



Volunteering Strategy

2024 - 2029

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**COMMUNITY
ACTION: MK**



Introduction

As the leading infrastructure organisation in Milton Keynes and the Hub for Volunteering, the work of Community Action:MK is key in promoting and strengthening the voluntary and community sector in our city.

It is a privilege for us to work with colleagues across Milton Keynes' voluntary and community, and public sectors, to coproduce this Volunteering Strategy 2024-2029.

This strategy will be a tool to improve health and wellbeing through the power of volunteering. This strategy will form our operational and strategic plans; including our work with partners to champion volunteering as a force for change and tool to reduce health inequalities.

We want this strategy to be a celebration of volunteering in Milton Keynes and reflect the voices of those who coproduced this plan. The strategy aims to build a vibrant and resilient community by harnessing the power of volunteerism. Through partnership working, inclusive recruitment, and a culture of ongoing support, CA: MK will build the volunteering infrastructure which creates positive and lasting change for the communities of Milton Keynes.

We must give thanks to the potential volunteers, active volunteers, volunteer managers and representatives from our Public Sector who got involved and helped to create this strategy. Finally thanks to the Beds Luton and Milton Keynes Care Board for funding this work.



Defining Volunteering

At Community Action: MK we work to the principles endorsed by the United Nations, recognising volunteering as an activity that should:

- Not be undertaken primarily for financial reward, although reimbursement of expenses may be allowed.
- Be undertaken voluntarily, according to an individual's own free-will.
- Be of benefit to someone other than the volunteers, or to society at large, although it is recognised that volunteering brings significant benefit to the volunteer as well.

Formal and informal volunteering

Formal volunteering takes place in organisations ranging from a small community group to major national charities. Informal volunteering, refers to a wide range of mutual help and co-operation between individuals and communities including babysitting, checking on a neighbour and involvement in faith groups. It is very difficult to quantify the value of informal volunteering as many would not necessarily refer to themselves as volunteers.

We recognise that both formal and informal volunteering contribute positively to active citizenship and participation. Woolvin 2010 proposes a spectrum to help us understand the different ways people participate in society, 'shaping positive social norms in their everyday lives'.



Defining Volunteering continued

This spectrum can be used to communicate the wide-ranging positive contribution all forms of volunteering make to the enhancement of social capital, social inclusion, community cohesion and active citizenship. The level of resources required for the recruitment, training and support of volunteers increases as you move from left to right across the spectrum.



Volunteers Week 2023 Thank You Picnic

The Benefits of Volunteering

Volunteering can bring with it both benefits to the Volunteer Involving Organisation (VIO), as well as the volunteer.

Potential benefits for the VIO

- Increased capacity to deliver services
- Learning from the lived experience of volunteers
- Connection to community

Potential benefits for the volunteer

- NCVO's Time Well Spent found 75% of respondents reported that volunteering directly improved their mental health and wellbeing.
- Pathway to improved work skills
- Improved interpersonal skills
- Social connections and a means of reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness
- A means of improving language skills



The Current Landscape of Volunteering in Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes was created in 1967 a new town within easy reach of London, and home to over 260 000 people.

Awarded city status in 2022, its strong volunteering culture contributed to the successful bid, however members of our Volunteer Managers and Coordinators Network have reported a decline in volunteers. This is, in-keeping with the national picture, as detailed in DCMS's Community Life Survey:

"In 2021/22, 16% of respondents (approximately 7 million people in England) took part in formal volunteering at least once a month in the past 12 months, in line with rates in 2020/21 (17%). However, these participation rates are the lowest recorded since data collection started on the Community Life Survey. In 2019/20 23% of adults took part in formal volunteering at least once a month (approximately 11 million people in England)."

**2167 Potential
Volunteers**

**242 Volunteer
Involving
Organisations**

Statistics from our current volunteering platform Do.It, December 2023

National Context: During and Post Covid-19 Pandemic

Volunteering levels have struggled to return to pre-pandemic numbers. During months of lockdowns, many of those who were furloughed, or wished to contribute to the vaccine programme mobilised to create a mix of longer term and ad hoc volunteering.

The enthusiasm and commitment to volunteering during the pandemic led to the NHS and Care Volunteer Responders, a programme supporting NHS England, Department of Health & Social Care and adult social care in England delivered by Royal Voluntary Service and GoodSAM, that embraces the ad hoc model of volunteering.

Interviews with a Primary Care Network representative also revealed that volunteer contributions were

invaluable during the peak of the pandemic, as Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) mobilised to steward vaccination clinics. The Crown PCN's PPGs have managed to maintain their group numbers, however there is a need to develop opportunities for new members to join and think about succession planning given the age profile of current volunteers. This is a common feature across many VCSE organisations.

National initiatives such as Volunteers Week and The Big Help Out seek to raise the profile of volunteering. These can present both opportunities and challenges at a local level, Encouragement to engage with ad hoc volunteerism comes with it potentially less time and financial investment in local provision of volunteer brokerage and support.



National Context: During and Post Covid-19 Pandemic cont

However, ad hoc volunteering is also beneficial to communities and can result in longer-term volunteering if volunteers have benefitted from a positive experience.

“In the Community Life Survey, informal volunteering is defined as giving unpaid help to individuals who are not a relative. For example, babysitting or caring for children, keeping in touch with someone who has difficulty getting out and about, or helping out with household tasks such as cleaning, laundry or shopping.”

The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)'s Vision for Volunteering is a ten year picture for the sector, it aspires to having volunteering woven into the fabric of communities, both informal and formal.

By 2033, it is hoped that:

- “Volunteering is something we all do across the different settings and stages of our lives. It has equal validity alongside public and private endeavours, and we are proud to talk about it.
- Organisations involving volunteers understand how and when volunteers want to engage.
- Volunteer voices are embedded in the leadership and design of volunteering initiatives, driving how they are involved.

National Context: During and Post Covid-19 Pandemic cont

- Volunteering is appreciated by individuals, communities, organisations and policy makers as helping to enrich lives and enliven communities.
- The appreciation and celebration of volunteering is supported by common metrics for measuring volunteering which have been adopted by central and local government, and organisations involving volunteers.”

The Vision is comprised of five themes:



National Context: During and Post Covid-19 Pandemic cont



In the sphere of Equity and Inclusion, The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO research), documented the experience of volunteers from the Global Majority in their *Time Well Spent 2023* report.

“While the satisfaction of global majority volunteers is high, it is lower than volunteers overall (86% vs 92% satisfied). Global majority volunteers are twice as likely to feel excluded compared with volunteers overall (12% vs 6%) and are less likely to feel a sense of belonging to the organisation (77% vs 84%). Feelings of exclusion are particularly high among disabled global majority volunteers (21%). Younger and disabled volunteers from the global majority also report lower levels of satisfaction. This indicates there are additional intersectional barriers for different demographic groups within the global majority. Just over two-thirds (69%) of global majority volunteers say they are likely to continue volunteering in the next 12 months, compared with 77% of volunteers overall.”

Locally, the Arts and Heritage Alliance’s *Rethinking Cultural Inclusion and Diversity: A Call to Action for Milton Keynes* has demonstrated the need to actively seek out opportunities to engage with and represent individuals of all backgrounds within arts and heritage organisations, these learnings can be extended to the voluntary sector. It is not enough to state volunteer roles are open to all, efforts must be made to actively build relationships.

Listening to the Volunteer Voice

Volunteers and Potential Volunteers

Through a series of interviews with prospective volunteers, it is evident that individuals are encountering multiple and intersecting challenges when finding a volunteer role. These include, but are not limited to:

- Transportation - public transportation networks can be expensive or unreliable. Transport expenses are not always offered by VIOs.
- Communication - using online applications and recruitment tools or language barriers
- Social - finding referees should volunteering roles require these

Volunteer Involving Organisations

Our discussions with Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) presented a commonality of challenges experienced:

- The lack of resource to be able to track impact and the outcome of brokerage efforts
- Though retention was good amongst the VIOs we spoke too, finding volunteers from a cross-section of financial backgrounds and ethnicities was a challenge
- Volunteering could be viewed amongst the wider teams as simply a means of plugging operational gaps, as opposed to being a meaningful opportunity for engagement with MK Communities. The volunteer experience was not always centred as a priority.
- Volunteering from corporate teams could present benefits and challenges. Whilst help with fundraising and more skills-based volunteering could be an asset, team and group volunteering can be time-consuming and inconsistent in tangible benefits to the host organisation. VIOs felt there was a lack of knowledge and appreciation around the 'true-cost' of organising team days.

Listening to the Volunteer Voice

Primary Care Networks

Interviews with representatives from Primary Care Networks revealed:

“Partnering with Voluntary organisations is something we have to do to keep some sustainability going. Demand is outstripping capacity.”

- The volunteering picture varies across Primary Care Networks (PCNs), with some incorporating volunteers through Patient Participation Groups, with others utilising volunteer power to support the facilitation of workshops.
- Volunteers positively impact the work of PCNs through a range of activities including establishing singing groups, helping disseminate surveys, fundraising and producing newsletters
- Time and financial resource for providing training opportunities for volunteers is limited
- PCNs would like to engage with the VCSE sector to benefit their patients, but the due diligence of checking if the correct governance and safeguarding measures are in place within the VCSE groups is onerous
- Unlike many VIOs, there is no dedicated Volunteer Manager or Coordinator, therefore the tasks of creating Volunteer Policies, Role Profiles, Volunteer Agreements and Inductions would require support and delegation to an ‘owner’ of these tasks within the PCN



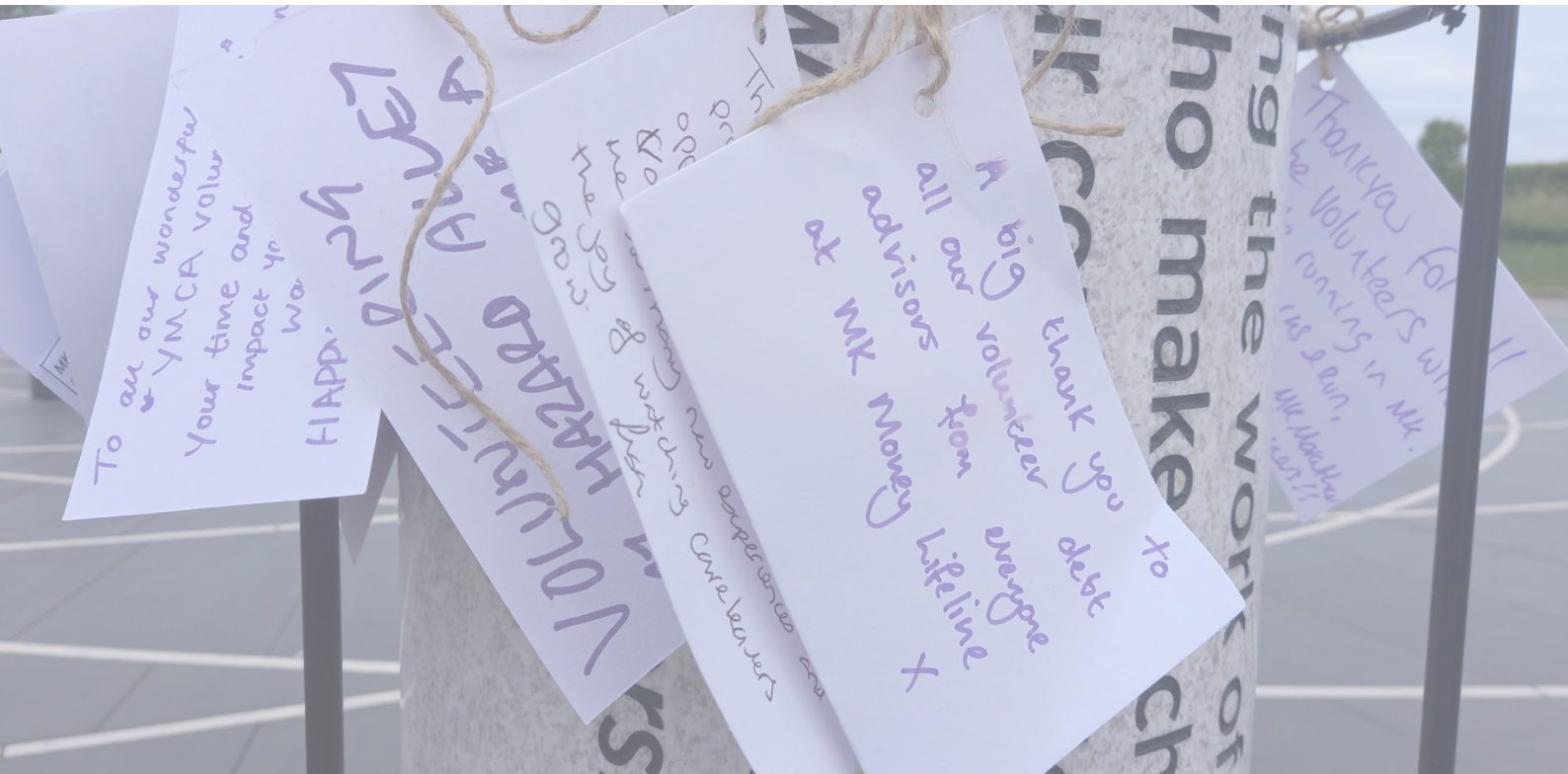
Listening to the Volunteer Voice

Conclusions

- For Milton Keynes there is enormous potential in the power of volunteers as a strategic tool to unlock the health and wellbeing in communities.
- Currently lack of resource into Volunteering Infrastructure underpins the challenges faced by volunteers, VIOs and PCNs
- Communication between volunteers, VIOs and PCNs would benefit from facilitation and access to good practice
- Building networks is essential to the health of volunteering programmes
- Milton Keynes would benefit from having a dedicated Volunteering Centre



Our Vision



To create a volunteering community that is welcoming, inclusive and connected to the voluntary, community, public and private sectors and each other.

Our Vision

We will do this by developing an Accredited Volunteer Centre for Milton Keynes which will:

- Create the conditions for volunteering to flourish and support community health and wellbeing
- Improve and attain positive consistency in volunteering across all sectors
- Support all sectors to be better informed about volunteering good practice and have access to an effective and efficient brokerage service
- Increase and improve the quantity, quality and diversity of volunteering in MK.
- Increase awareness of the issues impacting on Volunteering

Priority 1

Primary Care Networks will be supported in their individual volunteering initiatives

CA: MK will seek funding to support PCNs and VCSE groups to work together in a mutually beneficial way to benefit the development of PCN Volunteer programmes.

How can this be actioned?

- We will help PCNs become volunteer ready, through sharing best practice in volunteer management and associated resources. This could be achieved through webinars, training and support sessions.
- We will develop a toolkit for VCSE groups to use, which will facilitate collaborative working. The toolkit will include the governance requirements which need to be in place in order for PCNs to be able to partner with groups, with confidence.
- We will invite PCN representatives to join our Volunteer Managers and Coordinators Network, as well as other relevant networks, to assist in sharing learnings and peer support
- Community Action: MK will explore feasibility for the development of a Quality Assurance standard, relating to both organisation governance and volunteer infrastructure support

Priority 2

To facilitate effective and impactful relationships between Volunteer Involving Organisations and Employee Volunteers

Currently, CA: MK do not currently offer an employee volunteering brokerage service. However 31 volunteering queries related to this in our Annual Review Period 2022-3. Interviews with VIOs revealed that opportunities to collaborate with private businesses would benefit from facilitation through networking and exploration of longer-term partnerships where more meaningful and longer-lasting benefits from skills-sharing and profile-raising promotion could take place.

How can this be actioned?

- Through providing more opportunities for VCSE groups to network with local, private businesses - either online or in-person. This could be merged with a proposed annual, January Volunteering recruitment event.
- Community Action: MK will explore feasibility for the development of developing a chargeable scheme for Corporate Social Responsibility and employee-related volunteering.

Priority 3

To provide a brokerage platform that is accessible and effective in matching prospective volunteers to available opportunities.

Hosting a platform to assist in connecting VCSE organisations and prospective volunteers is key to our volunteering service. Volunteer Managers and Coordinators need access to a platform that can be navigated by a wide-range of users, and that help present their volunteer roles in an appealing and accessible way.

How can this be actioned?

- We will continue to monitor the effectiveness of our current platform, whilst exploring alternative options
- We will continue to provide opportunities to aid volunteer managers and volunteers navigate our volunteering platform through in-person and online support sessions
- Inviting PCN Colleagues to join a central volunteering platform could help them grow their volunteering communities, once their internal volunteering structures are established

Priority 4

To ensure everyone who wants to volunteer, can.

This objective can be met through empowering our network of groups which we support to ensure accessibility and inclusion underpins their practice. We believe we can best support the VIOs who access our volunteering service if we seek to continuously reflect and improve on our offer. This can be achieved through undertaking the Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation (VCQA), a process which encourages volunteering hubs to assess their provision, and to take the necessary steps to become a force of support and change within volunteering communities.

How can this be actioned?

- We will explore the feasibility of becoming an accredited Volunteer Centre, and seek business development opportunities to support this
- We will encourage and facilitate conversations around accessibility, to help create awareness around diversity and inclusion training opportunities through our networks and communication channels
- We will support local groups to provide a range of volunteering opportunities, in-person, online and at different times of day and week to ensure there is wide choice for prospective volunteers, with something to suit all lifestyles and time-commitments
- Community Action: MK will explore feasibility for the development of providing regular training in best practice volunteer managers for PCN colleagues and VCSE groups

Priority 4b

To help volunteers overcome barriers to volunteering

It is not enough to provide accessible volunteer opportunities. These must be actively promoted in the communities that would benefit from all volunteering has to offer

How can this be actioned?

- We will actively promote volunteering in regeneration areas, new communities and through partnering with MK Council Job and Conversation Clubs at MK Central Library
- We will seek to enable those who wish to volunteer to find a role that is right for them through volunteer recruitment events in accessible, community spaces

Key Terms

Volunteering

Volunteering is when someone spends unpaid time doing something to benefit others. It can be formal or informal, and it should always be a free choice made by the person giving up their time (Definition by NCVO)

Employee Volunteering

Where teams or individual employees use their skills and times to benefit local charities and community groups during work hours.

Global Majority

A collective term for non-white people of African, Asian, Latin American descent, who constitute approximately 85 percent of the global population, which challenges a white, Euro-centric approach to conversations around race.

12.4% of people in Milton Keynes are Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh. 9.7% of people in Milton Keynes are Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African. 4.1% of people in Milton Keynes are from mixed or multiple ethnic groups.

BAME

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic individuals. Within this catch-all term are the nuances of culture and community that are impossible to encapsulate in an acronym.

PCN

Primary Care Networks, GP practices working together with community, mental health, social care, pharmacy, hospital and voluntary services in their local areas

Thanks

Thank you to all our contributors, including those who give their free time to help the groups of MK, representatives from Unity MK, MK Community Foundation, MK Gallery, MK Christian Centre, The Bridge PCN and The Crown PCN

