

Volunteering: A family affair?

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VOLUNTEERING: A FAMILY AFFAIR?

FULL REPORT

Angela Ellis Paine, Oliver Chan, Véronique Jochum,
Daiga Kamerāde, Amy McGarvey and Joanna Stuart

September 2020



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We would also like to thank the partnership group that helped guide the study: Donna Bennett, the Scouts; Shaun Delaney, NCVO; Stuart Fox, Brunel University; Truly Johnston and Jennifer D'Souza, Greater London Authority; Bridget McGing, Pears Foundation; Kristen Natale, Sport England; Colin Shearer, Churches Conversation Trust. And the wider set of individuals and organisations, too numerous to mention by name, who expressed interest in the study, shared information about their experiences of family volunteering, commented on draft reports and/or reflected on our emerging recommendations.

Research team

This project has been led by NCVO, in partnership with the University of Birmingham and the University of Salford. The research team has included: [Véronique Jochum](#) (study lead, design and case studies), [Amy McGarvey](#) (case studies), [Oliver Chan](#) (mapping) and [Joanna Stuart](#) (literature review, case studies) from NCVO; [Daiga Kamerāde](#) (study design and Time Use Survey analysis) from the University of Salford; [Angela Ellis Paine](#) (lead author, study design and case studies) from the Third Sector Research Centre at the University of Birmingham.

Foreword

How people volunteer and choose to give their time is not a static thing. It changes over time and this change can be influenced by many different aspects of what is happening in people's lives and their relationships with those around them. For many, some of the most important relationships they have are with their family (in the broadest sense of the word), and we know that these relationships can play a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviours. We also know that there are practical implications of being part of a family that influences how people spend their time and ultimately whether they volunteer or not. We have known this for some time, but we have never fully understood the role of family within volunteering.

The partnership that came together to work on this research wanted to learn more. Although we come from very different organisations, we share a common goal: to get more people volunteering and to make volunteering more inclusive so that people who are less likely to get involved can also experience the benefits of volunteering. Formal volunteering in a group or organisation currently doesn't work for everyone, and addressing this diversity challenge will require volunteer-involving organisations and funders to think differently about the type of volunteering they offer and how it's supported and managed. This may become even more pressing as we begin to understand the impact of covid-19 in worsening inequalities within our society. Volunteering is an important part of the solution, but it is also part of the problem if we aren't able to make volunteering and the benefits more accessible to all.

Covid-19 has been challenging for everyone, including for families who have had to deal with the stressful realities of lockdown and social distancing. However, as communities have come together in response to covid-19, there have been some indications of positive changes for volunteering and families. Opportunities could emerge from stronger family ties created by more time spent living and working together, flexible working could open up time for those who felt they were too busy and a digital offer may continue to be something that enables people to fit volunteering in around a busy family life. So, although this research was conducted before covid-19, the learning and practical considerations within it feel more relevant than ever as communities and individuals start to rebuild and renew the connections between them.

We have found real value in the collaborative approach to funding this research, and the process of working together has had a positive impact in itself: strengthening relationships between our partnership of volunteering-involving organisations, researchers and funders and identifying shared objectives that could support future work. Our range of perspectives have also helped to shape the practical guidance, so that it feels relevant to a broad spectrum of volunteer-involving organisations that share our passion for opening up volunteering to new groups of people. Insights from research projects like this can help to shape volunteering practice.

Sport England, the Greater London Authority (Team London), Pears #iwill Fund and the Scouts are proud to support this research.

Executive summary

Introduction

Our research set out to explore the relationship between families and volunteering, from family and organisational perspectives. It aimed to address evidence gaps and to support volunteer-involving organisations to develop or enhance volunteering opportunities and experiences for families. We did this by reviewing existing evidence, mapping family volunteering opportunities, undertaking analysis of the Time Use Survey and carrying out organisational and family case studies. The report brings all this together under the following sections: What? (Defining and describing family volunteering); Why? (Why and how family volunteering comes about); How? (How family and organisational contexts shape family volunteering experiences); To what effect? (The outcomes of family volunteering for families and organisations); So what? (Conclusions and considerations). We hope that the findings will be used to help enhance the experience for all those involved.

Defining and describing family volunteering

Family volunteering is diverse, and it is extensive. It looks and feels very different in different families and organisations. It includes, but is about far more than, parents and children volunteering together within the same organisation. 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. It can also mean siblings, or grandparents and grandchildren. Families may engage in these types of volunteering at any one time or at different stages of their lives. For example, on moving to a new area, couples may volunteer together 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.

According to the Time Use Survey, in 2014/15 one-third of all formal volunteering households in the UK volunteered together as a family, 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 Time Use data, which only covers our 'do together' and 'do alongside' categories, suggesting that family volunteering is likely to represent an even greater proportion of volunteering.

The ways in which organisations approach family volunteering also differ: we identified a spectrum of approaches from 'by design' through to 'going unnoticed'. 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 they deliver which themselves have been focused on families or children. Family volunteering was 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 their children participate in, often family volunteering goes unacknowledged. Some organisations, however, had designed specific family volunteering schemes in

which families (particularly parents and children) were explicitly encouraged to volunteer together, often within discrete projects or activities. There were indications that these types of approaches are on the increase.

Why and how family volunteering comes about

We found that families can provide the motivations for, routes into and triggers for volunteering, and the resources that they draw upon to enable them to do so. Existing research shows us that marriage, divorce, strength of relationships, having children and caring for elderly/ailing relatives can all make a difference, in different ways, to volunteering: some make it more likely that families will volunteer, and others have the opposite effect. Our case studies highlighted how family can be a motivation for volunteering through: a desire to instil or express family values; parental desire to be effective role models for their children; wanting to spend meaningful time together (or indeed apart); wanting to give back to an organisation/community as a family. Families can also provide important routes into volunteering: the activities that children get involved in, for example, can be routes into volunteering for their parents and young people themselves, and volunteers often rope others in too! Volunteering also requires resources, and those resources can be found and shared on a family basis, particularly in terms of time and money, but also emotional support. They can also be a drain on those resources, creating barriers to involvement.

From the organisational perspective, family volunteering was seen by some as a way to meet mission or strategy and/or to strengthen and diversify engagement. These were the two main drivers identified by organisations for the establishment of specific family volunteering schemes. It was harder to identify drivers for the more extensive family volunteering by default, as by its very nature this was less strategically driven.

Family and organisational context makes a difference to family volunteering

Family circumstances can make a considerable difference not just to the chances of volunteering, but also to how it is experienced. With ever-busy lives, fitting volunteering in can be difficult, particularly when it is 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.

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 not just their own individual circumstances but also their 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.

Family volunteering makes a difference to families and organisations

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, 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.

Whether by design or by default, family volunteering can also 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.

Conclusions and considerations

Family provides one of the contextual layers shaping an individual's volunteering. More than that, however, exploring family volunteering has highlighted how volunteering is not a purely individual activity – it can also be a collective one. In this case, the collective is the family. We found it to be extensive – even more so than we had imagined. Like other forms of collective engagement, however, we also found evidence to suggest that it is no longer possible to assume that family volunteering will continue to flourish by default. Changes in the ways that we live and in how organisations involve volunteers are both affecting the chances of family volunteering happening and the experience of it once it does. If it is to be sustained, it 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.

We suggest a series of questions which organisations may want to consider on if they are looking to develop family volunteering.

- 1. 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 involving volunteering alongside each other, for each other or together. 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.

2. **How do you want to involve families and what approach to family volunteering is right for you?** Organisations have got involved in family volunteering for different reasons and in different ways. The different approaches to family volunteering affect how that volunteering manifests, is experienced and contributes to organisational and family life. After considering how they have involved families to date, we encourage organisations to consider what more they would like to achieve through family volunteering and what different approaches offer in helping them to get there.
3. **Can you enhance the volunteering pathways for families within your organisation?** Traditional pathways, which had previously facilitated family volunteering largely by default within some organisations, have begun to break down. 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 require a more systems-based approach to volunteer leadership that looks beyond individual roles, programmes, activities, teams and even organisations.
4. **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 – and it can be difficult to fit volunteering in. Volunteering is often carried out alongside or as part of other roles and responsibilities. If organisations want to facilitate family volunteering, it is important that they recognise and support their volunteers with this. We encourage organisations to consider how they can be more flexible in their involvement of volunteers and how they can adapt, so that 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.
5. **How can you ensure that family volunteering is as inclusive as possible?** While family volunteering has the potential to create more inclusive volunteering practices and is particularly effective at engaging parents with young children who would otherwise be less likely to get involved, it also has the potential to become exclusionary. 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.
6. **How does the balance you are striking between risk management and being inclusive affect the involvement of families in volunteering?** A tendency towards formalisation, professionalisation and centralisation can work against flexibility and inclusivity, and as such 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.

We encourage organisations to think more about how they can strike the right balance between risk and regulation.

- 7. 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 deepen the bonds between family members and provide an enjoyable way to spend time together, 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, particularly when it becomes too onerous. Organisations can also get a lot out of family volunteering, and the returns are likely to be even greater when families have a positive experience of volunteering. 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.

1. Introduction

Key findings

- Existing evidence suggests that family context might be an important influence on volunteering.
- Family life is changing, with unknown consequences for volunteering.
- While we know something about how family influences volunteering, we know relatively little about how families experience volunteering or how organisations engage them.
- This research study set out to explore the relationship between families and volunteering, from the family and organisational perspective.
- The research involved: reviewing existing evidence; mapping family volunteering opportunities; analysing the UK Time Use Survey; organisational and family case studies.
- This report brings together the findings from across these research elements.

1.1. Background

Volunteering is often viewed purely as an individual activity that is driven by a mix of altruistic and instrumental motivations, is influenced by demographics and leads to a range of personal benefits. When we research it, we often seem to freeze it in time and space, exploring individual instances of volunteering, in one place and at one moment in time. Over the last decade, however, research findings have emerged which have encouraged us to recognise the complex and wide-ranging social context in which volunteering is situated. The *Pathways through Participation* research,¹ for example, highlighted the range of factors that shape participation beyond the individual – including relationships and social networks, groups and organisations, local environment and wider societal and global influences. These interdependent contextual layers act together to shape the motivations for, routes into and experiences and outcomes of volunteering.

Evidence suggests that family context might be particularly significant. We know from existing literature, for example, that married people are more likely to volunteer than those who are single, especially if their spouse volunteers;² but newly married women (not men) are less likely to volunteer immediately after marriage,³ and volunteering rates can drop off when parents have a baby⁴ and increase when

¹ Brodie, E., Hughes, T. Jochum, V., Miller, S., Ockenden, N. and Warburton, D. (2011) *Pathways Through Participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?* London: NCVO/ IVR/Involve.

www.involve.org.uk/resources/publications/project-reports/pathways-through-participation (accessed September 2020)

² Nesbit, R. (2012) 'The influence of major life cycle events on volunteering', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 1153–1174.

³ Einolf, C. J. and Philbrick, D. (2014) 'Generous or greedy marriage? A longitudinal study of volunteering and charitable giving', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 76, no. 3, pp. 573–586.

⁴ Nesbit, R. (2012) 'The influence of major life cycle events on volunteering', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 6, pp. 1153–1174.

children reach school age.⁵ For women, in particular, volunteering rates can drop when they become carers for elderly or sick relatives⁶ and when someone is widowed.⁷ We know that if parents volunteer, their children are more likely to do so,⁸ partly through the parents acting as influential and enduring role models⁹ and through socialisation processes by which pro-social behaviour becomes the norm,¹⁰ although this can be disrupted by marital distress and family transition.¹¹ Children's activities can also provide a route into volunteering for parents and vice versa.¹² In short, existing evidence suggests that family matters when it comes to volunteering.

We also know, however, that families are changing. Evidence shows that family structures have become more diverse: fewer people are married; more couples cohabit outside of marriage, including those with children; there are more single-parent households (almost entirely mothers); there are more LGBTI couples, including those with children.¹³ Some of these structures have come hand in hand with changing attitudes and legislation. The division of roles and responsibilities within families has also changed. Changing attitudes to women working, combined with economic needs, have come with the rise of two-income households, for example. According to one recent report, 60% of households had two working parents, with more women in full and part-time work than in the past.¹⁴ Despite more women entering the workforce, however, the same research suggests that women are still doing the majority of domestic tasks, including childcare and chores, on their own. Evidence suggests that men are doing more childcare in general than in the past but are disproportionately undertaking interaction tasks, while women do more practical work alone and are more likely to reduce their leisure time or workload as a result.¹⁵ Women have

⁵ Einolf, C. J. (2018) 'Parents' charitable giving and volunteering: Are they influenced by their children's ages and life transitions? Evidence from a longitudinal study in the United States', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 395–416.

⁶ Taniguichi, H. (2006) 'Men's and women's volunteering: Gender differences in the effects of employment and family characteristics', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 83–101.

⁷ Ravanera, Z. R., Beaujot, R. and Fernando, R. (2002) 'The family and political dimension of social cohesion: Analysing the link using the 2000 National Survey on Volunteering, Giving and Participating', *PSC Discussion Paper Series*, vol. 16, no. 7, article 1.

⁸ Grimm, J. R., Dietz, N., Spring, K., Arey, K. and Foster-Bey, J. (2005) *Building Active Citizens: The Role of social institutions in teen volunteering*, Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service.

⁹ Bekkers, R. (2007) 'Intergenerational transmission of volunteering', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 99–114.

¹⁰ Taylor-Collins, E., Harrison, T., Thoma, S.J. and Moller, F. (2019) 'A habit of social action: Understanding the factors associated with adolescents who have made a habit of helping others', *Voluntas*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 98–114.

¹¹ Ottoni-Wilhelm, M. and Bandy, R. (2013) 'Stage-specific family structure models: Implicit parameter restrictions and Bayesian model comparison with an application to prosocial behavior', *Review of Economics of the Household*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 313–340.

¹² Einolf, C. J. (2018) 'Parents' charitable giving and volunteering: Are they influenced by their children's ages and life transitions? Evidence from a longitudinal study in the United States', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 2, pp. 395–416.

¹³ OECD (2011) *Doing Better for Families*. www.oecd.org/els/family/47701118.pdf (accessed September 2020); ONS

(2019) *Families and Households in the UK: 2019*.

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2019 (accessed September 2020); Saner, E. (2019) 'The family in 2050: artificial wombs, robot carers and the rise of single fathers by choice', *The Guardian* www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/dec/31/family-2050-artificial-wombs-robot-carers-single-fathers (accessed September 2020)

¹⁴ UCL (2019) 'Less than 7% of couples share housework equally'. www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2019/jul/less-7-couples-share-housework-equally (accessed September 2020)

¹⁵ Wajcman, J. (2014) *Pressed for Time: The acceleration of life in digital capitalism*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

also been found to disproportionately carry the ‘mental load’: the responsibility for organising, planning and managing the household.¹⁶

These changes have knock-on effects for wider family life, including the ability of families to spend time together. One study highlighted that many people are likely to be working hours outside of the traditional working week (flexible evenings and weekends), which can impact on the time that family members will be able to spend time together.¹⁷ Another study highlights that other factors in addition to work, including technology, housework and homework, are impacting on family time together: the study estimated that families spend on average less than seven hours of time together each week.¹⁸ Half wanted to spend more time together, and nearly all recognised that time together was crucial. Families are often combining activities, such as domestic chores or childcare, with leisure.¹⁹

All these developments raise considerable questions for volunteering, including how they will affect the likelihood of families engaging in volunteering, the volunteering experience and its outcomes. To date, however, evidence is limited on exactly how they are shaping volunteering from an individual or family perspective, and an organisational one.

When it comes to how volunteer-involving organisations are engaging with families as volunteers (and beyond), we know relatively little. Family volunteering schemes and opportunities which specifically target families have been operating in the US and Canada for a while but, to date at least, appear to have been less common in the UK. In a short survey on family volunteering conducted by NCVO in 2015, the majority of organisations that responded did not offer family-focused volunteering opportunities, but there was interest in developing these kinds of opportunities in the future. We suspect, however, that many have been involving multiple members of the same families as volunteers for years. The implications of family volunteering for volunteer recruitment, retention and support are as yet unclear. Furthermore, it seems that volunteer-involving organisations are thinking about family volunteering opportunities primarily as those in which family members participate together. There is, however, scope to look at this area more widely, including opportunities for siblings, grandparents and grandchildren, and couples to volunteer together, as well as considering how organisations might take into account family dynamics more generally when developing and supporting volunteering activities.

1.2. Research aims and objectives

Recognising the potential significance of the (changing) family context for volunteering, and the existing gaps in evidence, raises new questions about the relationship between families and volunteering. There is more to be understood from the family perspective – how and why families

¹⁶ Emma (2017) ‘The gender wars of household chores: a feminist comic’, *The Guardian*,

www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/26/gender-wars-household-chores-comic (accessed September 2020)

¹⁷ Wajcman, J. (2014) *Pressed for Time: The acceleration of life in digital capitalism*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁸ Woolfson, R. (2017) *The Bassetts Vitamins Purple Paper*.

www.bassettsvitamins.co.uk/~media/Bassettsvitamins/en/Pdf/BassettsVitamins%20PurplePaper%20Website.pdf (accessed September 2020)

¹⁹ Wajcman, J. (2014) *Pressed for Time: The acceleration of life in digital capitalism*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

engage with volunteering individually and collectively, how they think that changes in family circumstances are shaping their experiences and what effect volunteering has on the family. There is also more to be understood from an organisational perspective – why and how organisations engage with families as volunteers, whether this is through formal schemes or more generally through their everyday volunteering activities, what enables and constrains family engagement in volunteering and what difference it makes to those organisations.

We aimed to address these evidence gaps by exploring how organisations engage with families as volunteers and how families engage with volunteering. We did this through undertaking research to address three key questions.

- How and to what extent do families engage in volunteering?
- How do families understand and experience volunteering?
- How do organisations and community groups engage family members as volunteers?

Within this report, we have reframed these questions as follows.

- What? (Defining and describing family volunteering)
- Why? (Why and how family volunteering comes about)
- How? (How family and organisational contexts shape family volunteering experiences)
- To what effect? (The outcomes of family volunteering for families and organisations)
- So what? (Conclusions and considerations)

We hope that the findings will support volunteer-involving organisations to:

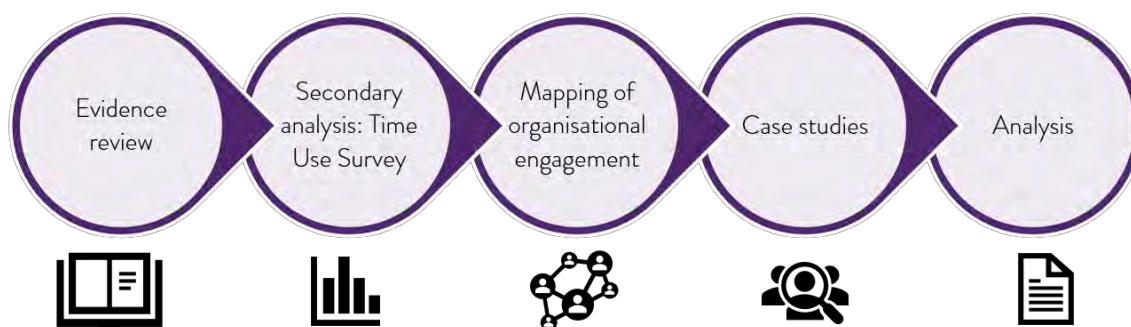
- develop or enhance volunteering opportunities for family members (individually or collectively)
- successfully manage such opportunities and enhance the experiences of all those involved
- help organisations, through newly created practical resources, to think through and consider family dynamics when developing and supporting volunteering activities.

A [practical framework to help organisations reflect on how they currently involve families in volunteering and how they could develop this in the future](#) has been produced alongside this report.

1.3. Research approach

This research has involved five stages, which are summarised in figure 1 and expanded upon below.

Figure 1: Research approach



Evidence review

Our search for existing literature on family and volunteering found 232 relevant documents that spanned a number of fields and disciplines. We reviewed these articles to help guide our research, in particular by highlighting key themes and gaps in current understanding on families and volunteering. While we identified quite strong evidence on how family status affects volunteering, we found very little on how organisations engage with families as volunteers. The findings of the review are available in a [full report](#) and [blog](#), as well as being interwoven within this report.

Secondary analysis of the Time Use Survey

We undertook quantitative analysis of the data from the UK Time Use Survey (UKTUS) 2014/2015 (the most recent version).²⁰ This is a nationally representative large-scale household survey, in which people aged eight and over, from 4,216 households in the UK, complete diaries about how they spend their time. Our analysis focused on: understanding how common family volunteering is amongst households in the UK; whether different members of the same family engage in volunteering activities together or separately; who volunteers as a family; the relationship between family composition and volunteering rates. A [blog](#) and [detailed report](#) of the findings have been published.

Mapping of organisational engagement with family volunteering

We mapped existing family volunteering opportunities using internet searches (Google, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) to understand the types of activities available, how they are communicated and the types and fields of organisations offering them. This included reviewing the websites of 106 organisations and 67 expressions of interest forms from organisations, which were submitted to NCVO in response to a blog about the research. We held follow-up conversations with a small number of

²⁰ Gershuny, J. and Sullivan, O. (2017). 'United Kingdom Time Use Survey, 2014–2015'. In *UK Data Service.SN:8128*: Oxford: Centre for Time Use Research, University of Oxford.

organisations that had contacted the research team with particularly interesting examples of family volunteering schemes. These are presented in yellow boxes within this report.

Organisational case studies

We undertook five organisational case studies. The organisations were selected from the mapping stage of the study to reflect different approaches to family volunteering, as well as a mix of other features such as: whether the engagement was within a specific scheme or part of general volunteering within the organisation; whether it was formal or informal; frequency of volunteering; activity subsector; focus; family type; scale of family volunteering; type of organisation. A brief summary of each of our case study organisations is provided in table 1.

Data collection for the organisational case studies included:

- interviews with staff/leaders at different levels
- focus groups and/or interviews with volunteers – both those who volunteered with family members and those who did not
- family case studies (see below)
- a review of organisational documents and administrative data
- observations of volunteering activities, where possible.

The methods we used were flexible, allowing us to adapt to organisational and family circumstances: the inclusion of young children in interviews, for example, required a different approach to those which only involved adults.

Table 1: Case study organisations

<p>Kids Run Free is a medium-sized, UK-wide charity set up in 2010. It aims to get children healthier, happier and more confident through running. The organisation runs two programmes, Marathon Kids and Park Kids. Our research focused on the Park Kids programme, which involves children of all ages in regular running events. Volunteers play a central role in setting up and running the community-based events, with limited operational support from a centralised staff team. Volunteers are also involved ‘behind the scenes’ in fundraising and communication activities. Park Kids involves over 120 volunteers across 25 events, many of whom are parents of the children who attend the events. Efforts are currently being made to expand Park Kids into new areas, focusing on engaging young people from deprived communities where activity levels are lowest.</p>
<p>The Whitworth, part of The University of Manchester, was founded in 1889. It is one of the main art galleries in the city. Recent years have seen major redevelopments and refocusing. The current director is a proponent of the ‘useful museum’ concept based on the idea that museums and art galleries have a civic purpose; this focus has led to engagement and participation becoming key priorities, with volunteering seen as a key mechanism for achieving this. While volunteers have long been involved in the organisation, until recently the approach was fairly informal. The wider changes to</p>

the organisation have led to an expansion of volunteering and a formalisation of approach. A new initiative has been established with the specific aim of attracting families to volunteer within the gallery.

Little Village is a medium-sized, London-based charity formed in 2016 to help local families to support one another during times of need through the collection and redistribution of clothes, toys and kit for families with young children. The charity has sites in three London boroughs and supports families across London. Our research focused on Wandsworth. Volunteers are central to the organisation, which has a small staff base – there are 155 volunteers to three paid staff in the Wandsworth branch. Nearly all the volunteers (95%) are mothers, including some who have been beneficiaries. Parents with young children, including those on maternity leave, typically attend daytime sessions; those who are working are more likely to go to evening sessions.

St John Ambulance is a major, national organisation providing first aid and pre-hospital care. There are approximately 15,000 adult volunteers plus a youth corps of approximately 11,000, many of whom currently volunteer or will do so in the future. There are approximately 850 paid staff. Volunteers are involved at all levels of the organisational structure and can be split into two groups: those who get involved with specific activities and stay for a few years before moving on; those who become highly committed, regular volunteers who take on different roles, with involvement often spanning whole families, across generations. One person estimated that half of the volunteers are connected to others within the organisation through family.

St Mary's is a lively church (a medium-sized, local charity), located in the market town of Wendover in the Chilterns. Alongside all the things you would expect of a church, it runs a gift and ethical-goods shop in the town centre and has a series of associated groups and activities which have grown out of its work over the years, including a youth centre and dementia-care group. All these activities rely on volunteers, with a wide range of volunteer roles. Volunteer involvement is organic, with little in the way of formal volunteer management. Recruiting new volunteers is becoming a bit of a challenge. Family volunteering tends to mean couples, with relatively few young people involved, although some whole families are particularly active.

In the main text of this report, we avoid referring to individual organisations to protect their anonymity, but organisations are named in the boxed examples. The green boxes throughout the report highlight stories from our organisational case studies.

Family case studies

We undertook 12 case studies with families from within the case study organisations. We sought, as far as possible, to maximise diversity of families in terms of: patterns of volunteering; family structure; ethnicity; age. For example, our case studies included: two siblings volunteering together without their parents; a single parent with three children, plus two grandparents; families with young children and families with

grown up children; blended families. Although most of our family case studies were from white, middle-class backgrounds, we did include families from minority ethnic backgrounds and from lower socio-economic groups. The limited demographic diversity of our family case studies does create a limitation to the study. Family case studies typically involved a joint interview with as many of the family members as possible, during which an interactive exercise was carried out to map out family members, their roles and responsibilities, and volunteering activities. In most cases, the joint interview was followed by a series of one-to-one interviews with individual family members. We have given all families pseudonyms to protect their identities in this report. The purple boxes throughout the report highlight stories from our family case studies.

Analysis

For the case studies, we conducted both within-case (description of the case and themes within the case) and cross-case (identifying key overarching themes, points of similarity and disconnect) analysis. An analysis framework was used to support this. Short case study descriptions were written up for each organisational case study.

Emerging findings, from all stages of the research, were shared at a workshop with volunteer-involving organisations to check for resonance and validity and to think through implications. The discussion within the workshop helped to shape the final stage of analysis and the development of our set of considerations for practitioners.

1.4. Reading this report

The report brings together the main findings from the different stages of the research and is divided into six key sections: Introduction; What? (Defining and describing family volunteering); Why? (Why and how family volunteering comes about); How? (How family and organisational contexts shape family volunteering experiences); To what effect? (The outcomes of family volunteering for families and organisations); So what? (Conclusions and considerations).

A note on definitions

The Office for National Statistics defines a family as: ‘a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent, with at least one child, who live in the same address. Children may be dependent or non-dependent.’²¹ We have taken a slightly broader definition, including members of extended families who may not live at the same address. Families, then, can include single-parent families, gay and lesbian families, blended and non-custodial families (including step-parents and stepchildren) and families without children.

We know that not everyone will call their involvement ‘volunteering’. We have tried to capture the range of activities that people undertake when giving unpaid help. This includes informal volunteering (carried out on an individual basis), as well as formal volunteering (through a group, club or organisation), although

²¹ ONS (2019) *Families and Households in the UK: 2019*.

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2019 (accessed September 2020)

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our focus is predominantly on the latter not least because we reached volunteers through organisations, groups and clubs. While we asked them about volunteering elsewhere, our findings are inevitably skewed to more formal forms of volunteering.

As for 'family volunteering', while it is commonly understood to refer to family members volunteering together in the same organisation, often within a specific initiative, in this report we take a broader view to include the range of ways in which families get involved in and shape volunteering. We detail our understanding of 'family volunteering' in section 2.

2. What? Defining and describing family volunteering

Keys findings

- Family volunteering is diverse and extensive.
- We identified five ways in which families engage in volunteering: do together, do alongside, do for, bring along and do separately.
- Family volunteering can mean parents and children getting involved; more often it means couples.
- Families may engage in these types of volunteering at any one time, or at different stages of their lives.
- The ways in which organisations approach family volunteering also differ.
- We identified a spectrum of approaches ranging from specifically designed family volunteering schemes to the involvement of families in volunteering going unnoticed.
- For many organisations, family volunteering is something which has evolved over time, largely by default, as an organic part of the organisation's wider volunteer involvement.
- Although relatively rare, specifically designed family volunteering schemes appear to be on the rise.

Like all volunteering, family volunteering is diverse. Here we outline our findings on the ways that families got involved in volunteering and how we have grouped these together to come up with categories of involvement. Our categories go beyond what others have traditionally defined as family volunteering. We then look at the ways in which organisations engage with families as volunteers and suggest that there is a spectrum of approaches – from family volunteering by design through to family volunteering going unnoticed.

2.1. What volunteering looks like within families

We identified five ways in which families engage in volunteering, as summarised in figure 2 and detailed below. While these take us beyond traditional definitions, we suggest that all of these are part of family volunteering: they all reflect how families engage in volunteering and all are important to consider. These are not mutually exclusive: many of our families were engaged in a number of these types. Indeed, we found that some families do them all. More likely, however, is that they move between types over their life course, depending on personal, family and organisational circumstances, opportunities and constraints.

Figure 2: Types of family volunteering

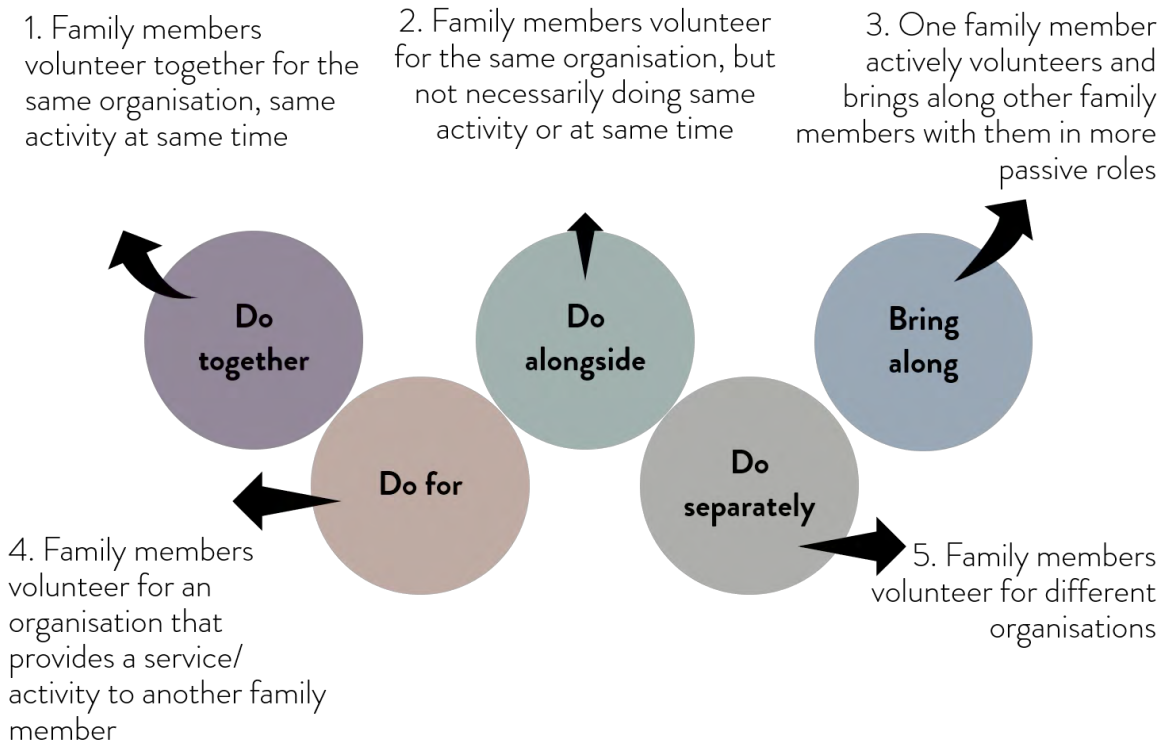


Figure 3: Examples of types of family volunteering



1. Do together: two or more family members volunteering together for the same organisation, doing the same activity at the same time and place

Our first category – ‘do together’ – is perhaps what people typically think of as family volunteering. It is when two or more members of the same family volunteer together for the same organisation, doing the same activity at the same time. It can be any combination of family members volunteering together: couples, parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, siblings, aunts and nieces, etc. Indeed, while we often think of family volunteering as being parents and children volunteering together, our analysis of the Time Use Survey data suggests that it is more often couples volunteering together.

Sometimes family volunteering together can be through specific initiatives set up to engage whole families as volunteers: our mapping work suggested that opportunities for families to volunteer together are most likely to be offered within organisations in the fields of heritage and culture (for example, museums and art galleries) and the environment (for example, conservation). More often, however, it is likely to be part of the general volunteering going on within the organisation, whether or not this is explicitly recognised. See section 2.2 for more on these different organisational approaches.

Volunteering together: the Johnston family

Rosie, Sam (aged seven) and Ellie (aged five) Johnston volunteer together at the Whitworth. Rosie used to come to the gallery for the free Baby Art sessions when Sam was only a few months old. They both really enjoyed the sessions, more so than other baby activities in town. The gallery then closed for a major refurbishment and they came back once Ellie was born. The circumstances were very different, as Ellie was ill and spent months in hospital. They came to the gallery in between hospital visits, as it was nearby. A couple of years later, Rosie saw on the gallery’s Facebook page that it was looking for family volunteers and she was really interested in taking this opportunity up. She felt that it was a way of ‘giving back’ to the gallery as it had ‘been a wonderful resource for her and the children’. Rosie initially only volunteered with Sam during the summer holidays and at half-term, but Ellie ‘was desperate to do it too’, so now they volunteer together. Sam and Ellie help set things up at the beginning of the activity, show the children taking part what to do and help to clear up. Rosie wasn’t sure whether having both children volunteer together would work, but they support each other and are comfortable in the gallery setting. It’s very much about play and fun, but Rosie feels that it’s also a way for her children to understand what helping others means.

2. Do alongside: different members of the same family volunteering for the same organisation, but doing different activities, often at different times

As well as families volunteering together, we also found that family members volunteer alongside each other – multiple members of the same family volunteering for the same organisation, but doing different roles and activities, potentially at different times. While our mapping work only revealed a few instances of

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opportunities for families to volunteer alongside each other being actively promoted, our case studies suggested that it is happening far more extensively than this would suggest.

Some families we spoke to talked about the value of being involved in the same organisation but doing different roles and activities, which reflects their different interests, skills and experiences, and enables them to have a common connection but not step on each other's toes: 'it worked better that way'. As we would expect from existing evidence of volunteering, there was often a gender dimension to the roles being undertaken;²² there was also an age dimension. We discuss in section 4.2 how having a variety of flexible roles and activities available for family members of different ages and genders enables families to volunteer alongside each other.

Family members volunteering alongside each other: Jane and Peter

Jane and Peter are both in their 70s and retired. They have been married for 50 years, they have two grown-up children – both in the 40s and no longer living locally – and four grandchildren. They have lived in their current community for over 40 years and have been involved in the local church all that time. They are also involved in lots of other groups and organisations within the local community: 'We've been participants in as many things as we can in the village because we find that that is part of being in a village that you need to be in with things to know what's going on and to do that.' When their children were younger, Jane and Peter encouraged them to be actively involved in things and often volunteered to support activities for them – Peter, for example, volunteered in the Scouts, and Jane in the Guides. Both their children volunteer, their daughter more so than their son. Although Jane and Peter are involved in many of the same groups and organisations, they took the active decision to volunteer not together but alongside: 'we did agree between us that we wouldn't be on any committees where both of us were on it because any conflicts of ideas or that we might disagree on something. So, either [Peter] would be on something or I would be on something but not together.' In the past, while Peter was on the school's PTA, for example, Jane volunteered in the classroom, helping with sewing and reading. In the church, while Peter is on the church council, Jane is heavily involved in various administrative activities, including spending one day a week sorting all the arrangements for weddings in the church. Fitting in such extensive commitments can be a bit of a juggle, with Jane leading on careful diary planning to ensure all their commitments can be met.

Family volunteering together and alongside: some insightful data

The UK Time Use Survey captures family members within the same household volunteering together or alongside each other, at the same time. It does not, therefore, neatly fit in to any one of our categories, but it provides valuable insights into the scale of family volunteering that are not available from any other data source.

²² See for example Low, N. *et al* (2007) *Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*. London: Cabinet Office.

Our analysis of the 2014/2015 Time Use Survey found that on an average day, **3% of the households in the UK volunteered together** or alongside each other as a family in the same group or organisation at the same time. This is equivalent to approximately 810,000 households. With 9% of households containing at least one member who formally volunteered on an average day, it represents one-third of all formal volunteering. In other words, **one-third of all the households that volunteered, did so together as a family.**

These family households spent on average 27 minutes per person per day volunteering together – one hour per household per day. This is a considerable amount of time, but is less than the average of 47 minutes for volunteers in households where people volunteer alone.

Most commonly, this was couples volunteering together. Couples of all ages volunteered together, but 7 out of 10 volunteering couples were aged 60 or over. The second most common category was an adult volunteering with at least one child younger than 16, followed by two adults volunteering with at least one child.

3. Bring along: one family member actively volunteering and bringing other family members with them in more passive roles

Rather than all volunteering together, some family volunteering involves one, or more, family members actively volunteering while bringing others with them – they are present together, but not everyone is actively involved in volunteering. Often this is parents bringing along young children. We found examples of babies being strapped to parents' chests while out on a march, prams being parked up in the back of a room during meetings and children playing while their parents got on with the task in hand. It also works the other way round: children bringing a parent/responsible adult with them for safeguarding or transport reasons.

For some, bringing family members along with them is what makes it possible for them to volunteer. A single mother of young children, for example, may not have childcare so could not take part in volunteering if she did not bring her child with her. For some, it is a more active choice: bringing children along, for example, can be part of a desire to instil values and build norms of behaviour. We heard that for some, being 'brought along' as a child had developed into a lifelong engagement with an organisation. We also heard suggestions that it was getting harder to bring children along due to growing safeguarding commitments. We explore these issues further in subsequent sections.

Volunteers bringing family members along: Samira and her children

Samira is a single mother in her 30s with two young children (aged one and three years old). She initially came to Little Village as a beneficiary of its services, receiving support at a difficult time in her life. After receiving this support, she felt strongly about giving back to the organisation that had helped her, and she has been getting involved as a volunteer up to twice a week. One of her sons is at nursery, but she is able to bring her one-year-old to the family-friendly sessions held at Little Village, where she can either have her son looked after in the crèche or have him near her as she volunteers in a

designated area. Other volunteers have got to know her and her son, so they also look out for him. As she doesn't have a support network of wider friends and family, she would not be able to participate in this volunteering without being able to bring her son along, and a key benefit for her is to be around others, which helps her mental health. She has recommended volunteering at Little Village to someone else she knows, who has since attended with their child.

4. Do for: one (or more) family members volunteering for a group or organisation that provides a service or activity to another family member

Parents volunteering for their children's activities: the Dickens family

The Dickens family – dad (Matt), stepmum (Sara) and Matt's two children (aged ten and seven) – consider themselves to be an 'active' family with 'frenetic' calendars. Sara now works full time and Matt is a freelancer at home, which gives him more flexibility with home life. The children are involved in many after-school and extracurricular activities – drama, rugby, Beavers, Cubs and running – and both Matt and Sara volunteer in various capacities to support these activities, sometimes together and sometimes individually. Sara is also the leader of a Rainbows group, which her stepdaughter once attended. Most of their volunteering can be considered 'do for' and is closely connected to their children's activities and interests, although they both actively volunteer in other areas too. Much of this involvement has been unplanned for Sara – helping to fill a role when there was no one else to do it, or helping out on the day has turned into a more regular commitment. Matt is very supportive of Sara's volunteering, both emotionally and practically, and he 'mucks in' and helps her in the various roles she has taken on. He also gets involved more directly in other community events and activities, often related to the children and his interest in music. Both Matt and Sara are keen for the children to be busy and for them to see first-hand the value of being active and taking action: 'I really want them to see them get up and go and that's a really good way to be and live.' Getting involved and helping out with their children's activities and clubs is seen as part of what they do as a family and an important element of their children's upbringing.

We came across many examples of one (or more) family member volunteering for a group or organisation that provided a service or activity for another family member; often this was parents volunteering to support activities their children were involved in, such as coaching a sports teams or helping out at Brownie packs, youth clubs or schools. There were also instances of volunteering at a care home where elderly parents were residents; it could also include, for example, chairing a local dementia support group that a partner attends, or volunteering at a hospice where a cousin, grandparent, aunt or other resident is cared for.

Our mapping suggests that this kind of family volunteering is quite prominent in sport and recreation (especially in local sports clubs), education (schools) and campaigns (education, climate change or bereavement justice).

5. Do separately: multiple members of the same family volunteering for separate groups and organisations

This category recognises that family is an important context for volunteering and that multiple family members might volunteer for different organisations. They volunteer but not together or alongside each other. Sometimes the decisions to volunteer in separate organisations are made collectively, based on an assessment of the family and community needs, resources and interests. For example, we found families with young children where one parent volunteered to support the school that their children attend, while the other parent volunteered to support a sporting activity.

A perceived need to support the different organisations that families engaged in led to volunteering being shared out across the family, with family members volunteering separately in the different groups and organisations. Such decisions were actively negotiated in some families. Sometimes, however, volunteering separately was a purely individual decision that reflected the different interests and skills of family members.

Volunteering separately: the Lowe family

Roger and Sandra are a married couple, with two sons (in their early 20s). One of their sons still lives at home; the other spends a lot of time abroad. Both work from home, Roger as a self-employed management consultant and Sandra as a foreign language teacher. They met overseas – Sandra was working and Roger volunteering. They describe themselves as a ‘small’ and ‘tight-knit’ family with lots of shared interests, including a love of music and the outdoors. While they have lots of common interests and are all actively involved in the community in a variety of ways, they currently tend to volunteer separately: ‘We don’t do many things together.’ Roger is heavily involved in the local youth centre, while Sandra is a central figure within a local refugee resettlement initiative. Most things, however, can be traced back to a connection with the church. Sandra describes Roger as a real volunteer type, having volunteered throughout his life, and herself less so, although alongside her work with refugees she supports the local Scouts group, which Roger was also involved in the past, and a local singing group and takes on various voluntary roles in the church.

Talking about family volunteering

Throughout this report, when we talk about ‘family volunteering’ we are talking inclusively about all five categories within the typology, although sometimes we differentiate between them by specifying certain types when they are pertinent to the point being made. We recognise that this is different to the much narrower understanding of family volunteering as family members (typically parents and children) volunteering together within the same organisation, which is more commonly used and much closer to

our 'do together' category.²³ As noted above, these categories are not mutually exclusive, and families may engage in multiple forms of family volunteering at any one time or over time. Often, they move between them as their circumstances change. For some families, volunteering is a small part of what they do – one of a number of activities, roles and responsibilities that they engage in as a family. For others, it is a key part of who they are as a family, representing a significant investment of time and energy, often across multiple roles and organisations. We explore these experiences of family volunteering in section 4.1.

Family volunteering at the heart of the civic core:²⁴ the Edwards family

The Edwards family – mum (Olivia), dad (Graham) and two teenage children (Stuart and Catherine) – are all active volunteers. When the children were little, a lot of their volunteering fitted within our 'bring along' category: at the church, for example, they brought their children along with them. Now that their children are older, they ask them if they want to come along: 'it's about enjoying time together, rather than getting them volunteering'. Some of their volunteering is now 'done together'. They are all, for example, involved in the local youth club, although Catherine is involved more as a beneficiary than a volunteer. Olivia and Graham also volunteer together at a local toddler group – they enjoy going back to support the group that they ran when their children were small. They also do things 'alongside' each other – they are all, for example, involved in the local church, but while Olivia spent a number of years running the church shop, Graham has been more involved in the pastoral side, and Catherine helps with services for young people. They also do some things separately: Graham, for example, helps out with the local cricket club. As one of them said: 'We do like spending time together and so we do quite a lot of things together, but we also do quite a lot of things apart.'

2.2. Organisational approaches to family volunteering

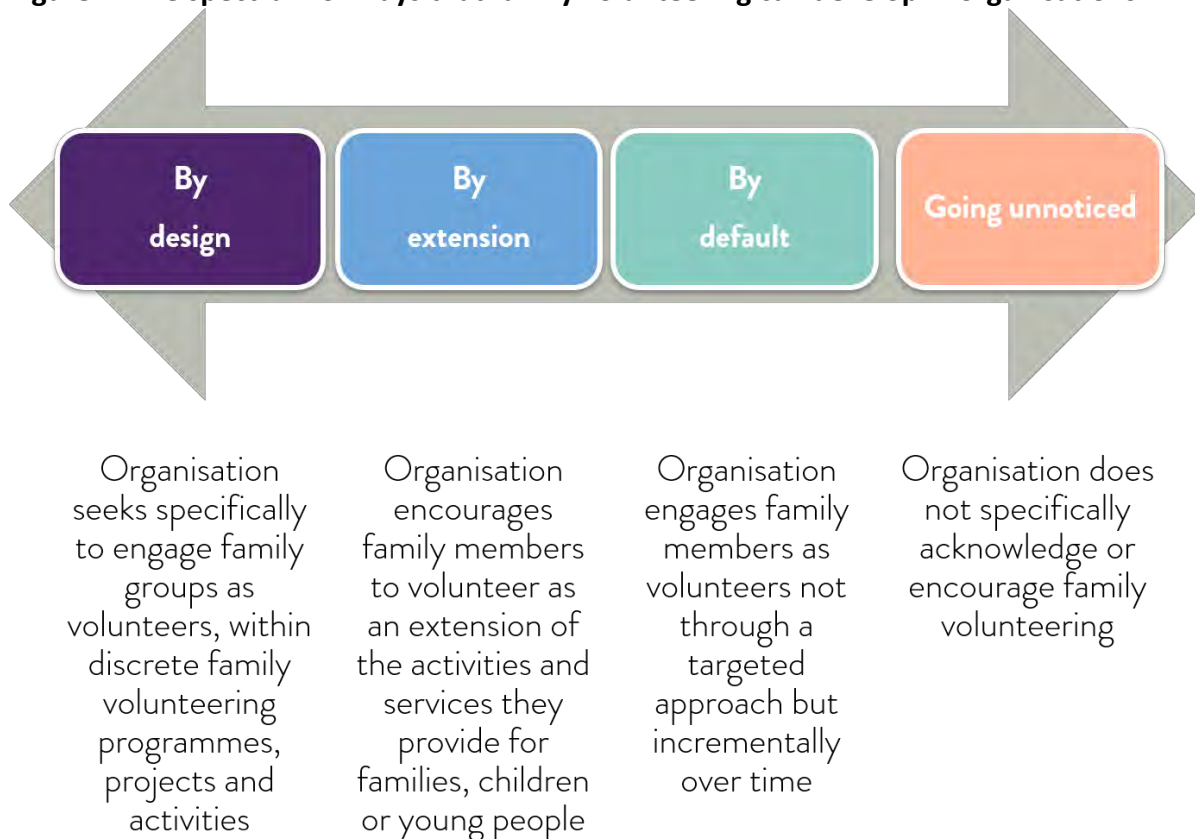
There were also different approaches to involving family members as volunteers from an organisational perspective. The key dimension here was the extent to which organisations had intentionally sought to encourage family volunteering within their organisation. We suggest that there was a spectrum of approaches taken by organisations ranging from discrete, designed family volunteering programmes, to

²³ In our literature review, for example, we found that Porritt (1995: 2) defined family volunteering as being: 'when family members volunteer together in community service activities. They may come from different generations, in combinations such as parent/child or grandparent/parent/child, or from the same generation, such as adult partners, or brothers/sisters'. While we think this is a useful starting point, particularly its emphasis on different family groupings, we would encourage a broader definition reflective of the broader types of engagement we found through this research. Porritt, K. (1995) *Family Volunteering: The Ties That Bind: An Introduction to Preparing Your Agency for Family Volunteers*. Ottawa: Department of Canadian Heritage volunteeringculture.or.kr/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Family-Volunteering.pdf (accessed September 2020)

²⁴ Mohan, J. and Bulloch, S (2012) *The Idea of a 'Civic Core': What are the overlaps between charitable giving, volunteering, and civic participation in England and Wales? Working Paper 73*. Birmingham: Third Sector Research Centre.

family volunteering by extension and family volunteering by default, to family volunteering going unnoticed within organisations (see figure 4).

Figure 4: The spectrum of ways that family volunteering can develop in organisations



By design: organisations specifically seek to engage family groups as volunteers, within discrete family volunteering programmes, projects and activities

Some organisations reported developing discrete activities and programmes designed specifically to encourage family volunteering. Our mapping work suggests that family volunteering by design remains relatively uncommon, but it does appear to be on the increase, with a number of organisations having dedicated sections on their websites, for example, to promote and recruit family volunteers. The examples we found were concentrated, but not exclusively, within organisations working in the fields of the environment, and heritage and culture. Where organisations had specific family volunteering programmes, projects or activities, these generally fell within our ‘do together’ or sometimes our ‘do alongside’ categories. Most of the examples that we found focused on engaging parents and children, rather than couples or other family groupings. Some ran continuously throughout the year; others provided opportunities for more discrete, episodic engagement, for example in events during summer, school term breaks and occasional weekend events. We explore the reasons why organisations have developed such schemes in section 3.2.

Family volunteering by design at the Whitworth

As part of a drive to become more relevant, representative and embedded within the local community, the Whitworth has designed interventions specifically aimed at engaging families as both visitors and volunteers. The family volunteering scheme has developed incrementally, building on the success of existing activities targeted at families, including a well-established early years programme. There is a specific family workshop volunteer role (not exclusively for people wanting to volunteer with members of their own family) and parents can bring their babies when volunteering. They are also able to volunteer together, with children of a very young age being encouraged to help with small tasks. All are given a volunteer t-shirt, even the babies. The families that are volunteering are predominantly mothers (in their 20s and 30s, often on maternity leave) with one young child (over two-thirds are babies and toddlers), although there are a few cases of older children being involved and some mothers volunteering with several children. In one instance, siblings are volunteering together, and there have also been some grandparents volunteering with their grandchildren, but this isn't common. Overall, working with and for families is helping to make the gallery more open and relevant, and has enabled it to reach out to people who wouldn't usually get involved.

By extension: family members are encouraged to volunteer as an extension of the activities and services that organisations provide for families, children or young people

Rather than having a discrete, specifically designed family volunteering scheme, some organisations actively sought to engage family members as volunteers as an extension of the activities and services that the organisation provided for families, children or young people. Typically, this was parents being encouraged to volunteer to support activities that their children were involved in, not within a discrete family volunteering initiative but as part of the organisation's wider volunteer involvement. While family-friendly practices might be put in place to facilitate this and organisations might mention the possibility of family members volunteering together on a volunteering page or frequently asked questions section of their website, it is part of a general volunteering offer rather than being contained within a specially designed family volunteering programme/activity or exclusively for family members. We found examples of this approach within uniformed youth groups and sports groups. We also came across examples in care homes, where the family members of residents were encouraged to volunteer to support various activities.

Family volunteering by extension at Kids Run Free

Recruiting and retaining families is key to Kids Run Free's organisational mission and model. Its aim is to involve children in outdoor running activities, and it relies on the support of parent volunteers, although other volunteers are also encouraged to get involved. The organisation recognises the important role played by families in the scaling up of the programme into new communities, particularly in setting up new 'Parks Kids' events: 'The family is going to be integral for years because without them, we can't get in to the next community because there's only so many of us here I suppose, so we need

them to want it and to, I suppose to run it as well, so we need them to take the lead on their event'. It has not, however, set out to develop a discrete family volunteering programme. Indeed, the organisation wants to keep volunteering opportunities open to all in the community and this is reflected in its marketing for volunteers. As one staff member said: 'So from that aspect it happens unintentionally if that makes sense, but I don't think as an organisation we've ever talked about the idea of, well can we engage families to volunteer, because I don't think we've even thought that that was a concept that could happen'.

By default: multiple members of the same family volunteer within an organisation not through any targeted approach but incrementally over time

Our research suggests that many organisations engage multiple members of the same family more by default than by design. Here, family volunteering had often evolved over time within the organisation; it was not something that the organisation had actively set out to achieve, although it may have implicitly encouraged it through its general ways of working, but multiple family members had been attracted to volunteering within the organisation. We frequently heard stories of couples volunteering together and of generations of the same family volunteering for an organisation, without ever having been specifically encouraged to do so. Some organisations had, however, implicitly acknowledged and therefore potentially encouraged family volunteering through, for example, recognising volunteering families within organisational materials or generally working in ways which were 'family friendly'. We found examples of this approach within uniform organisations, local community-based groups, including churches and sports clubs, and particular volunteering roles such as fundraising and environmental clean-ups. As we shall discuss below, there was concern amongst some organisations that had historically involved families more by default than by design that there was less family volunteering now than in the past,²⁵ leading some to consider whether they needed a more active approach to sustain it.

Family volunteering by default at St Mary's church

Families have always been involved in volunteering at St Mary's church, which reflects the nature of the organisation. Like all volunteering at the church, however, this is largely organic, self-organised and not formally 'managed'. There has been no drive to specifically encourage families to volunteer and no discretely designed family volunteering project. Instead, families have got involved in the church over the years by default: they come to the church together and get involved together; roles are often shared out amongst family members or passed on from one generation to the next. This has been further facilitated by the church having a range of activities which tend to focus on different age groups, enabling an informal pathway through participation (see section 4.2). Although St Mary's remains an active, lively church, as congregations dwindle and families face increasing pressures on their time, concerns have been raised that family volunteering is declining and if left unchecked will likely continue to do so.

²⁵ Reflective of what Hustinx and Lammertyn refer to as a wider move from 'collective' to 'reflexive' volunteering. Hustinx, L. and Lammertyn, F. (2003) 'Collective and reflexive styles of volunteering: A sociological modernization perspective', *Voluntas*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 167–187.

Going unnoticed: family volunteering is not explicitly acknowledged or encouraged by organisations

Our research suggests that some organisations may engage with multiple members of the same family as volunteers without giving it active thought or explicit acknowledgement: family volunteering goes unnoticed. It is hard to judge the scale of this or its significance, although with our analysis of the 2014/15 Time Use survey identifying that one-third of formal volunteering households volunteer together, the indication is that family volunteering may happen more than is acknowledged by organisations. Our mapping work, for example, highlighted that many volunteer-involving organisations made no mention of family on their volunteering webpages or social media feed.

A spectrum of approaches to family volunteering

As noted above, although we have presented discrete approaches, they fall along a spectrum, with organisations often focusing more or less on families and on family volunteering at different points in time, depending on a range of wider organisational and contextual factors. It was possible to follow the journey that some organisations 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 other organisations, the journey was less linear and more fluid. There was also considerable variation within these approaches according to whether the family volunteering tended, for example, to be planned or spontaneous, regular or episodic, formally organised and managed or organically led. In the sections below, we explore some of the factors which seemed to influence the approaches adopted by different organisations and the motivations behind them.

3. Why? Why and how family volunteering comes about

Key findings

- Families can provide motivations for, routes into and triggers for volunteering, as well as the resources needed to make volunteering possible.
- For example, family can be a motivation for volunteering through a desire to instil or express family values, parents wanting to be effective role models for their children and a desire to spend time together.
- Families can provide routes into volunteering through children's activities and through one family member 'roping' others in.
- Resources for volunteering, time, money and support can be shared on a family basis.
- From the organisational perspective, family volunteering can be developed as a way of meeting mission and strategy, and/or of diversifying engagement.

In this section, we consider why and how family volunteering comes about. First, we look at this from the family perspective: the motivations for, routes into and triggers for families to get involved in volunteering, and the resources that they draw upon to enable them to do so. Within this, we also consider how family can act as a barrier to volunteering. We then consider why organisations get involved in family volunteering, particularly the more actively designed approaches, while also considering what stops others from getting involved or doing more.

3.1. Beyond the individual: Why and how families get involved in volunteering

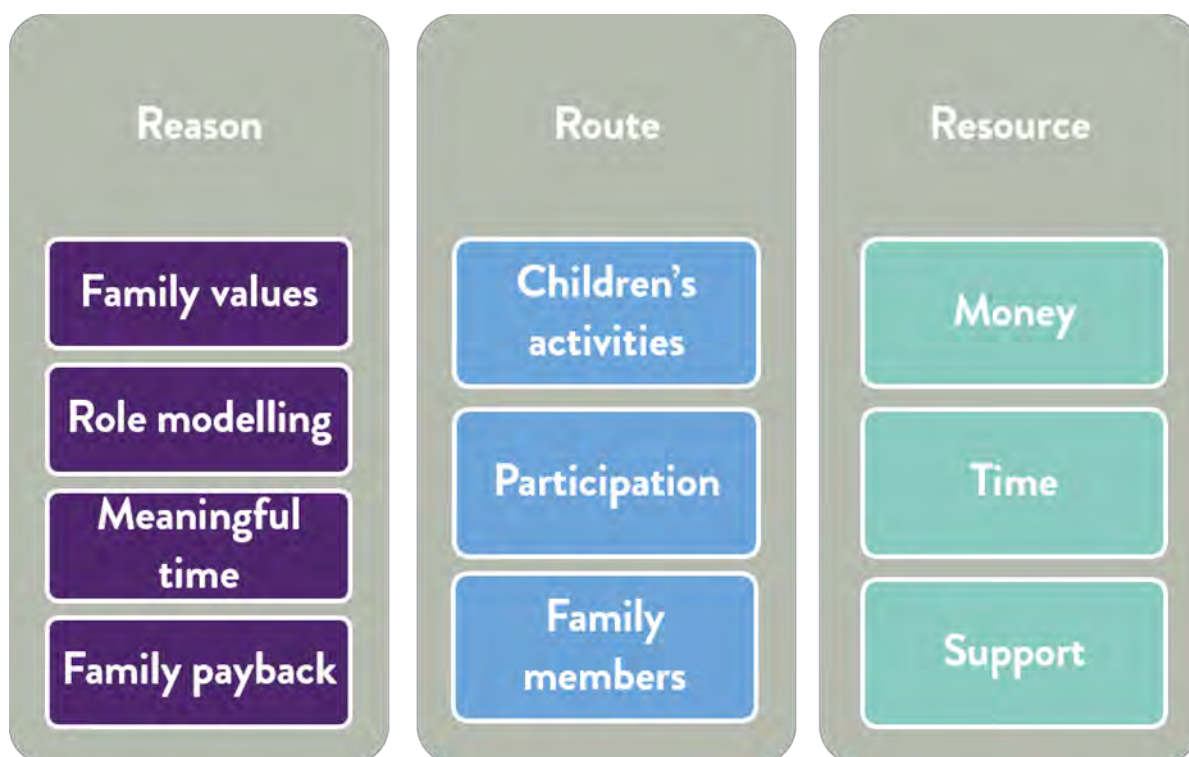
There is already a considerable body of evidence on why people volunteer. Most focuses on individual motivations, but there is also evidence on predispositions and triggers for and routes into volunteering.²⁶ Common reasons given for volunteering include wanting to help people or improve things, having spare time and wanting to support a group, organisation or cause that they think is important.²⁷ We heard many of these types of responses amongst our respondents. Rather than repeating all those findings here, we focus on the motivations, routes in and resources which were particularly related, in one way or another, to family. Each section incorporates findings on how family can also act as a barrier to volunteering.

²⁶ Musick and Wilson provide a thorough review in Musick, M. and Wilson, J. (2008) *Volunteers: A social profile*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

²⁷ See for example McGarvey, A., Jochum, V., Davies, J., Dobbs, J. and Hornung, L. (2019) *Time Well Spent: A national survey on the volunteer experience*. London: NCVO.

www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/volunteering/Volunteer-experience_Full-Report.pdf (accessed September 2020)

Figure 5: Family as a driver for volunteering



Family as motivation

For some, family was a motivation, or reason, for volunteering. The reasons that people gave for volunteering, for example, included those that specifically related to their children or their sense of family and their role within the family.

Instilling and expressing family values

For some, family volunteering was motivated by family values: for example, the importance of family, supporting each other, hard work, helping others, community, active citizenship and faith. These were not just individually held values, but also collective family values, or at least values that parents wanted to instil in their children, and volunteering was seen as a way to both actively express and transmit them. As one parent put it: 'they can see how things fit in the community and how people work together and that importance of being part of something'. Where parents and children volunteered together or alongside each other, this was seen as a particularly valuable way of expressing and instilling those values: 'You're experiencing it with them and you're showing them that you care for it'. The hope in many cases was that volunteering would become the norm for family life:

"I think it's important for these guys [children] to see. They probably think it's quite normal for someone to run a massive business [charity shop] like we've been doing, for free and [with] no time, while they're doing a job and running a family, they just think that's normal."

Family values and volunteering: The Adair family

Dad (Tom) and mum (Sally) share a strong sense that being part of a local community where you get involved and help one another is important. They have two children (aged five and three). Tom's volunteering is largely based on his interest in running, and he regularly volunteers for GoodGym. Sally gets involved in more informal ways, including coaching on interview skills, CV writing and supporting people in the community who need help. Exposing their children to experiences in the community and instilling positive values was seen as an important part of their children's upbringing: 'We're very much a values-based family where we try and teach values to our children.' Involvement in their community and in volunteering was seen as one way of promoting and teaching these values. They talked, for example, about the importance of getting involved as a family in community fundraising events and activities, such as the yearly Santa Dash: 'It's a good sort of opportunity for us to tell the kids that not everyone is as lucky as they are and that there are some people that need our help and if we can do it, either by passing on skills or helping raise funds or changing something for them'.

Role modelling

For some parents, the motivation for getting involved was a desire to be a good role model for their children. This was also highlighted in our evidence review.²⁸ As one volunteer who brought her child along with her to one of our case study organisations reflected:

"I have no husband here but my kids always copy what their parents do so my son came on Thursday last week because he had an inset day, and it was normal for him to come with me for a couple of years, he made the puzzles, it's good ... it's very important for kids to show [them] how you volunteer, they will copy."

While being a good role model was particularly associated with volunteering that involved parents and children doing something together or alongside each other, it was not limited to that: other forms of volunteering were also felt to offer the potential for positive role modelling. For example, in some families when it was just one of the parents who volunteered, this was enough to stimulate conversations about volunteering and/or to be seen volunteering by children – the role modelling still happened.

Spending meaningful time together

For some, the reasons given for wanting to get involved in family volunteering related to a desire to do something meaningful together as a family within the time they had available or to spend 'quality time' together, as a couple, a family unit of parents and children, or siblings. This was seen to be gaining

²⁸ See for example Bekkers, R. (2007) 'Intergenerational transmission of volunteering', *Acta Sociologica*, vol. 50, no. 2. pp. 99–114.

importance as lives became increasingly busy, meaning that time spent together was more precious.²⁹ As one person said:

“Because we’re spending time as a whole family, so I think that’s really important, everyone’s lives are so busy now, we all have our own little things, whereas this we’re all spending that morning together.”

Here, there was an added belief that spending meaningful time together would help to strengthen relationships amongst family members. One family talked about being motivated by a desire to ‘reframe’ their relationships, which had become challenging within the home – it was hoped that volunteering would provide a neutral space to spend meaningful time together and rebuild those relationships.

Time outside of the family

Sometimes, volunteering was motivated by a desire to do something as an individual outside of the wider family or with time that had become available because of changes in family circumstances – volunteering became ‘me time’. For example, for those on maternity leave, volunteering can be motivated by a desire to do something meaningful when paid work has paused, while also providing a reason to get out of the house, meet people, stay connected and do something ‘for me’ rather than with or for the family. We explore this further in the section on triggers/routes into volunteering below. As one person said:

“... I got very involved because ... I very much felt like I needed to do stuff because I’d been working 14/15 hours a day and commuting and then suddenly not ... I felt like I needed to get involved. They were little tiny things – doing the cash for a toddler group [for example, but] that was a job. So I did ‘a job’ to feel like I had a thing to do and it was part of my structure and my week because it had all turned upside down ...”

Family payback

Involvement in family volunteering was also motivated by wanting to give something back to an organisation or a community that the family were a part of or had benefited from. One volunteer talked about being motivated by a ‘huge debt of gratitude’ that they felt for the organisation – in this case the Scouts – for support they had provided to their son at a particularly difficult point in his life. For some parents, this meant volunteering for all the activities their children were involved in, particularly those that were run by volunteers: ‘So I think generally if our children do anything run by volunteers, we always try and do something’. Within this there was a sense of building reciprocity and mutuality across parents:

“After having kids you realise how much it entails – the cost – so giving back to some mothers who are in different situations is quite a nice kind of motivation.”

Similarly, wanting to be part of, or contribute to a community was a commonly cited reason for volunteering, particularly for families within the more rurally located cases. This has a particular family

²⁹ Wajcman, J. (2014) *Pressed for Time: The acceleration of life in digital capitalism*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

dimension to it: it wasn't about getting involved in the community individually, but about wanting the family to feel part of the community.

Family life providing multiple routes into volunteering

In common with existing research evidence,³⁰ and as indicated in some of the above, we found that family life could often provide triggers for and routes into volunteering.

Children's activities as routes into volunteering

Having children was itself an important trigger for volunteering, and children's involvement in education and leisure activities often provided a route into volunteering for parents. We found many instances of this within our family case studies. This was sometimes actively encouraged by organisations. For some organisations which provide activities/services for young people, becoming a parent helper is almost a requirement; for most, it is more gently encouraged – some do little to encourage or facilitate it, although it may happen by default. In some instances, volunteering had been triggered by an organisation that a child was involved in being threatened with closure if volunteers did not come forward. This left parents feeling as if they had little choice but to step in, and occasionally led them to volunteer in organisations in which they had little: 'Sometimes you do things because you feel you should, not necessarily because you have got a passion for it'.

Sometimes, however, children didn't want their parents, or other family members, involved in their activities: they valued their time apart, and indeed time apart was recognised as an important way for children to develop independence. One couple talked about waiting until their child had left an organisation before volunteering, as he hadn't wanted them to get involved: 'We fancied [volunteering] a little bit before, but with [our son] it was sort of, "Oh, I don't want to be going along there with my dad, let us have my own thing." So we waited a little bit longer until he went off to university before joining it properly.' This was acknowledged by at least one of our case study organisations, which had questioned the extent to which they should encourage parents to volunteer for activities in which their children were involved because they recognised that some young people's involvement represented the first thing that they had done independently of school or family: 'We're the first active decision they take for themselves'. To involve parents could take away from this.

Additionally, while children's activities can provide a route into volunteering for their parents, when those activities come to an end for the children, this can also mean the end of volunteering for parents. This was not always the case – we found examples of parents who had kept volunteering for groups that their children had left many years ago.

³⁰ See for example Brodie, E., Hughes, T. Jochum, V., Miller, S., Ockenden, N. and Warburton, D. (2011) *Pathways through Participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?* London: NCVO/IVR/Involve.
www.involve.org.uk/resources/publications/project-reports/pathways-through-participation (accessed September 2020)

Children's activities as a route into volunteering: Mr and Mrs Wilson

Husband and wife, Andy and Carmen, first got involved with volunteering at 'Parks Kids' in a casual, ad-hoc way when they took their three children (aged ten, seven and four) to the events: 'So I'd just naturally – I'd run round with my daughter or I'd grab a couple of elastic bands and help them out. Even if it's just standing on a corner giving the kids a high five just to motivate them, you know ... there's nothing better than a little bit of mutual support to keep them going when you can see they're tired'. After going along to the events and helping out for a year, they moved to a new area and approached Kids Run Free to set up a new 'Parks Kids' event in their new community. The children wanted to continue to be involved and the parents valued the enjoyment, exercise and time they spent together as a family: 'That's why I set it up, because they enjoy it, I want to carry that on, and if nobody else is going to do then you may as well do it yourself'.

Participation as a route into volunteering

Being a participant in or beneficiary of an organisation also provided a route into volunteering for young people themselves, sometimes on their own and sometimes alongside their parents. Sometimes there was a blurry line between being a participant and a volunteer, with no clear distinction between the two. In some cases, this move from participation to volunteering had been facilitated by organisations having a clear pathway, or route of progression, from participation into volunteering that was actively encouraged and supported. In others, young people found their own way. We shall return to this in the section below.

Other family members as a route into volunteering

The route into volunteering for some came from being encouraged to help out at an organisation by another family member. Sometimes this was in the form of a husband 'mucking in' to support his wife's volunteering by, for example, helping out at occasional events that his wife was organising, and at other times it was a more committed, sustained involvement. In such cases, while various family members got involved in volunteering, it was primarily driven by one person who got involved and then roped the others in. As one person put it:

"Once you step foot through that door, you don't get out again! And, if your family want to spend time with you, they have to come through the door with you! And, I say that in the nicest possible way, it's one of those things, it's like they see you doing something and, 'Oh I fancy having a bit of that' and they come and they try it, they enjoy it and they join in."

Some volunteers and family members themselves highlighted that they were not choosing to get involved; they felt obliged to help out a partner, for example, or had been told to help out by a parent. As one person said: 'It's more important for me than it is for them, they feel obliged to help me out, they certainly don't need to, but because I'm there every, one Saturday a month, I think my wife particularly has always felt obliged to turn up with me.' Generally, despite some resistance, being 'roped in' was reflected upon positively overall and had sometimes led to a lifelong commitment to an organisation. Indeed, in some cases we heard that while a child's volunteering may initially have been 'driven' by a

parent's, as they were roped in to help, over time this had changed. This was acknowledged by both parents and children:

“They would rather be doing their own thing, if I’m honest. My daughter was like ‘Mum must I?’, but then once she got there she used to enjoy it ... So she was okay once she was there, it was just getting her there that was the challenge.”

“... me mam and dad have been in [this organisation] ... since before I was born and that tends to be how I got involved because they were very, very active with [this organisation] ... it was a case of we got, I wouldn’t say ‘dragged along’ because a lot of the time we quite enjoyed it, but yeah... it’s been part of my life all my life.”

Family members as a route to volunteering: The Brown family

The Brown family – mum (Tina), dad (Alistair) and two children (Anna, 14 years old, and Emily, six years old) have all been involved in volunteering at Little Village to varying degrees. Tina has been quite heavily involved after first hearing about Little Village through another family-oriented charity. She is described by the family as the ‘linchpin’ who got them all engaged in different activities for the organisation, mostly in an ad-hoc way for Alistair, who helps out with some activities, and Emily, who is brought along sometimes. Anna was initially brought along by her mum, but has since been undertaking her own volunteering at Little Village as part of The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award. Initially, she felt her involvement was more motivated by her mum and less by her own choice, but having got more involved, she feels more self-motivated and especially enjoys coming with her friends, though she also sometimes participates with one of her parents: ‘I feel like it’s 60% my choice and 40% my mum’s ... if a teacher had suggested, “Why don’t you pop along?”, I would have said no, but I’m definitely glad I have. At the beginning it was probably 80% mum and 20% me but it has grown, and I definitely choose to come here...it’s a really good way to catch up with friends and at the end you feel satisfied you’ve done something really good, so I really enjoy coming.’

Family as a resource for volunteering

Families also provided a range of resources to enable volunteering to begin. Time and money were particularly highlighted here. Having more of these resources was generally thought to increase the chance of volunteering; having less of them created barriers to getting involved. We touch on how they relate to getting into volunteering here, and we shall return to them in section 4 when we discuss how they affect the ongoing experience of family volunteering.

As evidenced within the literature,³¹ time was thought to be an increasingly scarce resource, and a lack of it was identified as being a key barrier to volunteering by our case study families and organisations. Two developments were particularly highlighted as reducing the time that families had available to volunteer:

³¹ Wajcman, J. (2014) *Pressed for Time: The acceleration of life in digital capitalism*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

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increased working hours, particularly through rising female employment; the rise of children's leisure pursuits. Volunteering together as a family or volunteering alongside a child involved in an activity, however, were recognised as good ways to help to overcome time barriers and reduce time conflicts. Some people, for example, said that they were more likely to participate in volunteering at weekends if their children could be involved in the activity as well:

"On the weekends I'm more open for volunteering if it's something that would involve the kids and it's an experience that they would like... if it's a family activity and it's fun and it gets the kids out, then yeah, I think it's something that we would do more of."

It was also recognised that families often needed a certain level of financial security before they felt that they could volunteer. One member of a couple who undertakes full-time work, for example, may ensure that the family has enough financial resource to enable the other person to work part time and so have capacity (both time and financial security) to volunteer. Similarly, one parent (or grandparent) who looks after children may reduce childcare costs and so enable the other to go out and volunteer. One family, where three generations were volunteering alongside each other in the same organisation, reflected on how the grandmother had stepped back from her own volunteering roles to pick up some of the childcare activities in order to enable her daughter and grandchildren to do their 'activities', including volunteering.

Importantly then, these resources were not just individually held and drawn upon, but also pooled and shared across those families, enabling some or all of the members to engage in volunteering in ways which might not have been possible if they were reliant on their own individual resources. Single-parent families faced particular barriers through a lack of pooled resources. Further, when 'deciding' whether or not to take on a volunteering role, for some it was a conscious, collective, family (rather than individual) decision, made by weighing up all the resources alongside the other roles and responsibilities that they shared as a family:

"... for us it is very much the two of us [making decisions about volunteering] together, because [my husband] works full time, and he works away from home a lot, so I am on my own a lot here. He's really struggling to be chair of governors because he keeps not being here. I feel that I can do stuff on behalf of both of us, so as a family we have this lot of volunteering, maybe three-quarters of that is me doing it, but I can do it because of our situation, [my husband] can't, he's chocka, and when he's home he really wants to spend a bit of time with our daughter, so it's almost like, it's not us doing it individually, it's us as a family, what we can do in the circumstances we have."

For others it was more of an individual decision, although often made in relation to others within the family:

"I make my own decisions, but that's because my husband is still working full time so I'm a free agent to get on and do what I want, eventually it probably won't be like that, but it is at the moment."

We shall return to these points in section 4 when we consider how family resources affect not only access to volunteering but also the experience of volunteering once involved.

3.2. Mission and reach: why organisations get involved in family volunteering

When family volunteering had developed ‘by default’ within organisations, it was hard to identify why this had happened, other than a general sense that it had developed organically as a reflection of the organisation’s general mission, values and activities, and how embedded they are within the local community, for example. When family volunteering had been developed ‘by design’ or ‘extension’ however, two key sets of motivating factors were identified.

Family volunteering as a way to meet mission and values

For some organisations, developing family volunteering was seen as a way to meet its mission, to deliver on shorter term strategies and/or to reflect its values. This included organisations which aimed to educate and empower children, engage with families, be family friendly or embed themselves within the community.

It was suggested that it was those organisations which were particularly orientated to either families or communities through their mission and values that were most likely (and able) to actively encourage and facilitate family volunteering: it was something which naturally aligned to what they did more generally. For family-orientated organisations, for example, making volunteering accessible to families through being flexible, relatively informal, responsive to family needs and balanced in their response to safeguarding measures is easier than for other organisations, as it more closely aligns to what they do and how they work in general. As a respondent from one organisation put it: ‘Making sure it is accessible [for families] is one of the things that’s hard baked into any space we take on, it’s got to allow families to come in.’

For other organisations, family volunteering was seen as a way to help them become more family orientated. Here, involving family groups as volunteers was seen as a form of co-production: family members were encouraged not just to give their time but also to contribute ideas as to how activities could be delivered by the organisation to make them more appealing and accessible for families.

Meeting mission through family volunteering at Kids Run Free

Kids Run Free’s Park Kids programme is all about families and getting whole families involved and active. The 45-minute events, held weekly, fortnightly or monthly, rely on parents and other family members to not only bring their children to the events, but also encourage and motivate them: ‘Having their parents there is really, really important because it just relaxes them and it makes them more confident and comfortable’. Parents also play a key role in running many of the Park Kids events as volunteer race directors or in other formal roles, while others get involved in a more ad-hoc casual basis as and when help is needed: ‘The family for us is a key volunteer and more often than not, our volunteers have children with them, that’s what gets them involved or they’ve come to the event with the kids and they’ve realised that the event needs more volunteers to support it and then they’ll help

with that'. For some family volunteers, their involvement is regular and more formalised, whereas for others, it is informal and flexible. While the 'Parks Kids' events are family orientated, they are also community orientated, and the events aim to appeal to volunteers beyond families of existing participants: 'Although family is definitely at the heart of what we do, we want to appeal to everybody in the community ... so, we want everybody in the community to be involved, but we do also advertise that we're very much a family-friendly organisation; the event itself is for kids'.

Family volunteering as a way to widen participation

Some organisations had designed family volunteering schemes with the intention of widening participation in their organisation, particularly – but not limited to – diversifying their volunteer base. Family volunteering, for example, was seen to have the potential to overcome time pressures for people by enabling couples, or parents and children, to volunteer together, which would enable a wider range of people to get involved. Similarly, explicitly encouraging parents to bring children was seen as a way to overcome childcare as a barrier to volunteering and so widen participation. Encouraging parents and children to volunteer together was recognised as a way to overcome some of the concerns that organisations had about safeguarding when children were unaccompanied.

In some cases, it was hoped that there would be a wider knock-on effect, in terms of engaging more diverse volunteers through family volunteering and subsequently using this to demonstrate that they were an open and relevant organisation. One organisation, for example, talked about encouraging parents and children to volunteer together as a way to engage people from minority ethnic communities (particularly refugee groups) where the child is the main English speaker and so can act as an interpreter for a parent who would otherwise be/feel unable to participate due to the language barrier.

Little Village: Family volunteering as a way to widen participation

Volunteers within Little Village have to date been predominantly white and typically from a higher socio-economic background. To address this, the charity has been actively trying to diversify its volunteer base, particularly in terms of being more reflective of the community that it supports. In 2018, it received a grant to diversify volunteering, some of which was used to provide a crèche for one of its two family-friendly volunteering sessions. This was aimed particularly at enabling (and increasing) participation among beneficiary families that might not be able to afford childcare, yet were most likely to benefit from participating in volunteering. The crèche is run by two qualified childcare professionals, who also started out as former beneficiaries of Little Village before becoming volunteers and now staff members. Providing a secure environment, where parents can feel reassured of their child's safety, means that volunteers have choices about whether they have their children with them or in the crèche while volunteering. Providing this service for volunteers has also supported the organisation's conversations with referral partners, as it can provide a free, accessible, professional, safe space for children that partners can recommend to individuals in the community who might benefit. Although it is still early days, the initiative already seems to be attracting a more diverse pool of volunteers,

including people who had previously been service users. Attracting men, however, is an ongoing challenge.

Organisational barriers and limits to developing family volunteering

We heard from a number of organisations that wanted to develop family volunteering initiatives, but had experienced or perceived barriers to doing so. Reflective of the perception that family volunteering is about parents and children volunteering together, often these barriers were created through concerns about involving children or young people as volunteers: for example, would they be able to get insurance? How would they ensure they met safeguarding regulations? What roles or activities would or could children volunteer within? Would they be able to cope with the extra administration associated with the regulations around involving young people? Would they have the physical space to accommodate parents and children volunteering together? Sometimes these concerns reflected wider organisational cultures which themselves created barriers to the involvement of children. Concerns were also raised by some organisations about their capacity to manage family volunteers, perceiving family volunteering to be more resource intensive than other forms of volunteering.

Overcoming concerns and widening participation through family volunteering: the National Trust

The National Trust oversees cultural and conservation activities in heritage properties across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its engagement with family volunteers is one of the most well-known examples of family volunteering by design in the UK. Having incorporated inclusion into its last volunteering strategy in 2013, families are seen as important for diversifying its volunteering base.

The National Trust actively promotes [family volunteering](#) via its website and provides videos and case studies that mention how multiple families or different generations can volunteer together and a search engine for suitable opportunities. However, local properties are responsible for creating family volunteering activities at a local level based on their priorities. These family-friendly activities tend to involve practical outdoor activities, like harvesting vegetables and planting trees, and one-off events, like chalking the [White Horse](#).

The regional volunteering and participation consultants support local National Trust properties that want to develop family volunteering with guidance on designing activities and incorporating volunteering into local conservation plans. Despite initial scepticism about including families and managing additional insurance costs and DBS checks, local staff have been positive about what families have achieved.

The National Trust intends to hold a strategic review in the near future, which will explore ways to strengthen links with community groups and businesses, work with urban communities on green-space conservation and apply the new young people's strategy, which will all consider the role of family volunteering.

4. How? How family and organisational contexts shape family volunteering experiences

Key findings

- Family circumstances can make a considerable difference to the experience of volunteering.
- With ever-busy family lives, fitting volunteering in can be difficult, particularly when it is not given as much priority as other roles and responsibilities.
- There were important gender dimensions to volunteering within families.
- Sharing resources, including physical and emotional support, amongst families can be influential in sustaining volunteering: it becomes a team effort.
- What organisations do and how they do it can also make a difference to the opportunities for, experience of and outcomes of family volunteering.
- Creating a 'family-friendly' environment is significant. This included: actively encouraging families to get involved through a range of flexible opportunities; developing pathways through participation; supporting volunteers in ways which recognise and accommodate not just their individual circumstances, but also their family circumstances.
- Some organisations grapple with how to balance a desire to be inclusive, particularly of children, with a need to ensure safeguarding measures are followed.

Volunteering is a situated practice,³² shaped by the context in which it takes place. Here, we consider family context, particularly focusing on how people fit volunteering into their family lives or their lives around volunteering, and the importance of family as a source of emotional and practical support for volunteering. We then consider how the organisational context can affect families' experiences of volunteering, with a focus on elements that were highlighted as either enabling or constraining family volunteering.

4.1. How family life affects the volunteering experience

Fitting volunteering in

Volunteering is one of many roles and responsibilities that families juggle on an ongoing basis. People we spoke to talked about the busyness of their family life, particularly in terms of pressures from paid work, combined with a growing array of children's sporting activities, clubs and interests. Reflective of national evidence,³³ many felt that families were getting busier and more rushed, and that it was increasingly difficult to juggle everything. This was affecting the experience of volunteering for families. These wider developments were exacerbated for those who felt that the demands of volunteering itself were

³² Cornwall, A. (2002) 'Locating citizen participation', *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 49–58.

³³ See for example Wajcman, J. (2014) *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

intensifying. When volunteering was less intense, less frequent and/or more flexible, this was less of an issue.

Volunteering was often something that families fitted in, as and when they could, around other roles and responsibilities, such as paid work, caring responsibilities and leisure activities. Some made space for volunteering by fitting it into certain slots of time they had available around those other roles and responsibilities, such as during the school day on non-working days. What other roles and responsibilities people had to fit volunteering around depended in part on family life stage and changed over time. For some, there was a sense that it got easier to fit volunteering in as children got older and became more independent.

While some felt that volunteering was a distinct, separate activity, to be fitted in alongside other activities for others it was either an extension of or combined with those other activities, roles and responsibilities, making 'juggling' feel like less of an issue. For some, for example, volunteering was not seen to conflict with leisure time; it was a form of (serious) leisure³⁴ which extended from an interest such as sport, dance or music, and was talked about as a passion, something that was fun and enjoyable, if at times demanding. When parents and children were involved in the same activity – through volunteering for an activity that children were attending, bringing along children or volunteering together – this was seen as an effective way of combining both caring responsibilities and volunteering, and of enabling participation. Indeed, in this context, some volunteers said they didn't feel like they were volunteering at all, they were simply spending time with their children and having fun. Family volunteering became part of the family routine, part of family life, rather than something that needed to be made to fit in, as volunteering separately might. As one person reflected:

"I think it's about finding ways to include families because for a lot of people, it's how they balance that family time. They balance that family time because their kids are involved so it's okay for them to come along and do their [volunteering] stuff as well. We get a lot of single parents that join because their children are part of the youth units and the single parents join because actually, other than coming along to the youth unit, the only time they get adult interaction is when they drop their kids off at school. So, they join and they become a youth helper and they get, it gets them out of the house, they get a little bit of social time, they get, it has benefits for them."

In order to make volunteering fit, particularly when multiple family members were involved in multiple roles, people talked about the importance of being very organised, carefully planning their time and managing diaries across the whole family rather than just on an individual basis. Often the responsibility for managing the 'family schedule' fell to women, adding to their 'mental load'.³⁵ During a group interview with one family, the father reflected:

³⁴ See for example Stebbins, R. (2015) *Serious Leisure: A perspective of our time*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

³⁵ Emma (2017) 'The gender wars of household chores: a feminist comic', *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/26/gender-wars-household-chores-comic (accessed September 2020)

"there are some choices to be made of how things fit together and this lady here [wife] looks after the structure of the week and makes sure that it sort of fits."

Fitting family life around volunteering

For a few families, rather than fitting volunteering around other roles and responsibilities, they fitted family life around volunteering: 'So, yes, it wasn't [this organisation] being part of our lives, it was our lives fitting in with [this organisation].' For some, this meant sacrifices had been made: there was an opportunity cost for volunteering. Some, for example, felt they had neglected housework, gardening or leisure activities, as they had prioritised volunteering. We came across a couple of families that had delayed or cut short holidays to ensure they could meet their volunteering commitments. Reflecting on the level of commitment the family has made to volunteering, one person said: 'We also don't do anything outside volunteering, like normal family things are like very few and far between.' While this was generally reflected upon warmly within families (a standing family joke about having a messy house, for example), it could cause tensions within families when other things get neglected. This was particularly so when one part of a couple was more involved in volunteering than the other: 'It could be that the wife comes to do something but the husband doesn't and the husband says: "Well, I don't want you going every week to do something," it could be the reverse.' We return to these points in section 5 on the outcomes of volunteering.

For some, the juggling and meeting volunteering commitments can get too much, particularly when volunteering roles carry considerable levels of responsibility and/or at times when the demands from other roles are especially intense. As one person reflected, volunteering can become a 'job' that you have to fit into your 'spare time'.³⁶ A number of respondents talked about finding it hard to say no to requests to volunteer, whether to take on a new role or whether to increase their commitment within an existing one. For some, volunteering carried with it a considerable sense of duty, responsibility and obligation; to say no could be associated with feelings of guilt. These pressures felt particularly intense within families that were involved in multiple volunteering roles. It was suggested that these already 'busy people' were the most likely to be asked to volunteer, and there was a risk that they would feel pressured to go on taking on more and more until they reached breaking point. Once involved, some people found it hard to leave, particularly when their whole families were deeply embedded within an organisation. Some felt that the only thing to do was to break all connection with the organisation – to make a dramatic exit:

"...people kept saying, 'We know you don't want to do this and you're a bit too busy, but they've left and they've left and they've left...' and then I just got to the point where I said, 'I'm sorry, I can't do this anymore.'"

Fitting life around volunteering: The Taylors

The Taylor family – mum (Susan), dad (James), Graham and Eleanor (in their early 20s) are all involved as volunteers in St John Ambulance. Graham was the first to get involved in a Badger youth

³⁶ This chimes with other research, such as NCVO's 2019 [Time Well Spent](#) study, which found that one in five volunteers felt that their volunteering was becoming too much like paid work (p.9.)

group. They describe their family as 'busy', and 'very community orientated'; it is soon clear why. Last year, Susan and James volunteered for a combined total of nearly 3,000 hours with St John Ambulance. And this is only one of the organisations for which they volunteer. Susan also volunteers as a youth leader and on the council for her church; she is a school governor and heads up the local Women's Institute. Both Susan and James work full time, so most evenings are spent volunteering, with weekends spent preparing for the next week's volunteering activities. This doesn't leave much time for anything else: 'We also don't do anything outside volunteering, like normal family things are very few and far between.' They manage to fit everything in through being very organised: Susan manages the diary, keeping on top of everyone's schedules and planning the family calendar six months ahead. She said: 'In our diary we've actually got a list of all the duties that we expect to get and we plan around them, but that's our choice to plan around them, because you can always say no... so, as much as it does control our lives, that's our choice for it to control our lives, because we could say we're not doing any of those things'. For Eleanor, time to volunteer is juggled with her passion for dancing, which tends to take priority, university studies and paid work. They all talk enthusiastically about their volunteering, the opportunities it has given them, what they have achieved and the fun they have had along the way. For Susan and James, the opportunity to volunteer together after the children left home was particularly valued, after years spent supporting separate activities that the children were involved in.

Family support

The level of support for volunteering within/across a family can have an important influence on the possibilities for and experience of volunteering; this is critical if the volunteering role is particularly intense. This included both practical and emotional support.³⁷ Practical support can include: directly helping with a volunteering role that one member of the family leads on (we heard of children baking cakes or helping to prepare resources for a parent's voluntary role, husbands helping out with more physically demanding aspects of a role and wives doing the catering at events associated with their husband's voluntary role); providing transport or childcare to enable someone to volunteer.

Emotional support was also important. Families can be an important source of encouragement for volunteering, recognition and validation, a boost in confidence, an ear to listen after a stressful session, a shoulder to cry on and a person to vent to. As one person said of her partner and his support of her volunteering:

"He's a great sounding board so there are times when I've done a lot of stuff on my own and it's really nice to actually have that bit of stress alleviation, even if it is like having a bit of a yell at somebody sometimes but actually just take some of the pressure off me a little bit."

³⁷ Wider research evidence recognises the emotional and practical support that family members provide each other, in different contexts – see for example Swartz, T. (2009) 'Intergenerational family relations in adulthood: Patterns, variations, and implications in the contemporary United States', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 191–212.

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In supportive families, volunteering was described as a 'team effort', even when they weren't physically volunteering together:

"... as a family I think I sort of feel like we're a team and we'll support each other in stuff and we quite enjoy being together and doing things together when that happens but there aren't that many situations where we're explicitly volunteering together at the same time in the same place."

"... when I took on the chairmanship, I said to him [husband], 'What do you think?'; because I knew it was going to be taxing, shall we say. And he said, 'I think you can do it,' so that was good, and he realised, and he was such a support, he really was a very great support to me".

Even when volunteering wasn't physically done together, for some there was a sense that the psychological commitment to volunteering was a collective commitment.

A lack of support can cause tensions and resentments, making the continuation of volunteering difficult. We spoke to a number of people who had continued volunteering despite a lack of support for it from other family members, with knock-on effects on other areas of their lives. This lack of support can be reflective of underlying perceptions of and attitudes towards volunteering. Reflecting on conversations she had had with other volunteers, one person said:

"... .. it does...can cause quite a lot of tensions and sort of resentment, 'What are you doing that there for? You're not getting paid for this,' and I suppose it's the mind set isn't it?"

Levels of support for volunteering varied within and between families according to a number of factors, such as the nature of the relationships within families, the balance of other roles and responsibilities, family values, expectations within the family of certain individuals (often gender related) and the relative status of volunteering.

Family support: The Williams family

The Williams family consists of mum (Edith) and her two daughters (Jessica and Amelia) who are in their late 20s/early 30s. They all work and volunteer in a range of health, care and educational roles across the local community. Edith's parents were a big influence on the whole family's volunteering: her dad used to volunteer at a day-care centre and at the church they attended, while her mother was a Brownie leader. Edith used to help out with both. This has led to a lifelong passion for and commitment to volunteering and community support: she has been involved in the Brownies ever since. Edith is also heavily involved in St John Ambulance, a role that her daughters support her in both emotionally and practically. Jessica and Amelia, for example, both help to deliver youth work activities when they can, and when they can't attend sessions with their mum, they help her with the preparations for the session at the weekend. Talking about everything together also helps to take the burden off each other if things do get too much. They describe it as using each other's talents and interests, as working it out between them to make it happen and as being reflective of a wider sense that they have 'got each other's backs'. They describe themselves as a close-knit family who are intuitive about each other's needs. They reflect that not only does volunteering together 'feel good',

and represent a 'constructive use of time', it also 'teaches you a way of living and learning' and has contributed to them being a 'small family with big networks'. Enjoyment, they suggest, is key.

The status of and priority for volunteering

Within many of these findings are implicit or explicit messages about the relative status of volunteering, particularly compared with paid work. In general, it was suggested that societal changes, such as increased costs of living, were meaning that paid work was given priority over everything else, including volunteering. For some, this meant that it was hard to justify prioritising volunteering. For example, while it was generally seen as acceptable to ask grandparents to help out with childcare for paid work, this was not extended to volunteering. As one (very committed) volunteer, who was a single parent to three children, reflected:

"... my mam and dad have stepped in [to look after children] since I've started work. The volunteering never interfered, if that makes sense. It wasn't very often that me mam and dad needed to step in when I was volunteering; it was only if I was going on a training course over the weekend that they would step in then. But, school runs and things like that, the volunteering never got in the way of, I always made sure of that. Whereas paid work is paid work and you can't pay the mortgage without working."

The relative significance of and priority given to different roles and responsibilities was not static; it fluctuated and was influenced by different stages in family life. There was also a clear gender dimension within this. It was suggested, for example, that for many young couples (indeed young adults in general), paid work was the priority, as it was important to establish careers, and that demanding careers, particularly when involving a commute, left little time for volunteering. As one person put it: 'We didn't volunteer as young adults because we just worked'. Priorities and pressures changed with the arrival of children, and indeed grandchildren. Some changes led to volunteering being reprioritised (for example, supporting children's activities); others had the opposite effect. Other key 'moments' included: moving house and wanting to integrate into a new community; changing jobs; retirement; having ageing/ailing parents. Volunteering doesn't necessarily stop and start as people move through various family life stages but often changes as people readjust their priorities and commitments.

The relative status of volunteering was raised as a particular issue for women volunteering when on maternity leave or while working as homemakers. Some women, for example, suggested that volunteering was given a lower status than paid work, with implications for whether their partners would support their volunteering and whether they themselves felt that they could legitimately expect others to share their other roles and responsibilities in order to be able to volunteer:

"There's a hierarchy and volunteering doesn't come up as high as I'd like it to, it's something that you do, you go to Pilates and you do a bit of volunteering, it feels a bit like that...that's why I try and talk about it a lot and it's becoming something more valid...my husband will get his company to put money into it so that feels like it's a validity that's beginning to take on but that full support of 'you've got to go and do that, so I'll have to pick up the slack' – that doesn't exist."

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In some families, volunteers actively chose to talk about their volunteering as ‘work’ or as a ‘job’ in an attempt to raise its status and to justify their involvement to themselves and/or to others within their family and beyond:

“I really pushed that, I call it ‘I’m going to work’ and I make [my husband] do the school run on the days I work so that Wednesday morning is counted as ‘I’m working’. I do get pushbacks sometimes that ‘it’s not really’, not because they’re mean but that’s just because that’s what it’s seen as but then [my husband] and I really correct them and say ‘Not just because I don’t get paid doesn’t mean it’s not work.’”

Different perceptions of volunteering: Asma and her family

One family we spoke to came from Pakistan to live in Manchester six years ago. The status of volunteering within the family illustrates how understandings of volunteering may vary according to people’s cultural background. Asma volunteers for the Whitworth several times a week, and sometimes she volunteers with her younger brother. Her father has not been supportive of her volunteering for a range of reasons – partly because it’s not paid, partly because he wants his daughter to give priority to her duties at home, but also because it’s not something he is familiar with. In the UK, a lot of emphasis is placed on formal volunteering in an organisational setting like the Whitworth. But volunteering also happens more informally through people helping out and supporting each other or carrying out charitable actions, and this is what Asma’s father has been used to and sees in a positive light. For instance, during Ramadan, Asma cooks extra food and goes with her brother to give it to the homeless, and the family has helped neighbours who recently arrived in England with administrative tasks such as registering at the local GP surgery and school. Despite a lack of support from her father, Asma has pressed ahead with her volunteering, often working late into the evening to ensure her domestic duties are met so that she is free to volunteer. Indeed, she has now encouraged her teenage brother to volunteer with her during the school holidays, another brother to participate in activities at the gallery and her mother to come along to various events and exhibitions. Volunteering has been beneficial for Asma’s mental health and transformative for her relationships within the family.

4.2. How organisation affects families’ volunteering experiences

A range of organisational features were also identified as being particularly significant in shaping families’ experiences of volunteering.

A family-friendly approach

Creating a family-friendly environment and approach to volunteer involvement was a way of enabling and enhancing the family volunteering experience, particularly when the focus was on the involvement of parents and children. This included providing childcare facilities, enabling parents to bring children with them, ensuring volunteering roles and activities were fun and enjoyable for all ages and inviting family members to volunteer training days or celebration events. Putting such things in place helped to support

the involvement of people who would otherwise not be able to volunteer, including parents of young children. Comments included:

"...so it's that real feeling of doing something good and I think that's what also keeps them there and the fact that their children are having a great time, naturally enough you're going to keep bringing them back, aren't you?"

"I'm worried that I might just get in the way in just being there, but I think everybody here was like you do what you can do around your baby and any bit of help does help!"

It was suggested that one of the keys to making family volunteering work was the recognition and understanding of the context of families – 'being mindful of what else pulls on them' as one person put it. In particular, this meant being mindful of some of the challenges around the unpredictability of family life, organising childcare and the limited time that parents have, and the benefits that volunteers can gain whether volunteering with their family or as an individual in a family context.

Being family friendly was not limited to organisations with specifically designed family volunteering schemes, nor was it limited to volunteering. Indeed, for some organisations it reflected their wider ethos and/or mission, and this had contributed to an extensive engagement with family volunteering by default. One person talked about it as reflecting the 'organisational personality', whereby bringing family members along – whether you were a volunteer, a member of staff or a participant/service user – had become 'part of the socially acceptable narrative'.

Family-friendly opportunities: Little Village

Reflective of the organisation's mission and ethos, Little Village offers a family-friendly environment, in which family volunteering is actively encouraged. On two mornings a week, special sessions are run to enable volunteers to bring their children along with them. As one volunteer said: 'Everyone here is particularly family oriented so that is a big part of it that I'm able to bring the children, a lot of people have been DBS checked by the process so as much as you can in any large social situation, they are with you, near you.' While volunteers can bring children to both these sessions, with volunteers often looking out for each other's children, on one day a week a crèche is provided to enable volunteers to focus on their volunteering while feeling reassured that their child is being looked after nearby. More generally, the organisation is flexible and provides a range of opportunities across the week for different family members. Older children of adult volunteers, for example, can volunteer as part of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and/or during special sessions in the summer holidays; younger children are found age-appropriate tasks to help out with: 'Depending on the age of the children, we will get them involved...we've got puzzles they can pair, a knife, fork, spoon they can match together. We try and make sure that if children are involved and part of their experience of volunteering, that we look at what they can get out of it, what they can do together, can they do something together that is at the right level for a child of three.' Volunteers are encouraged to bring family members along with them to social/celebratory events. Creating family-friendly opportunities had been particularly important for

the inclusion of their volunteers who were former beneficiaries of their service, who may want to give back to the organisation but do not have childcare.

Flexibility and variety

Being flexible was frequently identified as being an important way for organisations to enable families to volunteer, ensuring that volunteering can fit around other commitments. Flexibility was important in terms of the time commitments required of volunteers, for example creating roles that could be undertaken at different times of the day and week (school hours suited some; evenings and weekends suited others) or not requiring a regular commitment but allowing more episodic involvement. This helped to reduce barriers to participation, making it easier to fit volunteering around family life. This was recognised by organisations and volunteers alike:

“We try to make sure that we’re offering really flexible opportunities through the week that will fit with people’s lifestyles and they can fit volunteering in and it balance, not being too much of something or the other, so volunteering that fits with family life.”

“This charity, you can come here with your baby or you can also come once a month or every two weeks, so the commitment is flexible, so that was one of the reasons why [I volunteered].”

Allowing family members to share volunteer roles was also identified as being an important form of flexibility. Sharing a volunteer role (especially when it was particularly onerous) with another family member, or indeed with someone else from the local community, was highlighted as a way for volunteers to manage the volunteering commitment and balance it with family life: ‘That really supported my family and my lifestyle and commitments outside of [volunteering in this organisation]’. Similarly, it was suggested that organisations should be mindful of family preferences regarding volunteering together or alongside, being flexible enough to enable a balance between the two. Some families expressed frustration that they had been volunteering alongside each other within an organisation, but had not had the opportunity to see each other or do anything together, making them feel like they were being treated more like workers than volunteers:

“I think that’s the thing with volunteering isn’t it? Sometimes people, people in management roles within volunteering organisations, sometimes they forget that we’re volunteers, and I see that not just in [this organisation]. They forget that you’re volunteering and actually you don’t have to, and I bet that happens in all volunteer organisations. It becomes as if it’s your work, but it’s not your work. Actually if it’s not what you want to do, you’ll not do it. So it could be that if we want to spend some time together, we could say ‘Well, if we’re not together, we’re not coming’.”

Flexibility was also talked about in terms of enabling volunteers to engage in a wide range of roles and activities, ensuring that there was enough variety to suit different – and changing – interests, needs and time constraints. Having a variety of flexible opportunities was seen as particularly important when engaging with different generations: different roles and activities were needed to suit different age groups. As one respondent reflected:

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"... it's the family as a unit but also individuals within that and ... if a family is coming in, it's not necessarily that they're coming in as a one point to do the same thing, it's allowing that opportunity for each of the family members to come and do the bits that they enjoy and the bits that they're wanting to do..."

Being flexible also meant organisations recognising that volunteering isn't static: it changes with people's life course. It was important for them to consider how they might accommodate potential breaks in volunteering (for example, no longer having time to volunteer due to the arrival of a new baby or taking care of a sick relative), keeping in touch when appropriate and welcoming people back when their situation altered.

Almost complete flexibility at the Whitworth

Within its discrete family volunteering programme, volunteering at the Whitworth is very flexible, allowing volunteering to slot in around family needs. Most of the volunteers in the scheme have young children, and this flexible approach allows them to fit volunteering around children's routines and the somewhat-unpredictable nature of family life. Indeed, the activities that family volunteers are involved in are structured so that they could run if the family volunteers didn't turn up: no activity is entirely dependent on the family volunteers, as other volunteers or members of staff are also involved. There is a degree of formality with some processes in place around recruitment and health and safety, but the gallery prioritises the needs of family volunteers and is able to adapt. The gallery's approach to family volunteering has been largely influenced by the volunteer manager's own experience, as she has a young family and volunteers with her three-year-old daughter. Because of the very flexible approach and tailored support provided to volunteers, family volunteering is considered more resource intensive than other forms of volunteering. Staff at the gallery believe that they could attract more families if they promoted family volunteering more widely, but they don't feel they currently have the capacity to manage this potential growth.

Diversity and inclusion through flexibility and variety within family volunteering: the Scouts

Throughout its history, the Scouts have involved parents as volunteers for events, camps and outdoor activities. In recent years, it has responded to changing family needs with a more flexible and varied volunteering offer. For example, in response to being approached by families from Muslim communities, it has assisted them to set up over 200 local sections nationwide. To support this, it established the Muslim Scouts Fellowship to train parents to become Scout leaders and allows them to bring their families along to weekend training events where it provides children's activities.

It has also been involved in a Department for Education-funded [early years pilot](#) to address child attainment gaps across five English locations. Adults over 18 bring a four- to five-year-old close relative – mostly parents with their child – to a Scouts location where they are supported and trained by a volunteer to deliver communications group activities (both written and verbal). Pilots have benefited from a flexible definition of close relatives – for example, a grandparent can take a

grandchild to events held after school or on weekend days if a parent has work or childcare responsibilities.

Progression and pathways

Alongside providing a variety of flexible roles and activities, supporting progressions within them was also seen as important. Creating a pathway for people to come into an organisation and gradually move through different forms of engagement, roles and responsibilities was seen as being particularly important for facilitating: young people's move from participant/service user to volunteer; parents' move from helping out with activities their children were involved in to a wider, more sustained engagement. This enabled family volunteering to move from 'do for', to 'do together', to 'do alongside'. As one person reflected:

"...effectively that's how you end up with whole families being involved because you get young ones that are attending class, middle aged, you know older teenagers who are helping out as young helpers and then parents who might be on a committee or volunteering as an adult helper from a ratio point of view."

Having pathways into different roles was also important for those who, due to age, ill health or changes in circumstances and family needs, needed to step back from a role that had considerable responsibility or was particularly physically or emotionally demanding, but wished to keep helping out in less intense ways. Finding ways to continue to involve people in new roles more suited to their changed capability and/or capacity was felt to be particularly important when volunteers – and their families – had been involved for long periods of time and the family had become particularly embedded within the organisation. This could be a sensitive issue and could sometimes mean moving people on from a role or organisation, or helping them to allow themselves ('giving them permission') to step back, which could have considerable ramifications for that person:

"So, if something happens and we take that away from them, that's ultimately putting somebody into a situation where you're taking their whole social and their whole meaning away from them."

Some organisations we spoke to had clear routes, or pathways, into and through volunteering, particularly those that provided services and activities for young people (encouraging young people who attended activities to gradually take on responsibility for supporting, delivering and leading those activities, for example). In others, it felt more as if the volunteers were left to find their own way. There was a suggestion in some organisations that traditional pathways, which had previously facilitated family volunteering, had begun to break down due, in part, to societal changes, but also to a lack of attention or leadership. In one case, it was suggested that there used to be a 'natural migration' of parents from volunteering to help with activities in which their children were involved to wider roles within the organisation, and of young people from attending an activity as a participant to volunteering to help with the running of that activity and then to wider roles. However, this 'flow' had been neglected, and opportunities to engage families, and build involvement across generations, had been missed.

Natural progression: Family volunteering at St John Ambulance

As a large organisation that is heavily reliant on volunteers, St John Ambulance has a broad range of opportunities. As well as being focused on different activities and practical tasks, opportunities carry with them various levels of responsibility and require different skills, competencies and time commitments. This is seen to facilitate the involvement of multiple family members within the organisation, while also enabling the progression of individual family members, both of which contribute to volunteer retention. As one person reflected: 'So, you can bring your whole family to Saint John because we have offers for different ages, we have offers for different intensities. Because we work outside of the working day, in the evenings and the weekends and stuff, it is something you can do on family time.' Another said: 'So, the structure if you like is quite volunteer-focused and volunteer-led, so there's lots of opportunities for volunteers to progress and take increasing responsibility in the charity, which is probably one of the things that opens up this kind of sense of where families can get involved in lots of different ways, lots of different areas, etc.' While the organisation has never had a specifically designed scheme for family volunteering, it is implicitly welcomed, encouraged and celebrated: 'But, we celebrate it, we talk about it wonderfully, it's an organisation that celebrates and recognises long service, it's an organisation that recognises the value of this and that holds up young people as these wonderful examples to society and to a future.' Recently, St John Ambulance has done more to actively encourage parents of children attending the youth groups to become leaders, through for example the 'three week challenge'. As one person explained: 'You say, "Can you come and help us for three weeks?" and the chances are by three weeks you've either fallen in love with it or somebody has press-ganged you into doing something else so then that's it, that's how you do it, you recruit by stealth!'

Balancing risk and regulation

A particular challenge identified for family volunteering was risk and regulation (especially safeguarding), as well as wider associated processes of formalisation and professionalisation. These tended to work against the enabling elements outlined above, such as flexibility and allowing volunteers to bring children along. The balance that organisations struck between risk and regulation, and flexibility and formality, was influential. Due to safeguarding concerns, some organisations had adopted blanket policies on the involvement of young people which effectively ruled out volunteering amongst under-16-year-olds, creating a barrier to certain forms of family volunteering. Fears and uncertainties about what was and wasn't allowed in terms of involving young people had led some organisations to be particularly cautious. Others had adopted a more nuanced approach, acknowledging that there was a 'fine line' between making sure volunteering opportunities were accessible, flexible and informal and having robust safeguarding and health and safety policies and procedures in place. Overall, it was suggested that safeguarding concerns were making it harder to involve young people as volunteers, for parents to bring children along when they volunteered and for parents to help out in activities in which their children were involved:

"... ..When I was [my daughter's] age, grandparents, parents and kids would be in together, because it was okay for kids to come along. Whereas now, it's not so much okay so when I was a

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young adult, so when [my children] were born, they would come along to the events with me ... whereas that's not okay anymore. "

Even when policies allowed for young people to volunteer, concerns about safeguarding held by staff or other volunteers could create a resistance to volunteering alongside young people. As one young volunteer reflected:

"To be fair, like when I go out on duties because ... I'm still a [young volunteer], there has to be certain numbers and it kind of feels as if people like dread having [young volunteers] there because they need to worry about paperwork, safeguarding, not leaving them alone and stuff which can sometimes make you feel like a bit of a burden ..."

More broadly, it was suggested that over the past couple of decades, the tendency had been for organisations to become more formalised, professionalised and centralised, which had worked against flexibility and inclusivity, and against family volunteering by default or by extension. A growing amount of 'red tape' created barriers and was contributing to a suggested decline in multigenerational family volunteering in particular. For some organisations, the introduction of a specifically designed, discrete family volunteering scheme had been a way to overcome some of these developments.

Developing opportunities while managing risks: Royal Voluntary Service

Royal Voluntary Service is a charity that encourages volunteering through supporting people in hospitals and helping to improve the wellbeing of older people in the community. The charity has shifted towards recruiting a more diverse pool of volunteers by addressing barriers to participation, one of which is childcare responsibilities for parents and grandparents.

To accommodate this, Royal Voluntary Service has changed the way that it both recruits and engages volunteers. First, volunteer recruitment campaigns are tailored to appeal to parents and are clear they are able to volunteer with their children. Second, Royal Voluntary Service uses a non-prescriptive recruitment model based on what the individual wants to do and brokers arrangements where volunteers can bring or volunteer with any child below the age of 14.

These approaches have resulted in major challenges to managing risk. Royal Voluntary Service has worked with its insurance company to demonstrate that it could manage the safeguarding risks. For example, depending on the role, the charity allows children to participate in lower-risk home companionship or community group activities – especially where children can bring a special type of interaction with older people – but not with higher-risk people like those recovering from illnesses or a stay in hospital.

Helping organisations overcome barriers to engagement: Family Volunteering Club

The Family Volunteering Club's launch was motivated by one mum's experience of how difficult it had been to find opportunities to volunteer with her child. Starting in Lambeth and Southwark, the Family Volunteering Club has been working with organisations to create family volunteering events in local communities that are easy and fun to be involved in. A core part of its mission is connecting families and children with their communities – especially in a more transient city like London.

As part of its community-centred mission, Family Volunteering Club started by engaging with local families and organisations. During its three-month pilot in late 2019, it advertised at schools, libraries and community centres, asked families to complete a questionnaire on what they wanted to do and approached local volunteer-involving organisations to discuss and organise events. Successful activities included maintaining a miniature railway at the London Transport Museum, sorting donations at Ronald McDonald House, gardening at Draper Hall and carolling for Waterloo Foodbank.

Initial feedback indicates that families value their contribution to the community, seeing children learn about what local charities do and charitable giving, and, for families without access to their own garden, being exposed to new activities like gardening. Going forward, Family Volunteering Club will be growing its programme in London with a focus on widening participation for groups such as families with English as a second language, as well as piloting the programme in other locations across the UK.

5. To what effect? The outcomes of family volunteering for families and organisations

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.³⁸ 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

³⁸ 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;³⁹ 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."

³⁹ 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:

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"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

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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.⁴⁰ 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

⁴⁰ 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,⁴¹ 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-year-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.

⁴¹ 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,⁴² 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

⁴² 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’⁴³) 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 research⁴⁴ 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.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ 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,⁴⁵ 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

⁴⁵ 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.