of family volunteering, people described a 'double benefit' that results from this kind of participation. Family volunteering can bring about the kinds of outcomes that are found in studies of volunteering in general, but also a set of outcomes that particularly relate to or intensify in family volunteering. As with motivations, volunteers cited a number of individual benefits which reflected those seen for volunteering in general. Rather than repeat those, here we focus on outcomes for individuals that specifically relate to family volunteering, and in particular on outcomes that were identified for families and for organisations. In the families section, we highlight some outcomes for individual family members that specifically relate to family volunteering.

5.1 Family outcomes

Family volunteering was felt to have a considerable impact on both the families and the individuals within them. Although volunteering was generally felt to be beneficial for families, not everything was positive. There was, of course, considerable variation according to the wider family context, types of volunteering undertaken, intensity of volunteering and balance with other roles and responsibilities.

Self-identity and individual wellbeing within the family context

Wider evidence suggests that the feeling of making a difference, along with a sense of satisfaction, are among the benefits that individuals gain from volunteering.[1] In the context of family volunteering, these feelings take on a particular dimension: they provide a space for individual family members to develop their own sense of purpose and identity within the family context. This could be seen in a variety of contexts but was particularly highlighted as an important outcome of volunteering for those on maternity

[1] McGarvey, A. , Jochum, V., Davies, J., Dobbs, J. and Hornung, L. (2019) *Time Well Spent: A national survey on the volunteer experience*. London: NCVO.

leave, stay-at-home parents not currently in paid work and the recently retired, who may otherwise struggle with loss of role identity, feelings of isolation, loneliness, stress and guilt. This took on an additional dimension when children were brought along to the volunteering activities but was equally applicable to those who left their children at home:

> *"I don't have company or friends, instead of me staying at home coming here helps, really gets a lot out of my brain and seeing my child playing and all that. When he started the crèche, his interaction with kids changed, he wants to play more, since he came here, I see the difference in him."*

> *"As a mother, it's very much that thing of your job is only apparent if you're not doing it, when you're volunteering and making a difference, certainly I come away going 'Actually I can interact with other people' or 'I can make somebody laugh' or 'I can help with something' – there's a huge sense of feeling like you are good at something."*

One organisation had actively promoted this aspect as part of their family volunteering offer:

> *"We talk about volunteering here as 'something for you', 'something to give you some time out so that you can feel valued and you can feel productive and your children will still have a good time as well as they're socialising but this is for you actually'. That's how we market it: 'It feels satisfactory, builds a sense of self-worth, a sense of dignity for a couple of hours being able to put yourself first you can still be a mum and you're doing something great with your kid'."*

Such outcomes were not, however, limited to parents. We spoke to one young woman, for example, who had gone through a particularly challenging time with depression and anxiety, and for whom volunteering had enhanced her mental health and subjective wellbeing. Her volunteering experience has been transformative at an individual level, which had led her to encourage some of her wider family members to get involved, which in turn had provided a space and the opportunity to reshape family relationships.

Enjoying spending time together

An immediate outcome of some family volunteering was the enjoyment of spending (quality, meaningful, active) time together and doing something which was slightly out of the ordinary for everyday family life. This was highlighted in terms of parents spending time with their children:

> *"... for me it's important because it's just spending time with the kids on stuff that you wouldn't normally do as a family, because they see you're committed to something and you're doing something and you're having fun with it, so it's not part of daily life, if you know what I mean."*

And by couples volunteering together:

> *"Because sometimes you don't get enough time for, especially having three kids and stuff...you come home, putting the kids to bed and everything, and by the time you come to sit down you're pretty much ready to go to sleep anyway. So having something at the weekend to aim towards that you both kind of work together."*

This outcome was somewhat dependent on both the type of family volunteering (it was particularly prevalent when volunteering together) and the nature of the volunteering activities.

Strengthening family ties

A key outcome of family volunteering was a strengthening or deepening of relationships between family members. Family members volunteering together, alongside or with children participating in an activity was particularly felt to strengthen family relationships. Beyond spending meaningful enjoyable time together, it added a new dimension through which to express shared values and interests, and gave family members something in common ('gives us something to talk about!'), shared experiences and a sense of joint achievement and pride. Some couples had met through their volunteering and continued to be involved when they got married and had children, after which they brought their children with them. Comments included:

> *"We were all proud of the outcome: we did this thing we did together."*

> *"We're definitely closer. Just being able to spend time with them [children] that isn't around cinema or a theme park."*

Previous research has highlighted the strengthening of family bonds that comes from parents and children volunteering together;[2] our findings confirmed this while also showing how this extends to couples. Indeed, this strengthening of relationships was evident amongst parents, grandparents and children, between couples and amongst siblings. It had the potential to have increased significance at key moments in family life. For example, for some couples, volunteering gained in significance when children left home or when they reached retirement, both points which were associated with significant shifts in the dynamics between couples. For some, it also gained significance when new blended families were being formed. People talked, for example, about having to reinvent themselves and find new ways to relate to each other and spend (newly available) time together, and how volunteering together or alongside each other could help to facilitate that. Couples in particular talked about the sense of cooperation and teamwork that developed through volunteering together:

> *"I think there's that element of teamwork stuff and that, as [my partner] has said actually, it's something we enjoy as part of our relationship. I think it's not something we necessarily always, we didn't set out to be involved perhaps in the fact that we do but we get a lot from it."*

> *"...it's the teamwork a little bit, so it's a common ground isn't it, I know doing things together has created a new fresh common ground, something to talk about, something to achieve. And for me it will be something in years to come just to look back at photos or something and say,* 'Oh remember when we did that?' *Just another stepping stone isn't it."*

[2] Bird, C. (2011) Family Volunteering Pilot - Evaluation Report: Getting families more actively involved in the National Trust's work, National Trust; ; Littlepage, L. Obergfell, E. and Zanin, G. (2003) *Family Volunteering: An Exploratory Study of the Impact on Families*, Center for Urban Policy and the Environment, Indiana University: Indiana.

It was suggested, however, that there is a tipping point when volunteering too closely together can create challenges. Some said that it became too intense, when, for example, they realised that it was all they ever talked about together: 'It was a thing that we then shared, but I don't think that was very good for us because that was both of us talking about school constantly'. This was reflected in some people's preference for volunteering 'alongside' – engaging in the same organisation, and so gaining that commonality, but within different activities so as not to step on each other's toes. Working through these challenges, however, can sometimes have its own rewards: 'I'm sure it's ended up that we are a lot more together, bound together than we would have been, but we've probably got quite a lot wrong on the way and you know stressed each other out.'

Making families through volunteering: The Smiths

Three generations of the Smith family currently volunteer alongside each other at St John Ambulance. Michael and Lucy first got involved, in separate units, as teenagers. Indeed, they met through volunteering at St John. Sixty years later, their daughter (Samantha) and granddaughter both now volunteer for the organisation (other family members have also been involved at various points). Samantha, who has been involved in the organisation throughout her whole life, also met her (now ex) husband through volunteering, and her three children have all been involved in the youth groups with one daughter heavily involved in volunteering. She reflected: 'Yeah, it's like my second home now, I've just grown up with it. Everyone that I look up to is involved in it.'

Staff from St John Ambulance referred to this recognised pattern as 'making families' through its volunteering: 'What mazed me is how families have developed as part of volunteering. So, seeing some situations where people have become families as a result of joining [this organisation]. So, people have met their partners, they've had children, it's then brought two families together which has then grown and again, those children will be probably part of [this organisation] for the rest of their life and they'll extend.'

Relationships with others

Alongside the strengthening of relationships within families, volunteering can also contribute to a strengthening of relationships between families and others. For some, family volunteering had contributed to strengthening relationships with other families involved in an organisation or encouraging other families to also become involved (for example, at local community event). For some, most of the family's socialising was done with other families involved in the organisation, particularly when those families had children of similar ages who had grown up together in the organisation. This was facilitated by organisations encouraging regular social events for volunteers or generally creating convivial volunteering environments. But it was more than the social contact which strengthen relationships; it was suggested that volunteering added extra depth to relationships by providing the opportunity to do something meaningful together – a shared sense of purpose and achievement, for example. For some families, this extended to a sense of being deeply embedded within their communities, not just as individuals, but also collectively as a family:

> *"Oh, it's huge, it is absolutely huge, I think. It's community, it builds, it helps you to be part of the fabric of the community and that's, it's really strong and powerful."*

Broadening families' horizons, perspectives and skills

Volunteering had opened doors and expanded the horizons of many of the families that we spoke to, with many also noting that through these opportunities they had developed new skills. For some, volunteering had provided opportunities for the family or family members to get involved in activities and experiences that would otherwise not have been available to them. Sometimes these new experiences and opportunities were directly through the organisation they volunteered for; sometimes they grew from there: volunteering in one organisation could open doors to others. When these experiences were shared and recognised through family volunteering, they had added value. As one person reflected:

> *"It has a positive effect on families in that respect. I think the impact on families of us giving lots of opportunities for young people to be celebrated, upskilled, recognised, have some sense of achievement, I think that's inherently positive in terms of a family point of view."*

Such opportunities and experiences could also challenge perspectives and create awareness of the world. Some parents, for example, felt that volunteering as a family or alongside family had helped to broaden their children's minds and to instil values such as the importance of active citizenship and community engagement:

> *"…they can see how things fit in the community and how people work together and that importance of being part of something."*

> *"… they're seeing that it is good to help out, you should, you can be, it's just like, to be helpful to do things, do things for your community, positive things, and be good role models."*

Even where family members were not directly involved, volunteers were taking away reflections to their families at home and, in some cases, changing their behaviours and outlook.

Pressure and stress

As suggested in section 4.1, volunteering can create pressure and put stress on individuals and wider family members. Volunteering can, for example, put pressure on individuals, which is exacerbated when their families are less supportive of volunteering. In families where volunteering was valued less by those members who did not volunteer, those who did reported feeling a greater sense of pressure to manage other people's expectations of how they fulfilled their various roles and responsibilities.

Pressure and stress were also more intense when multiple family members were involved in volunteering in multiple roles, and when those roles had high levels of responsibility and/or were juggled alongside other intense roles and responsibilities, such as a stressful job. While many of the families we spoke to reflected positively on being busy (when asked how they would describe themselves as a family, 'busy' was a common response), it was clear that at times it could get too much.

For some, time spent volunteering meant no time or less time for other family activities. When children were not involved in the volunteering, this could mean time apart from them, and: 'An extra thing they've had to contend with'. When children were brought along to their parents' volunteering activities, it could mean that they missed out on other things: 'I resented [the organisation we volunteer for] somewhat at times, especially when I was told I couldn't go to a friend's sleepover or I couldn't have my friend sleepover or I couldn't have a birthday party or I couldn't do something because it clashed with [volunteering].' It can mean that other roles and responsibilities are neglected or passed on to someone else, sacrifices are made and leisure activities are foregone, which can cause resentment within the family:

> *"...sometimes it can be negative, you know, time is precious ... So when you want to go away as a family, to go and do a day out somewhere, it's tough as a coach, because you don't want to be letting down kids. But it's tough as a parent because you don't want to be letting down your wife and kids."*

Such tensions within families were exacerbated when the volunteering itself became stressful. Some volunteering brings a strong sense of obligation and responsibility, which can be overwhelming, make it hard to say no or to walk away and create pressure and stress that affects not only those who are volunteering, but also other family members. In one family case study, the children talked about living with 'angry mum' during a period when her volunteering role (in which they all supported her) became too much. There was a sense that these pressures could be particularly intense when whole families were involved in an organisation – their lives were more entangled within it and so it became harder to step back.

5.2 The organisational outcomes of family volunteering

Family volunteering also had an impact on organisations. Again, we focus on those impacts which were highlighted as being specific to or intensified within family volunteering.

Meeting the mission

Family volunteering can support organisations to achieve their mission. For those whose mission, values or strategy focused on improving outcomes for families, family volunteering could be a direct way to achieving that: both through the volunteering itself and through what it achieved for others. In other words, family volunteering was a means to an end as well as an end in itself. As a member of staff from one of our case studies described:

> *"It's really valuable because it's the volunteers who run our activities and sessions. Being able to provide family-friendly volunteering means that we are able to achieve our objective which is by supporting families with love and dignity and apart from just helping families it enables us to provide something for other people within the community as well, other more satisfying productive experiences."*

Family volunteering could have a similar double effect for those whose missions or values related to empowering young people or engaging with and building community:

> *"Oh, yeah, huge benefits. I think it's, because again it's about building better communities, isn't it? So, actually, it's the influence those families have out in the community as well…"*

> *"We tend to find that the family volunteers are really representational of our local community, so it's our community taking ownership of the gallery and running it for other members of their community."*

Family volunteering was identified by some as having changed people's perceptions of an organisation and helped to improve its image and reputation:

> *"It just gives a different energy to the welcome and people's perceptions of what the space is about, because I think a lot of what we do is trying to create new ways in which different people can engage."*

Recruiting additional resources

Bringing in different family members provides additional resources for organisations. For some organisations, offering family volunteering opportunities was an effective way to enhance volunteer recruitment and, in doing so, brought additional resource into the organisation. Reflective of the findings on motivations and routes into volunteering, for example, family could be an important stimulus for volunteer recruitment and a way of reducing some of the barriers to involvement. This could be enhanced by having clear pathways into volunteering which, for example, saw parents of young people who attended services provided by an organisation being actively recruited. It could also include young people who were brought along with their parent volunteers, and later moved on to become volunteers themselves.

Respondents frequently talked about getting 'two for one' through family volunteering – they may recruit one volunteer but that volunteer then brings along other family members, either to provide occasional help or as ongoing volunteers. In this way, family volunteering increases the organisation's human resource.

Promoting retention

Family volunteering was also thought to promote retention, as families may be likely to stay longer because of the connections they make or if they have children involved in that activity. This was achieved partly by reducing time conflicts within families, meaning they were more likely to stay longer: 'I don't feel like I have to make choices between having a family and continuing to be part of [this organisation] because my family can be part of [it].' It was also facilitated by the encouragement and support from other family members, which helped to sustain the volunteering. This was particularly highlighted in terms of parents encouraging and motivating their children to stay involved, and vice versa, but was also recognised amongst couples. As one person said:

> "*I suppose the benefit of the family rather than the individual volunteers, they're probably going to stay longer because their children are going to be there over many years normally."*

It was also partly the intensity of the connection and attachment that was established between families and organisations which made them more likely to stay. Some families, for example, talked of a sense of

belonging to and/or ownership of an organisation or a 'community' which kept them volunteering for longer.

Challenges for volunteer management

While family volunteering was generally viewed positively in terms of its contribution to recruitment and retention, it was also recognised to create potential challenges for volunteer management. For example, while recruiting one volunteer can lead to other family members getting involved, the downside is that when one volunteer leaves – particularly due to some kind of a dispute – the whole family can leave, risking leaving gaps within organisations. When that family has developed close bonds with other families within the organisation, it can result in significant swaths of volunteers leaving.

There was also some suggestion that the risk of dispute was higher when whole families were involved. Domestic tensions within families may bubble over into the organisation, creating an uncomfortable environment for others. As one respondent described:

> *"...if there's a family breakdown or an argument or something, the impact that has in this organisation is huge because ultimately when, and it's not just family, there's the part of friendships and even though it's still family isn't it, ultimately? So, when those friendships break down it can just erupt because people haven't got the skills all of the time to be able to manage that conflict."*

The enhanced level of passion and ownership that some family volunteers come to feel for the organisation can make volunteering particularly emotive. This can create challenges for organisations, including, for example, making it harder to manage change:

> *"...it's got that positive and negative, doesn't it? The positive is you quite often get like multiple people for the price of one, for want of a better word. The negative side to the organisation is you know some families can be a force to be reckoned with in a sense that where change needs to take place and they're stubborn and set in their ways and won't, trying to manage one person and get one person on board is a lot easier than trying to get a whole family on board and sometimes that can cause barriers, sometimes, depending on how the family interact with each other."*

Continued involvement in volunteering may also depend on the interest and enjoyment of children in an activity. If that wanes or if they choose to move on to a new activity, whole families may decide not to continue participating. This can pose challenges for organisations in filling the gaps that families leave behind.

Volunteer diversity

Family volunteering was generally seen to have led to a widening of participation within organisations by enabling the involvement of a more diverse range of volunteers – particularly children, and parents of young children. An increased diversity of volunteers was achieved through the organisational features and approaches outlined in section 4.2, such as creating a family-friendly atmosphere, providing flexible opportunities, allowing children to be brought along or providing childcare facilities, which enabled

parents with young children to be involved. This finding from our case studies was reinforced through our analysis of the UK Time Use Survey 2014/2015: if they are not volunteering together, families with children are less likely than families with no (dependent) children to engage in volunteering activities. Volunteering together enables families with children to engage.

Involving a more diverse range of volunteers, particularly families, helped some organisations to better understand what families need and want, develop an offer of activities better suited to the communities they were looking to engage with and bring people they knew in to the organisation. Family volunteering was helping organisations to reach out to people who wouldn't normally get involved:

> *"I think by involving families, they inevitably bring other family friends, other families that they're in touch with or if the parents are involved in different community groups, whether it's religious, sporting, book club, they'll bring different children and families through that way which is great. We do get diversity through that."*

Staff from one of our case study organisations talked about their approach to enabling the involvement of families and its positive outcomes in terms of diversifying engagement, which brought not just families with young children, but also families from a wider range of socio-economic and ethnic groups. This had been recognised by partner organisations, which had additional knock-on effects:

> *"If you look at our Tuesday and Thursday [family volunteering] session it is a much more diverse group … it brings that richness, that diversity of experience, diversity of background that we don't get in our less child-friendly volunteering … it's allowed us to talk to referral partners … the crèche makes [us] look professional, safe space for children so partner organisations can recommend to a mum with a small child to come and volunteer knowing the child will be looked after and mum has time to themselves and it's free and accessible."*

Bringing a more diverse mix of volunteers into the organisation meant that people from diverse backgrounds were mixing, which in turn was thought to be contributing to more inclusive communities: 'I think we're getting a wide range of people, the backgrounds that they come from, and quite a few of the people wouldn't speak to each other or socialise if it wasn't for [this organisation].' This included the value of bringing different generations together through family volunteering.

While we found evidence in our case studies that developing family volunteering had increased the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the volunteers, this was not mirrored in our analysis of the 2014/15 Time Use survey (see box below).

The risk of exclusivity

While family volunteering was generally thought to have widened participation, there were limits, and indeed some felt that it risked sometimes having the opposite effect. There were different ways in which this played out in practice.

First, in the more designed, specific family volunteering schemes within our case studies, far more women were involved than men.[3] To some extent, this was reflective of the organisations as a whole (focused on families or children), but it was also reflective of the nature of the opportunities on offer and particularly the emphasis on encouraging the involvement of families with young children. A male volunteer in one of the organisations suggested that there needed to be a wider range of volunteering opportunities that appealed to men, beyond 'stereotypical' roles such as fixing things and lifting:

> *"We're good at fixing things, good at lifting heavy boxes, could there be more than that certainly? But I hate fixing stuff, it doesn't excite me at all; I like talking to people, so that would be more interesting for me … it would be very interesting if they were to say 'We specifically want some dads to speak with male clients, or to open that much more'."*

Second, in some organisations – particularly where family involvement had developed by default over many years or by an extension of activities in which children participated and parents were encouraged to volunteer – the intensity of family involvement could feel like 'family takeover' and could contribute to exclusivity by putting other people off getting involved. In such cases, rather than family volunteering encouraging diversity, it did the opposite, with some organisations saying that for them the struggle was not engaging families but recruiting volunteers from outside of the families that were already involved in the organisation. As one person reflected:

> *"...it may lead to feelings of exclusivity. Cliques, favouritism, stuff like that. So, when we're bringing in to unit areas, if I, like anything, if I come into a small rural community and, 'Hang on a minute, my manager is this guy's dad and his three kids are here and his wife's here and this kind of stuff and there's 12 people in this room of which six are related to one another,' I might not feel comfortable and then the decisions that get taken to prioritise them over me because of service and all the rest of it, I'm going to excuse because of relationships and stuff like that. So, that's rare but obviously it does happen that we get this suggestion that family ties within the organisation lead to cliques and exclusivity for other individuals."*

What the Time Use Survey suggest about the inclusivity of family volunteering

If they are not volunteering together, families with children are less likely than families with no children to engage in volunteering activities. The Time Use Survey suggests that this is the case for all families with children, but **opportunities for families to volunteer together are particularly important for those with children under the age of four**. They're the ones who are the most likely to not volunteer at all, but they have above average family volunteering rates. Opportunities for families to volunteer together seem to be the most attractive to families with children aged between 11 and 15. These families have much higher rates of volunteering together than families with children under the age of

[3] This gender imbalance was also reflected in our analysis of the UK Time Use Survey data which found that six out of ten people who volunteered together with family members were women.

11. This supports the suggestion that family volunteering is inclusive in terms of enabling the participation of people with children.

The rates of households volunteering together as a family varied slightly by region – with the West Midlands having the lowest – but were not statistically significant. This suggests that family volunteering together may be more geographically even than other forms of formal volunteering.

The size of household income does not make a significant difference to whether or not family members volunteer together, but some sources of income do. Having independence means (for example, income from investments and savings) makes it more likely that family members will volunteer together, whereas unemployment benefits makes it less likely.

Among family volunteers, there tend to be more women, married people, employed people aged between 35 and 46 and teenagers aged between 12 and 15 than among formal volunteers.

Family volunteers, like other formal volunteers,[4] are more likely to be women than men: six out of ten family and formal volunteers are women. A considerably higher proportion of family volunteers (85%) than other formal volunteers (54%) are married or cohabiting; considerably less are divorced or single. Family volunteering attracts more 35–46-year-olds and their teenage children than formal volunteering. Family volunteers are slightly younger (average age of 48) than other formal volunteers (51). There are considerably more 36–45-year-olds among family volunteers (18%) than there are among other formal volunteers (8%) but fewer young people aged 19–25 years (4% and 12%, respectively). Family volunteering also has a higher proportion of 12–15-years-olds (7%) than formal volunteering (3%), but the difference is almost negligible for those aged 8–11, 16–18 and 65+.

Adult family volunteers are more likely to be in employment (49%) than other formal volunteers (38%) and less likely to be unemployed and economically inactive. Among employed family volunteers, there are significantly more managers, associate professionals, care and leisure workers, but fewer professionals, people in administrative occupations and sales and customer service workers than among other formal volunteers. There are no significant differences in the level of education between family volunteers and other formal volunteers. Overall, the national picture suggests that there are significant differences and inequalities in who gets involved in family volunteering; those who are married/cohabiting, women, those employed and those aged 35–46 are more likely to be involved.

[4] That is, people who engaged in formal volunteering but not in family volunteering.

6. So what? Conclusions and considerations

Key conclusions and considerations

- Family provides an important contextual layer that shapes an individual's volunteering.
- Beyond individuals, however, family volunteering is a collective form of volunteering.
- Family volunteering is extensive – more than we expected – but it may not continue to flourish by default.
- Changes in the ways that we live and in how organisations involve volunteers are affecting the chances of family volunteering happening and the experience of it once it does.
- If it is to be sustained, family volunteering needs attention and nurturing.
- While an increasing number of organisations are looking to design specific family volunteering schemes, this remains a small part of what family volunteering is about.
- This research suggests that it is important for organisations to consider how:
    - families currently engage with them
    - they want to involve families and what approach to family volunteering might be right for them
    - volunteering pathways for families could be enhanced within their organisation
    - they can help families balance volunteering with family life
    - they can ensure that family volunteering is as inclusive as possible
    - the balance between risk management and being inclusive might affect family volunteering
    - they can ensure that families and their organisation get the most out of volunteering.

6.1 Conclusions

In this section, we bring together findings from across all stages of the research and all sections of the report to draw conclusions about how families engage in volunteering and how organisations engage with family volunteers.

Family volunteering is extensive

Family volunteering is an extensive form of volunteering. In 2014/15 one-third of all formal volunteering households in the UK volunteered together as a family,[5] most often as couples without (dependent) children, followed by one parent with at least one child. And we define family volunteering more broadly than is reflected within this data, suggesting that it is likely to represent an even greater proportion of

[5] Two or more family members from the same household.

volunteering. Much of it takes place, however, with little explicit acknowledgement or encouragement. We can't tell from our data whether the extent of family volunteering has changed over time. On the one hand, a number of societal developments seem to work against it, not least in terms of time becoming increasingly pressured within families through a combination of longer working hours, rising female employment and the growth in children's leisure pursuits. On the other hand, organisations are paying it increasing attention and more are overtly encouraging it. Either way, it is clear that family volunteering is changing.

Family volunteering is varied

Family volunteering is also varied. It looks and feels very different in different families. We identified five types of family volunteering: do together, do alongside, do for, bring along and do separately. Family volunteering can mean parents and children getting involved in volunteering; more often it means couples. Families may engage in these types of volunteering at different stages of their lives. For example, on moving to a new area, couples may use volunteering as a way to integrate themselves into the community; parents may volunteer for activities in which their young children are involved and then volunteer alongside each other as their children grow older, and they may all volunteer separately after their children leave home. This does not suggest, however, that there is a linear model of progression. Some families were involved in a number of different types of family volunteering at any one time. For some families, volunteering is a small part of what they do – they might, for example, help out at an organisation once a week as one of many activities that they are involved in with little more significance than other leisure or work pursuits. For others, it is more fundamentally a part of who they are. Volunteering becomes part of everyday life in some families, reflective of their values and integral to their identity, which leads significant levels of commitment and responsibility within one organisation and/or to multiple volunteer roles being undertaken by family members.

Organisations adopt different approaches to family volunteering

The ways in which organisations approach family volunteering also differ. For many organisations, family volunteering is something that has evolved, largely by default, over the organisation's history or as an extension of the activities and services that they deliver, which themselves have been focused on families or children. Family volunteering was often not a discrete thing, but integral to the organisation's engagement with volunteers per se, and often reflective of a general orientation towards families or communities. While some efforts may be made to promote and encourage family members to get involved, particularly in terms of parents being encouraged to help out with activities in which their children participate, often family volunteering goes unacknowledged. Some organisations, however, had developed specific family volunteering schemes, in which families (particularly parents and children) were explicitly encouraged to volunteer together, often within discrete projects or activities, and family volunteering was seen as a way to meet mission or strategy and/or to diversify engagement. Whether by design or by default, family volunteering can have a considerable impact on organisations: it can help them meet their mission and boost volunteer recruitment, retention and resource. It can also, however, create challenges for volunteer managers and get in the way of inclusivity.

Organisational context makes a difference to family volunteering

What organisations do and how they do it can make a difference to the opportunities for, experiences of and outcomes from family volunteering. Creating a 'family-friendly' environment is significant. Key aspects seen to facilitate engagement included: actively encouraging families to get involved in a range of flexible opportunities; opportunities that suit the (changing) needs and interests of different family members (particularly of different ages); having the potential for stepping up and stepping back as circumstances change; supporting volunteers in a way which recognises and accommodates both their individual and family circumstances and how these may affect their volunteering. Some organisations grapple with how to balance a desire to be inclusive, particularly of children and young people, with the need to ensure safeguarding measures are followed. Some grapple with how to balance the deep commitment to an organisation that family volunteering can bring (akin to what others have referred to as 'thick volunteering'[6]) with the need to manage individuals, organisations and change.

Family context also shapes volunteering

Families' own situations can also make a considerable difference to the chances, experiences and outcomes of family volunteering. This study has highlighted just how significant the family context is for volunteering. Our review of existing research[7] shows us that marriage, divorce, strength of relationships, having children and caring for elderly/ailing relatives can all make a difference to volunteering: some make it more likely that families will volunteer; others have the opposite effect. Further, like others, we found that families can provide motivations for, routes into and triggers for volunteering, as well as the resources for volunteering. With ever-busy lives, fitting volunteering in can be difficult, particularly as it is often given less priority than other roles and responsibilities. There were important gender dimensions to family volunteering, which were reflective of those within wider society, not least of which included women often shouldering the responsibility for making volunteering fit within the family schedule. Sharing resources, including physical and emotional support, amongst family members can be crucial in sustaining volunteering: it becomes a team effort.

Volunteering shapes families

In return, volunteering can make a considerable difference to those families that get involved. It can deepen the bonds between family members, providing a point of commonality, an expression of shared values and identity, a way to spend meaningful time together and a route to new opportunities and experiences. It can, however, also add to the stresses and strains of family life. When volunteering becomes too onerous – in time and/or energy – it can take its toll not just on those individuals directly involved, but also on the wider family; other roles and responsibilities can be neglected, opportunities missed and tensions heightened. For some, however, when the stresses were not too great, working through these issues as a family had in itself been developmental.

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[6] O'Toole, M. and Grey, C. (2016) 'Beyond choice: "Thick" volunteering and the case of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution', *Human Relations,* vol. 69, no. 1, pp. 85 –109.
[7] Stuart, J. (2019) *The Links Between Family and Volunteering: A review of the evidence.* London: NCVO. https://publications.ncvo.org.uk/the-links-between-family-and-volunteering-a-review-of-the-evidence-/ (accessed September 2020)

Family volunteering as collective volunteering: Under threat?

Family does more than provide one of the contextual layers shaping an individual's volunteering. Exploring how families engage in volunteering reminds us that volunteering is not a purely individual activity – it can also be a collective one. In this case, the collective is the family. Volunteering can be an expression of family values. Decisions on whether to get involved, and what and how much to do (or not to do) are made both individually and collectively, through negotiation and a sharing of opportunities, roles, responsibilities and resources amongst family members. Recognising volunteering as a collective activity, and family as one important collective, serves to highlight the relational aspects of volunteering. It also raises the question as to whether family volunteering, like other forms of collective volunteering,[8] is on the decline. While we found it to be extensive – more so than we had imagined – the evidence suggests that it is no longer possible to assume that family volunteering will continue to flourish by default. If it is to be sustained, it needs attention and nurturing. The considerable interest expressed by both organisations and families in learning about and designing ways to support families to volunteer suggests that this might be possible.

6.2 Considerations

The conclusions of this research raise a set of questions that organisations may want to consider if they wanted to develop family volunteering. None of this is rocket science: a lot of what we set out below will be familiar territory to those who know about general good volunteer management practice. This is not the type of good volunteer management practice which focuses primarily on policies and procedures, but instead it focuses on the relational and developmental aspects of volunteering. While we introduce these considerations here, we develop them further within our separate guidance document.

How do families currently engage with your organisation?

Family volunteering is diverse, and it is extensive. It includes, but is about far more than, parents and children volunteering together within the same organisation. It can be about any number of family members volunteering and can involve volunteering alongside each other, for each other or with each other. It goes beyond what people typically think of as family volunteering. Much of this volunteering currently goes unacknowledged by organisations. We encourage all organisations to reflect upon how they currently involve families as volunteers (and members, supporters and participants), how this has been facilitated to date and how it is changing.

How do you want to involve families and what approach to family volunteering is right for you?

Organisations have different approaches to family volunteering. More often than not, family volunteering has happened by default within organisations. Different family members – couples, grandparents, parents and children – have come to be involved over many years with relatively little active encouragement or support of that collective involvement by the organisation. Despite largely going unacknowledged, this family volunteering has often had a significant effect on those organisations, enhancing volunteer

[8] Hustinx, L. and Lammertyn, F. (2003) 'Collective and reflexive styles of volunteering: A sociological modernization perspective', *Voluntas*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 167–187.

recruitment and retention, and community connection, for example. At the same time, there are risks of the volunteering becoming exclusionary or resistant to change. Wider societal (and organisational) changes have begun to alter the ways in which families volunteer, and without more active support and encouragement, family volunteering seems likely to decline. Some organisations have begun attempts to counter this by moving towards a more active approach to facilitation, with an increasing number looking to design specific discrete family volunteering schemes. It would seem that there is a demand for such schemes – 18% of respondents to NCVO's Time Well Spent survey who weren't currently volunteering, for example, said that they would be encouraged to get involved if they could do so with a member of their family or a friend. For some organisations, it was possible to follow the journey that they had been on, from family volunteering largely having occurred by default, through to a more proactive approach whereby they had designed a specific programme to target families; for others, the journey was less linear and more fluid.

When organisations have specifically set to encourage family volunteering, this is often out of a desire to fulfil organisational values and strategies which align to family involvement and/or a desire to diversify volunteer involvement, particularly as a way of engaging parents with young children. But family volunteering can help organisations to meet other ambitions too. Specifically designed, discrete family volunteering schemes offer the potential to overcome some of the barriers to volunteering by, for example, allowing parents to volunteer with or bring along their children, but can be resource intensive and limited in scope. A more active facilitation of the more diffuse family volunteering that has previously occurred by default offers a more organic approach with the potential to involve a wider range of families and types of participation, but may require strong leadership and a shift in culture and practices across the whole organisation. Careful consideration of what family volunteering already happens and contributes to your organisation, but also what you might want it to achieve through more active facilitation, can help you think through what approach(es) to adopt.

In short, the different approaches affect family volunteering in different ways. We encourage organisations to think through what family volunteering currently looks like within their own organisation and then to reflect upon what they want to achieve through family volunteering and what the different approaches might offer.

Can you enhance the volunteering pathways for families within your organisation?

As mentioned at above, traditional pathways that have previously facilitated family volunteering largely by default have begun to break down due, in part, to societal changes and a lack of attention or leadership. It was suggested that in some organisations there used to be a 'natural migration' of parents from volunteering to help with activities in which their children were involved to other roles, and of young people from participating in an activity to volunteering to help with the running of that activity, but this 'flow' had been neglected and opportunities to engage families and build involvement across generations had been missed. We encourage organisations to consider the pathways through participation for families within, and indeed beyond, their organisation and how these might be further supported. This may include, for example, developing a wider variety of roles suited to a wider range of people (or, rather than having specified roles, working with potential volunteers to identify what they might offer the organisation). It may also include a more active encouragement of migration through different forms of

engagement with the organisation – not just volunteering. This may facilitate progression by supporting people along the journey from being beneficiaries of an activity to actively supporting it and taking on additional roles and responsibilities, but it is also about recognising and supporting people when they need to take a temporary or permanent step back from their volunteering as their circumstances change over their life course. This may require a more systems-based approach to volunteer leadership that looks beyond individual roles, programmes, activities, teams and even organisations.

Can you do more to help families balance volunteering with family life?

Families provide important reasons for, routes into and resources for volunteering. But family life is busy – increasingly so – often making it difficult to fit volunteering in alongside or even as part of other roles and responsibilities. If organisations want to facilitate family volunteering, it is important that organisations recognise and support their volunteers with this. A key way to do this is to be flexible. This does not necessarily mean moving to short-term, episodic volunteering roles with no expectation of commitment; it means being specific about what levels of commitments are required and then being flexible in terms of how these are met. This might mean offering greater flexibility in the duration and frequency of volunteering – recognising that different 'working' hours suit different people at different stages in their lives, and that volunteers may be able to do more on some days than others, for example. It might also mean being flexible in terms of who does the volunteering, recognising that families sometimes share volunteering roles/responsibilities amongst themselves and supporting them in this. Of course, there are limits to how flexible some organisations or some volunteering roles can be, so organisations may need to weigh up the pros and cons of flexibility versus consistency.

Helping families fit volunteering in also includes considering how volunteering can be seen as part, or an extension, of a family's other roles and responsibilities rather than a source of conflict about a family's resources. This might include allowing/encouraging parents to bring along their children when they are volunteering or encouraging parents and children, and couples, to volunteer together and alongside each other. This way, volunteering becomes part of family time rather than conflicting with it. It might be about providing childcare facilities or expenses. It might be about ensuring that volunteering is convivial and enjoyable so that it becomes part of leisure time rather than competing with it. It might be about ensuring that those who lead, manage, support volunteers actively talk to their volunteers about their family contexts, and the pressures they are under, ensuring that volunteering does not add to those stresses, letting them step back and do less when they need to and, step up and do more when circumstances change. This can be particularly challenging in volunteer-led organisations when volunteers take on considerable levels of responsibility, often have more intense feelings of ownership and duty, and may be less likely to have explicitly considered how to 'manage' volunteers.

How can you ensure that family volunteering is as inclusive as possible?

It was recognised that family volunteering could have the potential to create more inclusive volunteering practices. It was, for example, more inclusive of parents with young children than other types of formal volunteering. Some organisations had found that offering discrete family volunteering programmes had enabled them to engage people from more diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds than they had previously been able to do. Some recognised, however, that while such schemes had been successful at engaging mothers and their children, they had not been so successful at engaging men. Further, left to

its own devices, family volunteering has the potential to become exclusionary. When certain families come to dominate an activity, group or organisation, there is a risk that others will be put off getting involved or made to feel unwelcome. Organisations need to consider how they can develop their volunteering offer to make it more inclusive of families, and within that a more diverse range of families, while also guarding against the potential for family takeover.

How does the balance you are striking between risk management and being inclusive affect the involvement of families in volunteering?

Reflective of wider evidence, we found that over the past couple of decades the tendency has been for organisations to become more formalised, professionalised and centralised, which has sometimes worked against flexibility and inclusivity, and against family volunteering by default/extension. A growing amount of 'red tape' created barriers and was contributing to a suggested decline in multigenerational family volunteering in particular. It was seen as increasingly difficult, for example, for volunteers to bring young children along with them, which created a barrier to participation for parents, particularly single parents. More generally, it was seen to be difficult to involve children and young people as volunteers, due to concerns about safeguarding, risk and insurance. Sometimes, this had led organisations to adopt blanket policies which ruled out volunteering by people under the age of 18 or 16, creating a direct barrier to participation and limiting the potential to build pathways through participation. Developing specific family volunteering schemes was one way to try to overcome some of these issues within a contained programme, but they may still affect more diffuse forms of family volunteering. We encourage organisations to think more about how they can strike the right balance between the management of risk and being inclusive.

How can you help to ensure that families, and your organisation, get the most out of volunteering?

Volunteering can make a considerable difference to those families that get involved. It can be an enjoyable way to spend (meaningful) time together. Perhaps more significantly, it can deepen the bonds between family members, providing a point of commonality and an expression of shared values and identity. It can also be a route to new opportunities and experiences. It can, however, add to the stresses and strains of family life. When it becomes too onerous – in time and/or energy – it can take its toll not just on those individuals directly involved, but also on the wider family; other roles and responsibilities can be neglected, opportunities missed and tensions heightened.

Organisations can also get a lot out of family volunteering. When families have a positive experience of volunteering, the returns for organisations are likely to be greater, not least because happy volunteers are likely to do more and stay longer. We encourage organisations to think more about how they can ensure that families get the most out of volunteering: not only will this improve the volunteering experience and outcomes for families, it will also improve the outcomes for organisations and their beneficiaries.