

# Darlington Volunteer Strategy

Building stronger, cohesive communities through volunteering

2010 - 2020

## Executive Summary

Volunteering contributes to community life, the personal well-being of Darlington people and the town's economy. The Volunteering Strategy for Darlington is drawn up at a time when Volunteering is high on national, regional, sub regional and local agendas.

The aim of this document is to provide a framework from which agencies across all sectors can develop their own Volunteering Strategies and action plans to suit their specific areas of work.

The Volunteering Strategy for Darlington will help organisations in the voluntary and community sector, and those in the public and private sectors, to develop a collaborative and co-ordinated approach to building and maintaining a strong Volunteering culture in Darlington.

Endorsement, adoption and implementation of the strategy by stakeholders across all sectors will ensure a healthy future for Volunteering.

**Aim:** The aim for this strategy is for:

- Organisations to work together on innovative volunteering initiatives using good practice in volunteer management.
- Individuals representing the diverse population of Darlington will have access to

information on volunteering, enabling them to get involved

- Opportunities serving a wide range of needs to be developed, supported and promoted across Darlington.

**Mission:** To create a borough wide approach to the support, development and resourcing of volunteering so that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to building stronger, cohesive communities, to gain useful experience for themselves and to make Darlington a better place to live and work.

**The strategy is built on four main objectives:**

- To make volunteering more visible and valued in the community.
- To enable every individual, whatever their background or ability, to have the opportunity to contribute to community life through volunteering and to benefit from the experience.
- To ensure that organisations across all sectors have the information, skills and attitudes to benefit from volunteering activity.
- To build and maintain quality support services that champion volunteering.

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# **1. Background to Darlington Volunteering Strategy**

## **1.1 A Volunteering Strategy for Darlington**

A strategy is a 'high level' and 'far seeing' plan, and volunteering needs to be thought about in this manner.

The Volunteering Strategy for Darlington aims to highlight issues which will inform and enable the development of a stronger and more sustainable volunteering culture in the town. Volunteering has long been a cornerstone of society in general and in Darlington in particular, building and strengthening trust and social networks within local communities, providing a source of much needed assistance for vulnerable groups and individuals, giving a sense of fulfilment and diversion for active citizens, and much more.

The purpose and objectives of this strategy are to provide a framework for the continued development of work with volunteers across the whole Borough in a common, consistent, equitable and sustainable way.

## **1.2 Who is the strategy for?**

Voluntary, community, public and private sector agencies that have volunteering on their agendas.

## **1.3 How has the strategy been developed?**

The strategy is built upon the views and experiences of Volunteering Involving Organisations in Darlington and support from the Volunteer Strategy Working Group. Appendix 1 lists some of the groups involved in the strategy.

## **1.4 How will progress be made and measured?**

A working action plan will be produced by the Working Group to progress the strategy. The Working group will meet regularly to review the implementation of the strategy across organisations and partnerships and continuously review the action plan.

## 2. The national context

The context of volunteering on a National basis is an ever-changing one and never more so than in the current economic climate and changing political landscape. With volunteering being a key part of the Coalition Government's plans for the "Big Society" the full extent of the impact on volunteering is not yet known. But with the details that have already been released we can gauge that volunteers will play a major part in the plans.

The "Big Society Communities" are being piloted in Liverpool, Windsor, Cumbria and Sutton. It is believed that they may be a 2<sup>nd</sup> round of pilots and initiatives which would include the North East.

There is also the National Citizen Service for 16-year-olds, this is being piloted in the summer of 2011 and will involve up to 10,000 young people spending six to seven weeks volunteering in the school holidays after they have taken their GCSE's.

The buildup to the 2012 Olympic Games will play a major part in shaping the future of volunteering. With a significant number of volunteers needed, it is hoped that the legacy will be far reaching, encouraging whole communities to become involved in local activities.

Voluntary and Community Organisations can influence government policy both locally and national. The advent of the Compact locally, regionally and nationally will create a structure which is consistent across the country. This influence and structure will provide the Government with proof of the beneficial role volunteering plays in today's society.

### 3. The local context

Across Darlington prosperity and the quality of life varies considerably, with significant pockets of deprivation. Darlington is ranked the 95<sup>th</sup> most deprived area in the country, with 45% of the population living in 10 wards that are amongst the 25% most deprived in the country. Seven wards are amongst the 10% most deprived with 31% of the population living in them (2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation).

As the publication of Darlington Partnership's "One Darlington; Perfectly Placed" sets out the strategy for Darlington 2008-2021, the One

Darlington priority carries forward the vision as it relates to people which has many strands. These include;

- Tackling deprivation wherever it exists, narrowing the gaps in life chances across the Borough and focusing on reducing inequality for the most deprived and disadvantaged.
- Encouraging and opening up opportunities for people to volunteer their skills, experience and willingness for the benefit of the community.

#### 3.1 Volunteering in Darlington

There are many different types of organisation in Darlington that work with volunteers. These include large national charities and small community groups, as well as a range of public sector organisations.

This Strategy builds upon and underpins the principles of the Darlington Compact and should be read in conjunction with that document. The Compact recognises the significant contribution made by volunteers and the role of voluntary and community organisations in supporting them.

Volunteering should :

- Be inclusive of and target a full range of potential groups of volunteers (e.g. those with mental health issues, young people, older people etc).
- Provide targeted support for large and small organisations and specific support for different sectors.

- Recognise and promote the value and benefits of volunteering.
- Incorporate the development and promotion of common principles and good practice in placing and involving volunteers.
- Work with hard-to-reach groups in the community and tailor services accordingly.
- Ensure that the volunteering experience is a positive one.

- Seek to provide additional training and

support to volunteers.

### **3.2 eVOLution Volunteer Centre**

eVOLution recognises that volunteering is a key stepping stone in gaining experience and finding work and have also increased the number of opportunities available that provide accredited training alongside a volunteering placement. In order to strengthen the position of volunteering further, now run a Volunteer Co-ordinators Forum to share advice and good practice amongst volunteer involving organisations.

The Volunteer Centre has extended the number of outreach sessions, including volunteer drop in surgeries to support and encourage people living in the town to help them find placements and work. These outreaches have taken place in colleges, libraries, Domestic Abuse Forums and Jobcentre +. More are planned in the near future. We recognise that not all people are able to visit the Volunteer Centre and believe that expanding their services across the town will ensure they are able to meet the needs of hard to reach clients looking to find voluntary work.

It is important to identify the needs of volunteers to ensure each individual is placed in the right opportunity for them and to assess the number of regularly demanded opportunities and ensure these are in good supply by continually strengthening and sustaining partnerships with organisations, services and colleges in Darlington.

## 4. Introduction to Volunteering

Darlington has an excellent history of working with volunteers and support for it spans not only the Voluntary and Community Sector but also the public and private sectors. All three sectors provide volunteers and volunteering opportunities. The scope of voluntary work undertaken is extremely wide covering things from Litter Picks, Home Care Workers,

Counsellors, School Governors, Shop Floor Volunteers to name a few. The commitment and achievement of organisations developing volunteer schemes across the Borough should be acknowledged and applauded, with each group of volunteers being recruited, trained and supported in quite different ways, each intended to meet the needs of that particular situation.

### 4.1 Definition of Volunteering

Volunteering England describe volunteering as “any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that

Volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation.”

### 4.2 Volunteering Involving Organisations

This term is used to describe organisations who use volunteers. Some organisations will have paid staff as well, while others will rely solely on volunteers. Public sector organisations could fall

into this category if they use volunteers to add value to their services, for example using mentors or peer support groups in health or social care settings.

### 4.3 Types of Volunteering

- **Formal Volunteering** – is generally classed as volunteering through established groups, clubs or larger organisations in any sector. These roles are often formalized by the organisations volunteer management policies and procedures.
- **Informal Volunteering** – is generally accepted as volunteering more than once a year as an individual to people who are not relatives, such as befriending, time banking, or help shopping for a housebound neighbour. Also in this category is irregular volunteering for

more established organisation, for example, ferrying scouts to and from summer camp once a year, or helping out at school sports day.

- **Employer Supported Volunteering** – All sectors are increasingly appreciating the value of establishing employee volunteering schemes. By supporting their employees to volunteer the organisation benefits from enhanced image and reputation, employee’s skills and motivation and can boost loyalty and commitment to the organisation whilst having a major impact in the



local community through the projects they support. Also research has indicated that when organisations show a commitment to developing strong and healthy communities, they create networks with customers and partners that are, ultimately, good for business.

- **Active Citizenship** – is about people taking opportunities to become involved in local community issues that could improve their neighborhood and their quality of life; for example, through community action groups, community partnerships, tenants and residents

associations, neighbourhood watch groups and through engaging in decision making processes within the Borough such as area forums.

- **Micro Volunteering**—there is no strict definition of micro volunteering but this is a term generally used to describe small acts that can be done from home, at the office or on the move. This form of volunteering has become wider spread with the advent of the internet for example an organisation has a social networking site which the volunteer can update and maintain from his own personal computer.

## 4.4 Principles of Volunteering

**Choice:** Volunteering is a choice freely made by individuals. Any encouragement to become involved in volunteering should be by way of any form of coercion or compulsion. Freedom to volunteer implies freedom not to volunteer.

**Diversity:** The diverse people of Darlington bring a wide variety of skills, qualities and experience to the voluntary and community sector and this diversity needs to be recognised, respected and valued. Volunteering should be open to all, no matter what their background, age, race, sexual orientation, faith, etc. Volunteering can also help overcome social exclusion through new skills, experience, confidence and contacts gained while helping others.

**Reciprocity:** Volunteers offer their contribution unwaged but should benefit in other ways in return for their contribution to wider social objectives. Giving voluntary time and skills must be recognised as establishing a reciprocal relationship in which the volunteer also gains. Benefits that volunteers expect to gain include a sense of worthwhile achievement, useful skills, experience and contacts, sociability and fun, and inclusion in the life of the organisation and the wider community.

**Recognition:** The value of a volunteer's contribution to the organisation, to the community, to the social economy and to wider social objectives, is fundamental to the relationship between volunteers, organisations and statutory policy and practice.

## 4.5 Defining Volunteers

Volunteers come from all walks of life and different backgrounds; can be any age or ability. The one thing they have in common is that they are people who provide the energy and commitment to giving their time freely for public benefit.

- **Employed People as Volunteers** – Opportunities for volunteering are also available for people who may not have a lot of time on their hands, professionals and skilled people of all ages who are in full time employment still volunteer within their communities or through employer supported schemes. They use their work-based skills and experience to support other organisations for example becoming a trustee, a treasurer and so on.
- **Unemployed people as Volunteers** – Volunteering for the unemployed represents an opportunity to gain new skills and experiences which could offer a route back into work. Other benefits are that volunteering offers structure to the day, an up to date entry on the CV, updating through training and some positive experiences which will boost self-confidence and increases motivation.
- **Retired people as Volunteers** – Generally, people are remaining active and living for longer. Many Voluntary and community organisation rely heavily on retired people. With recent and planned changes to pensions, retirement planning no longer follows the traditional path. People may retire later in life and are entitled to work beyond the normal retirement age. Their financial situation, caring responsibilities alongside other factors may impact on their ability to volunteer.
- **Young Volunteers** – Over the past years government initiatives such as Millennium Volunteers and V Involved has encouraged Youth Volunteering also becoming an important element of the school citizenship curriculum. Encouraging a tradition of volunteering from an early age can only have a positive effect on the individual, through the development of transferable social and work skills and for the community.
- **Volunteers from ethnic minorities** – Targeted volunteering marketing and recruitment can encourage people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, helping reduce their under representation in traditional volunteering roles. Volunteering is a way to engage with local communities, helping to improve integration and bringing a sense of belonging and community cohesion.
- **Disabled people as volunteers** – People with disabilities can often feel they are just the recipient of services and feel their ability to give something back to the community is overlooked. On most occasions reasonable adjustments can be made to enable disabled people to take up volunteering, bringing valuable insights and experience to the roles. Volunteer Centres, with the proper resources, are able to offer support to all who face barriers to involvement, as volunteering is a direct way of enabling socially excluded groups to participate in the community.
- **Ex-offenders as volunteers** – Almost a quarter of men and women in the UK have a criminal record. The majority of the convictions are for single minor offences and the offender poses no threat to children, young people or vulnerable adults. Voluntary and Community Organisations have a duty to safeguard their service users while ensuring that these volunteers are treated fairly.

## 5. Benefits of Volunteering

This strategy arises from the recognition that volunteering has a positive impact on individuals, organisations and communities.

Volunteering encourages interaction among people living in a community and strengthens community connections. When people volunteer, they are actually improving the life of their own community and creating social capital at the same time. Social capital is a kind of currency for healthy living and grows when people in the community are involved in civic activities and earn the trust and cooperation of others. The more social capital there is, the healthier and more vibrant the community.

### The Benefits of Volunteering For Communities

- More active citizens
- Higher participation and involvement in the Boroughs decision
- Making progress
- More welcoming, friendly places to live
- More understanding between different cultures
- Lower crime and perception of crime rates
- Better mental and physical health for citizens.

Organisations, both large and small, that choose to involve volunteers gain significantly from the enthusiasm, commitment and skills of those individuals. They can extend their activities, increase their capacity to deliver services and diversify their workforce

### The Benefits of Volunteering for Organisations

- Ability to enhance and add value to services and activities
- Increase organisations `reach` into the community
- Greater understanding of service users' needs
- Provision of services that are rarely funded
- Mentoring, and befriending services.

Of course volunteering is great for communities and organisations and makes a positive impact on other people's lives, but it can also significantly improve the life of the people volunteering too.

### The Benefits of Volunteering for Individuals

**Confidence Building** – many volunteers encounter a variety of new challenges when they begin giving time in their communities. Sharing new experiences with new people, they can learn new skills that can give them confidence to face challenges in other areas of their lives

**Meet new friends** – there's no better place to meet likeminded individuals than through volunteering for a campaign or cause one believes in. Working together to bring about a change is a great way to bond with others and become part of a community that can stay in touch long after the work is done. Plus, meeting people from a diverse range of backgrounds grows community cohesion.

**Improve health** – there is evidence that volunteering can improve health such as:

- A heightened sense of well-being
- An reduction in insomnia
- A stronger immune system
- Speedier recovery from surgery
- Anecdotal evidence claims that volunteering also improves your sense of humour, your perspective on life, and even your sex life!

**Boost career options** – a survey carried out by Time Bank through Reed Executive (2008) showed that among 200 of the UK's leading businesses:

- **73%** of employers would employ a candidate with volunteering experience over one without.

- **94%** of employers believe that volunteering can add to skills.
- **58%** says that voluntary work experience can actually be more valuable than experience gained in paid employment.
- **94%** of employees who volunteered to learn new skills had benefited either by getting their first job, improving their salary, or being promoted

Additionally, volunteering lets people sample different kinds of work, giving hands-on experience of how different professions operate and can bring people into contact with all kinds of professionals and people from every walk of life. In fact, the networking opportunities it can provide are among the least publicised but most exciting benefits of all.

So in summary, volunteering matters in Darlington because through volunteering people:

- Have the power to make a positive difference
- Take action and campaign for change
- Deliver services
- Share skills, knowledge and understanding
- Increase their health and well-being
- Challenge prejudices and break down barriers
- Increase their employability
- Meet new people and build a better social life
- Feel useful by putting something back into their community
- Increase mutual trust and build strong, safe communities

## 6. Barriers to Volunteering

There are many reasons why people in the community and particularly those from diverse backgrounds encounter barriers to volunteering. But, in addition to general obstacles such as a lack of time, fear of committing to a role, childcare or other significant responsibilities, people often encounter other barriers which stop them thinking about volunteering. Examples of these barriers are:

- A lack of understanding that many volunteer-involving organisations are open to and encourage volunteers irrespective of their ability to read or write in English, or disability, age, gender or background
- A perception that volunteer-involving organisations are not equipped to accept or manage people with special needs, e.g. language barriers or requiring an accessible work place for people with disabilities
- A lack of existing volunteers from diverse backgrounds
- The word 'Volunteering' may have other connotations for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- People with criminal records may not think that any organisation will accept them as a volunteer
- Age should not be a barrier to volunteering. However volunteer involving organisations can be constrained by their insurance policies which may limit the minimum and maximum age for volunteering
- A lack of understanding that some volunteer activities can be done in flexible formats, e.g. at different times, in different locations, remotely or electronically
- Arranging transport may be difficult for people with disabilities or those living in rural areas
- In the past some disabilities have had very negative stereotypes e.g., mental health or long term illness. Because of this some people may be concerned that they will be judged or excluded from volunteering. Every volunteer should be judged by their merits not on their personal circumstances
- Some people expect volunteering to take up large chunks of time each week or think that only retired people or part-time workers have time to volunteer
- Volunteering should not leave you out of pocket. Reimbursement of expenses such as travel and meals vary depending on the individual organisation: there is no set standard
- You should be able to carry out volunteering whilst claiming benefits as long as volunteering comes under the following definition  
***Voluntary work is work for a not for profit organisation, or work for someone who is not a member of your family, where only reasonable expenses are paid.*** The rules vary according to which benefit you receive

### **Barriers for organisations**

In addition to people from diverse backgrounds encountering barriers to volunteering, volunteer organisations may also feel as though there are too many obstacles involved in recruiting and managing people from diverse backgrounds.

Cost is not the principal barrier for organisations wishing to engage volunteers from under-represented groups including disabled people, refugees and asylum seekers, and single parents. It is recognised that there can be additional costs incurred in involving volunteers from these groups, and funding bodies could recognise and support the potential extra costs and time.

Organisations can encounter issues such as the availability of CRB checks, language barriers and additional staff time required to support under-represented volunteers. Involving volunteers from these groups also brings distinct benefits for organisations, such as specialist knowledge and language skills, as well as promoting community cohesion.

## 7. The Future of Volunteering

Many people are often surprised when they discover the wide range of volunteering activities available and the many different benefits that volunteering can bring. Some also have pre-formed ideas about both volunteering as a whole and also what they could, would like or able to do.

One key element of the strategy is to encourage a diverse range of people from different backgrounds to think more widely about how they want to volunteer their time to help others and how they can become active citizens within their community.

Some people that look to volunteer may also come up against a number of barriers and difficulties and research shows that only a small proportion of people expressing an interest in volunteering actually begin a volunteering placement. Due to its nature, volunteering is often used as a way of introducing people back into work, or providing an alternative activity for those that are unable to work. For this reason, volunteering must be fully inclusive and available to people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. Another element of the strategy will be to ensure good practice and high levels of customer care to ensure volunteers are offered appropriate, relevant and beneficial services.

This document, sets out the vision for further developing and increasing the rate of people

registering as volunteers and who then go on and do something. This will be done by:

- Development of diverse, high quality opportunities including those around active citizenship, those that are short term or easy access such as taster sessions, Employer Supported Volunteering and those that identify and meet specific local needs such as the Crime Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) and working with hard to reach and under-represented groups such as young offenders.
- Creation of a network of volunteer champions to promote volunteering. These would be people such as careers advisors, doctors and support workers in rehabilitation projects or community leaders.
- Seek to continue and broaden our supported volunteering work and develop specific projects to target under-represented groups, those that need additional support to start volunteering or where volunteering can make a major difference to someone's life.

### **Increase the effectiveness of volunteering and active participant involvement**

There are a wide range of benefits and reasons for an individual candidate to volunteer. However as part of the strategy it is essential that we continue to promote and develop clear practice and procedures to ensure Volunteering is both enjoyable and fulfilling.

*Objective: Profile volunteers locally, identifying gaps in respect of groups that are currently under-represented in the volunteering community.*

There are a number of ways to do this;

- By working with volunteer-involving organisations, running a proactive service to engage groups and tackle bad practice. Introducing health checks, training and a charter defining what good practice in volunteering to be.
- By working with people who are already volunteering and active citizens to increase their skills. There is also scope to trial 'volunteer brokerage workers' and increase the amount of resources available for volunteers, both hard copy documents and the resources available on the eVOLution website.

Also to:

- Develop more effective working with other infrastructure support groups and overall partnership working with public, private, community and voluntary groups.
- Increase marketing using a number of creative and innovative techniques.
- Improve good practice in citizen engagement and look at workshops, signposting and other services we can offer to support engagement and skills based learning.
- Develop longer term links between businesses through Employer Supported volunteering
- Increase the sustainability and capacity of volunteering through diversification of the types of opportunity offered and development through necessary team training and support.
- Ensure that there is a strategic approach to development of volunteering in Darlington, including the implementation of a borough-wide and internal volunteering strategy.
- Get involved and look to develop cross borough and regional work as well as good practice around information sharing.



## 8. Objectives

Objectives	Action	Timescale	Delivery Partner(s)
<b>Objective 1</b> Volunteering and Communities  To make volunteering more visible and valued in the community.	Promote volunteering through collaboration across all sectors	Ongoing	All Partners
	Promote the value and importance of volunteering for individuals and communities	Ongoing	All Partners
	Create innovative volunteer involving projects which build strong local communities	Ongoing	All Voluntary & Community Partners
	Promote positive messages about the range of opportunities to volunteer	Ongoing	All Partners
	Promote images of volunteers which reflect the local community	Ongoing	All Partners
<b>Objective 2</b> Volunteering and Individuals  To enable every individual, whatever their background or ability, to have the opportunity to contribute to community life through volunteering and to benefit from the experience.	Provide easy access to volunteering information and brokerage services	Ongoing	Volunteer Centre
	Offer appropriate support for volunteers, particularly those who face significant barriers	Ongoing	All Partners
	Develop imaginative, innovative and flexible opportunities that meet individual and community needs	Ongoing	All Voluntary & Community Partners
	Create opportunities for volunteers in learning and personal development	Ongoing	All Partners

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<p><b>Objective 3</b> Volunteering and Organisations</p> <p>To ensure that organisations across all sectors have the information, skills and attitudes to benefit from volunteering activity.</p>	Work with organisations to build their capacity to increase their volunteer involvement	Ongoing	Volunteer Centre
	Have provision for volunteer expenses reimbursement	Ongoing	Volunteer Centre
	Develop relationships with volunteer brokerage services for effective volunteer recruitment	Ongoing	Volunteer Centre
	Promote good practice in volunteer management through networks and peer support	Ongoing	Volunteer Centre
	Work with organisations to ensure sufficient resources are available to support the management and development of volunteers	Ongoing	Volunteer Centre
	Develop and promote employer supported volunteering opportunities	Ongoing	Volunteer Centre
<p><b>Objective 4</b> Volunteering Support Services</p> <p>To build and maintain quality support services that champion volunteering.</p>	Secure sustainable resources to maintain borough wide quality volunteering support services	Ongoing	All Partners
	Provide effective brokerage services	Ongoing	Volunteer Centre
	Ensure that volunteering is represented on strategic partnerships and maintains a high profile	Ongoing	Volunteer Centre
	Promote a volunteer - friendly society and challenge initiatives which threaten the integrity of Volunteering	Ongoing	All Partners

## Appendix 1

**Thank you to all who contributed to the strategy.**

**Examples of Volunteering can be found on [www.evolutiondarlington.com](http://www.evolutiondarlington.com) or on the individual organisation websites.**

700 Club

Age UK

Change Tracks - You Choose

Community Nutrition Volunteers

Darlington Arts Academy

Darlington Borough Council

Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau

Darlington Railway Museum

Darlington Mind

GOLD - Growing Older and Living in Darlington

Libraries and Learning Skills

Rape & Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre

Refugee Service

Safer Communities – Domestic Abuse Volunteer Mentors

Scout Association

Sockburn Hall

St Teresa's Hospice

Street Scene

The Atisha Centre

The Darlington and District Talking Newspaper Association

The Wildlife Trust

YMCA

