

ASUME

Volunteering in Dementia



Management

Based on the data collected from our survey with volunteer agencies, nearly all of them (98%) reported having a volunteer policy in place. However, despite having a policy, volunteers did not always feel this was implemented and adhered to across the organisation, particularly at a senior level where managers were not always seen in a positive light by volunteers, often being described as distant from the experiences of volunteers. However, some volunteers felt that they could and should contribute to the wider aims of the organisations they worked for.

I think sometimes maybe people who are little bit higher up in the organisation perhaps, I don't know, making a little bit more effort to perhaps come round the groups and just have a little look would be nice. I know that's not always possible but maybe I don't know more personal discussions of our volunteering experience perhaps. You know, we might be quite a useful resource of constructive criticism because we see what's going on but I know when you're in an organisation you can't always say these things. So I think that would be perhaps a little bit more helpful and looking at how people might want to develop and what they might want to do and seeing us all as very different people with very different strengths and weaknesses. (CVF03, Cumbria)

Volunteers thought that managers should be more engaged and visible with a wider organisational commitment to volunteering activities. Some volunteers reported specific problems with the management within the organisations they volunteered for, linked to changes in personnel within management.

[Management] is an enormous gap from the [organisations] side. One of the problems is that it's been such a rocky road over the last three years, where you've seen somebody in post and then four weeks later they've disappeared or they've resigned or something. It's been a really unhappy situation so the volunteers have just muddled along really. (CVF10, Cumbria)

This would suggest that sustainability is not just about volunteers' sustainability but also about the sustainability of the staff and wider organisations that support them.

For others, it was other aspects of their lives that limited their volunteering experiences and they felt those could be more flexible. This example is from a student who is encouraged to volunteer while studying but their timetable does not support this.

I mean, I think from the university's perspective as a student we are sort of encouraged to do voluntary work but at the same time sometimes your timetable doesn't encourage it and that's something I feel a little bit frustrated about. You can start off as a volunteer and you want to make a commitment but then suddenly things change and your timetables change and that's out of my control. I think from the university's perspective I think it's in everybody's favour to encourage students to do voluntary work so I think they should almost incorporate it in the programme and make some time. (CVF02, Cumbria)

However, there were some positive examples of volunteers influencing management. For example, there were instances where volunteers had been able to provide useful and influential feedback through group feedback. The following example describes the impact of feedback from a volunteer forum resulting in a change of personnel working with them within the wider organisation's management.

And it seems from the reports of the last volunteer forum it wasn't ignored at all and they have taken it on board to the extent of changing the personnel on the management. So, they have brought somebody else in who obviously feels the same way that the bulk of the volunteers do. So, that has been quite good. (CVM01, Cumbria)

Volunteers also thought it was important for organisations to look more closely at why volunteers leave their organisation and move on to other volunteering opportunities or stop volunteering altogether.

I think organisations do need to look at their leaving volunteers and perhaps find out why they've gone and where they've gone and whether it was just other things, the pressures, things at home or whether it really was, well, I didn't like it here and I've gone to go to [organisation] because I feel that they value me more. (CVF03, Cumbria)

Overall the management of an organisation did not seem to be particularly influential over volunteers and their experiences. There were few positive experiences or examples of volunteers engaging with wider management within organisations. The experience of volunteers was more likely to be influenced by the volunteer coordinators and other volunteers.



For more information
visit www.asume.co.uk or
contact Dr Vikki McCall,
Principal Investigator of the project
vikki.mccall@stir.ac.uk /
[@vikki_mccall](https://twitter.com/vikki_mccall)