The impact of verbatim quotations on research users: Qualitative exploration

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Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction

This short paper presents findings from one component of a larger study of the theory, practice and impact of using verbatim quotations in reporting applied social research. The paper is concerned with the impact on a small group of research users of reading, in a research report, the spoken words of people who took part in an exploratory qualitative study.

The overall study was funded by the ESRC, and conducted by the Social Policy Research Unit during 2002-05. The component reported here took place in May 2005. An earlier report (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005b) presented the impact on research participants of the way their spoken words were included in a written report of their views and experiences of using a local service which aims to support people in moving towards paid work through taking part in volunteering. This paper goes further in our empirical exploration and reports research users' reactions to reading the same report.

The first part of the chapter summarises the overall ESRC funded study; explains how the component reported here fits within this study, and explains the methodological approach used in this component. The second chapter presents the findings. The third chapter reflects on these findings alongside the views of those who initially spoke the words presented and we see whether the speakers' expectations and concerns were reflected in the readers' response.

1.1   The overall study

Qualitative approaches in social research have become popular and influential among UK policy makers (Lessof and Squires, 1997; DSS, 1998). Qualitative research methods are adopted widely across areas including health and social care, education, psychology, employment and housing policy. Including verbatim quotations from research participants has become effectively standard practice in much reporting of applied social policy research. Many of the frameworks and tools which have emerged recently for assessing quality of research evidence (see Spencer *et al.*, 2003) point to inclusion of quotations as enhancing quality in various ways. However, until very recently, it was hard to find a well developed conceptual and theoretical basis for inclusion of verbatim quotations within social researchers' written texts. Explanations of the processes of transcription, selection and editing were relatively rare in research reports. There were few examples of investigation of the impact of quotations on readers, or issues that arose for those who spoke the words.

Against this background, the aim of the authors' overall study was to investigate inclusion of research participants' verbatim quotations within written reports of applied social research, from the perspectives of researchers, research users and people who take part in social research.

Specific objectives were:
- to review conceptual and theoretical arguments for using verbatim quotations in presenting findings;
- to explore current practice and beliefs among social researchers;
- to explore expectations and preferences of users of research;
- to investigate views of those who speak the words which are presented;
- to test, among a range of readers, accessibility, acceptability and impact of different ways of including verbatim quotations in research accounts.
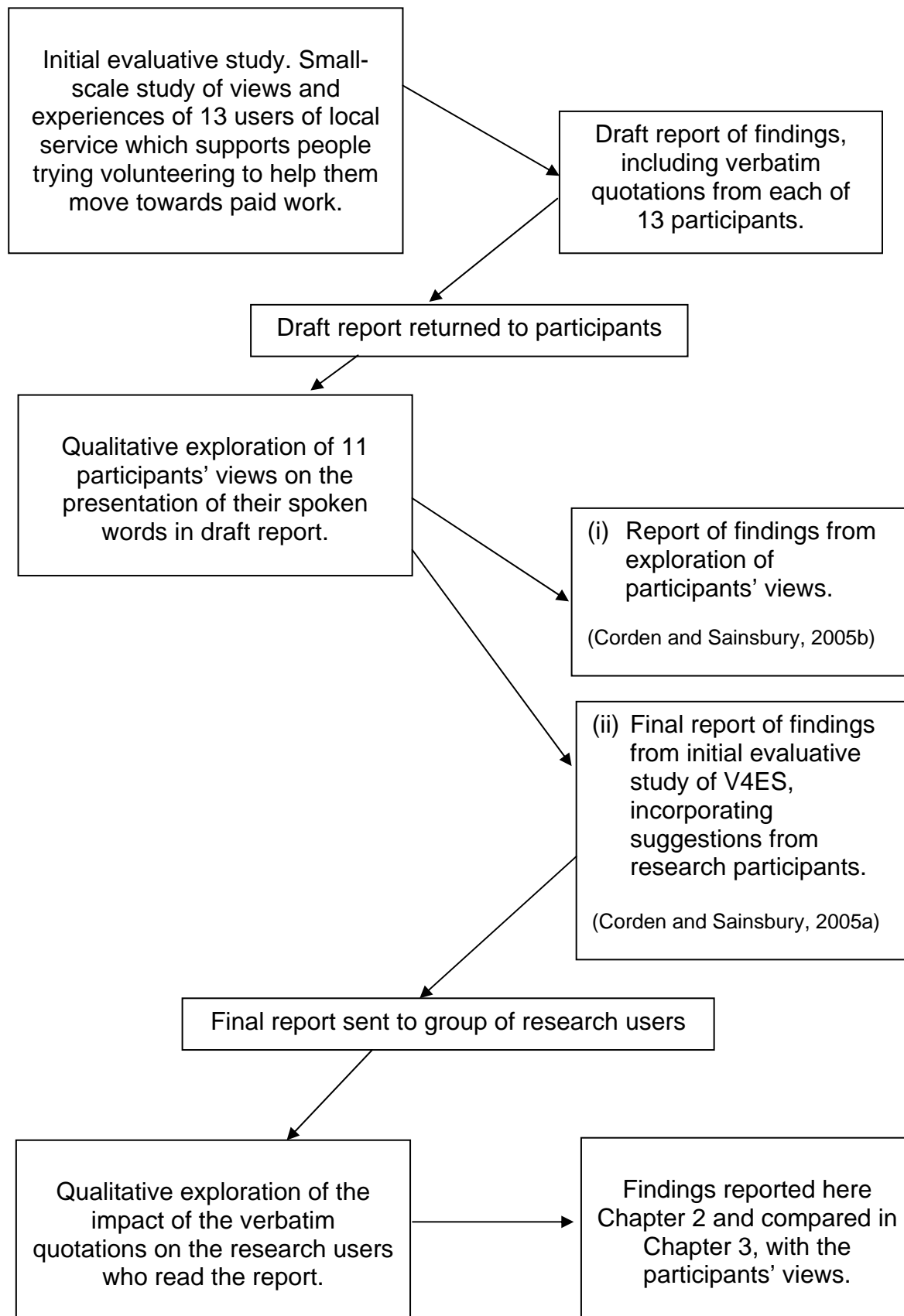
The overall study had a four-stage design, using different research approaches to address the various objectives outlines above (ESRC application H333 250 002). This report is concerned solely with one component of the overall study, which was designed to investigate the views of research participants in a small qualitative study on the way the authors of the research report used their spoken words as 'quotations', alongside the views of research users who read the same report. The first part of this empirical investigation, exploring the views of the speakers of the words, has been reported separately (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005b). Here we are concerned with the second part of the empirical investigation, exploring the impact of the spoken words presented in that report on a small group of research users who read the report.

The chapter goes on to describe the research approach adopted.

1.2   The approach

The empirical investigation had an iterative and developmental design, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1   The developmental study

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ Initial evaluative study. Small-│           ┌──────────────────────┐
│ scale study of views and        │           │ Draft report of      │
│ experiences of 13 users of local│ ────────▶ │ findings, including  │
│ service which supports people   │           │ verbatim quotations  │
│ trying volunteering to help them│           │ from each of         │
│ move towards paid work.         │           │ 13 participants.     │
└─────────────────────────────────┘           └──────────────────────┘
                    │
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        ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
        │ Draft report returned to participants │
        └──────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│ Qualitative exploration of 11   │           ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ participants' views on the      │ ────────▶ │ (i)  Report of findings  │
│ presentation of their spoken    │           │      from exploration of │
│ words in draft report.          │           │      participants' views.│
└─────────────────────────────────┘           │                          │
                    │                          │ (Corden and Sainsbury,   │
                    │                          │ 2005b)                   │
                    │                          └──────────────────────────┘
                    │
                    │                          ┌──────────────────────────┐
                    │                          │ (ii) Final report of     │
                    └────────────────────────▶ │      findings from       │
                                               │      initial evaluative  │
                                               │      study of V4ES,      │
                                               │      incorporating       │
                                               │      suggestions from    │
                                               │      research participants.│
                                               │                          │
                                               │ (Corden and Sainsbury,   │
                                               │ 2005a)                   │
                                               └──────────────────────────┘
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                    ▼
        ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
        │ Final report sent to group of research users │
        └──────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────┐           ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Qualitative exploration of the  │           │ Findings reported here   │
│ impact of the verbatim          │ ────────▶ │ Chapter 2 and compared in│
│ quotations on the research users│           │ Chapter 3, with the      │
│ who read the report.            │           │ participants' views.     │
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The first stage was a small scale evaluative study of the views and experiences of a group of people who had been in touch with Volunteering for Employment Skills (V4ES). V4ES is a local service which offers advice and support to people who are interested in trying volunteering as a way of helping them towards paid work. Managers of this service were keen to know if and how this service helps people and whether they could improve it, and asked the Social Policy Research Unit to conduct a small study to provide information to help. The aim of the initial study was to explore the views of people who had been in touch with V4ES on:

- what helped them towards paid work and what made this hard;
- what was their experience of volunteering;
- what role had V4ES played;
- what else would be helpful.

Full details of recruitment are reported elsewhere (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005a). Thirteen people who had been in touch with V4ES during the past year agreed to meet one of the researchers and take part in a tape-recorded interview. They were invited to participate in the research on the basis that the researchers would show them a report of the findings, and return for further discussion about the way their views were included. The researchers undertook to take such views into account when writing a final version of the report so that all participants would be happy with the way they were included. Everybody who took part in an initial interview about volunteering agreed to meet the researcher again. Some said at this stage that it would be hard for them to read a report and the researchers said they would send a tape-recorded version.

The researchers conducted a thematic analysis of the material in the transcripts from the initial interviews; wrote a short draft report of findings which included verbatim quotations from each of the 13 participants and mailed this to participants. Those who had said reading would be hard received a tape-recorded version of the draft report, in which the verbatim quotations were read by research unit staff of appropriate gender. The researchers then got in touch by telephone and arranged an appointment for a second interview with 11 of the original 13 people. They were unable to make contact with two men from the original group.

In the second-stage interviews the focus was the research report and the way people's own words were represented. The researchers led discussion to explore people's reactions to seeing or hearing their own spoken words in a research report, and preferences and views on issues such as selection, editing, format and attribution. Transcripts from these tape-recorded interviews were again subject to a thematic analysis. Full details of the methods summarised so far, and the findings from the second stage of enquiry are reported elsewhere (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005b).

The researchers continued in the iterative design. Views and preferences of the research participants were taken fully into account in completing the final evaluative report for the service managers (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005a). It is this final version of the report on service users' views and experiences of V4ES which was taken forward into the third stage of the work. We go on to describe the approach adopted.

The researchers wished to explore the impact of the verbatim quotations presented in the V4Es report with relevant research users, in a number of group discussions. Group discussions provide a useful way of exploring perceptions and beliefs among people who have a common interest or basis of experience. Observing what people talk about when they come together, which ideas are shared and what becomes a focus of interest provides valuable insight. The researchers believed that bringing together in discussion groups relevant research users who had already read the V4ES report would provide rich and interesting material about the impact of the quotations.

In deciding who to invite to the group discussions, the manager of V4ES who commissioned the initial evaluative research would be a key contributor, and had already expressed interest in attending. For further recruitment from the wider community of research users the researchers had to address a number of issues. First, attending a group discussion generally requires at least two hours time commitment, including travelling time. Taking part in a group would also involve reading the report in advance. Together, this would represent a major commitment for others who might be invited, who would generally be fairly senior personnel from, for example, government departments, and commercial and voluntary organisations. The researchers were unable to offer a fee for attendance. People most likely to be interested in attending were those for whom the topic of the report (volunteering and employability) was directly relevant for their own work. They might see advantages in having early access to an interesting research report, and value an opportunity to discuss issues with a range of other interested people. Another group of people who might accept invitations would be research users who were themselves already interested in the issue of use of verbatim quotations in research reports. The authors were already engaging with people in this group in a separate component of the overall ESRC study, and a number had already been approached to take part in face-to-face interviews. This somewhat reduced the pool from which participants in group discussions might be invited.

Taking these factors into account, the researchers decided to focus recruitment among personnel in government departments, and business and voluntary organisations who were known to have interest in and/or practical experience of the links between volunteering and employability. Supporting people in volunteering is a key component in many active labour market programmes, thus has policy relevance within the Department for Work and Pensions, Department for Education and Skills and the Home Office. Volunteering and employability is of policy interest within local

and area regeneration initiatives, and strategies for social inclusion. Taking part in voluntary activities is encouraged in some rehabilitation and healthy living programmes. Organisations which are themselves built around the concept of voluntary activity have general interest in motivation and support for volunteering. A number of major UK companies are developing initiatives which support and fund volunteering. The researchers started by targeting ten people from such backgrounds, sent letters of explanation and invitation (see Appendix A), and followed these up with informal telephone calls.

It proved hard to convene discussion groups for this stage of the research. Everybody approached said they were interested, and thought the event would be useful, but few felt able to spare the time, given their other commitments. Suggestions of alternative dates or venues made no difference. In the event four people agreed to take part in a group discussion, were mailed a copy of the final evaluative report and asked to try to read this in advance. On the day, one person experienced problems on the journey and did not arrive, but kindly offered to meet separately with the researchers at a later date. As we see in the following chapter, the one small group discussion generated rich and useful material. However, in view of limited resources and such problems with recruitment the researchers decided not to try to convene further discussion groups.

The discussion took place in a central London venue. Those who took part included the manager of V4ES, two senior officials from government departments and units, and both researchers. The discussion lasted for one and a half hours and, with participants' permission, was tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Discussion was moderated mainly by one researcher, using a topic guide (Appendix B) to steer the discussion through topics including the impact of the verbatim quotations on their understanding and assessment of findings; and aspects of presentation of quotations, such as layout, length and attributions. To stimulate discussion, the moderator showed some prepared material with alternative forms of presentation of the same content of the report (Appendix C).

It is important to explain further some aspects of management of the discourse in the discussion. The researchers sought to observe and understand how people made sense of the quotations in the report. As part of this exploration the researchers were interested to know how the research users had interpreted the researchers' approach to using quotations, which they had explained in the introductory chapter. Thus in the group discussion the researchers particularly avoided correcting any wrong assumptions, or providing answers when those taking part were uncertain about the researchers' intentions or meanings. Rather, they tried to seek further clarification for the reasons behind wrong assumptions or uncertainties and not close down the discussion with their own explanations.

The analysis of material in this one transcript has been based on careful reading of the transcript, and extraction of data using thematic headings. The headings reflect concepts and issues already identified as important in previous parts of this study, including the topics identified as salient by those who spoke the words in the V4ES report. At the same time, the researchers looked carefully for any new concepts, linkages or explanations emerging.

1.3   The intial evaluative V4ES report

Readers who are interested can read for themselves the V4ES report and the verbatim quotations which participants in this group were discussing (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005a). It is useful to make some observations about this report before moving to the presentation of findings from the group discussion.

The evaluative study was developed and conducted by the researchers according to their usual standards of working at the Social Policy Research Unit. In comparison with other similar research reports from qualitative studies routinely written by the researchers there were some differences in writing and presentation in the V4ES report. The draft report were purposefully kept fairly short as it was important that the research participants were encouraged to read as much as possible, and at least the chapters presenting findings. The fact that the report was relatively short does not, however, reflect selectivity in reporting findings. The topic was fairly focused, and conducted with a small group of people, some of whom had less tos ay than others about some of the topics of enquiry. All relevant findings form the interviews are included in the report. The descriptive, contextual material about individuals is presented succinctly because of the need to maintain anonymity for service users of a relatively small, local project. To accommodate a wide range of reading skills among participants there were probably more sub-headings than the authors would usually include.

There are many different ways of selecting, using and presenting verbatim quotations in research reports, which the authors will discuss in forthcoming publications from the overall ESRC-funded study. In this report, the authors selected and used quotations in two main ways. Some of the quotations show the kinds of terms and concepts which people used when they talked and how these linked together. Some of the quotations show strength of feeling (satisfaction, enjoyment, disappointment or hurt), confusions or hesitations. We considered this approach appropriate to the policy context of the study; the aims, design and conduct, and the nature of the evidence collected; the analytical techniques; and the form of output likely to be useful to the sponsor, and a wider readership in the field of employment programmes. This approach to using primary data in this way is generally supported by authors such as Bogdan and Taylor (1975), Patton (2002) and White *et al.* (2003). That said, there were probably more verbatim quotations than the authors would normally

include. This was so that they could explore everybody's reactions to seeing or hearing their own words. Spoken words from everybody who took part were included at least once, and most people's twice or three times, so that everybody might be shown how their words were used.

The quotations were indented and italicised, interwoven with the authors' narrative, and attributed by gender and age group, shown in brackets at the end of the quotations. The authors purposefully did not use, either in the attributions to the quotations or in the narrative text, some descriptive categories which we know from our previous research are disliked, for example 'disabled person'. Overall, the researchers aimed towards a report which was generally fairly 'user-friendly' for the research participants.

Chapter 2 of this paper goes on to present the findings from the discussion group convened to discuss the impact of the verbatim quotations in the V4ES report. For clarity of presentation we use 'group members' or 'discussants' when referring to the three people who took part in the group discussion; 'participants' when referring to people who took part in the evaluative V4ES study, and 'researchers' to describe the authors. All the indented, italicised quotations presented in Chapter 2 come from the V4ES report and were spoken by participants in the evaluative study. They are reproduced here when the group discussants talk specifically about their content or presentation. Occasionally, in Chapter 2, sentences include short phrases spoken by group discussants, taken from the group discussion transcript to illustrate expressions of view or thoughts.

Draft copies of Chapters 1 and 2 were sent to the three people who took part in the discussion, inviting comments. Nobody asked for any adjustments to the text. The authors then wrote the final chapter of this report, bringing alongside some of the issues arising the views of those people who originally spoke the words.

Chapter 2 The impact of quotations: research users' perspectives

This chapter presents the main findings from analysis of material in the transcript of the group discussion. First, we give some contextual information about those who took part and the salience for them of the topic of discussion. The next part presents issues raised when asked about the general impact of the report, and the verbatim quotations.

2.1   The discussants

The three discussants all had direct research experience in earlier stages of their careers, and some also had experience of commissioning qualitative research. They all had long experience in national or local departments which were directed towards aspects of social inclusion; were all knowledgeable about and interested in potential links between volunteering and working lives; and well-informed about various welfare-to-work programmes. The manager of V4Es took part, who has direct contact with volunteers and employers and organisations which offer volunteering opportunities. Other group members' roles involved keeping abreast of research and developments in the general field of volunteering.

Thus all members were interested in the idea that volunteering can be effective in building people's capacity to think about paid work and make changes in their lives, and the potential value of volunteering in building skills, resilience and resources among disadvantaged groups. Some had direct roles in promotion of this idea and putting the principles into action. So each member of the group had a personal and professional interest in the substantive findings from the evaluative research with V4ES. All had read the report in advance of the meeting. The manager of V4ES had seen the report earlier than other discussants, discussed findings with V4ES staff and personnel in other relevant organisations, and used it to inform service development.

The group members explained that being invited to come to the discussion had an effect on the way they read the report. For example, one person said their usual way of dealing with the V4ES report would be to glance at it, and pass it to a member of staff to read and look for any useful information. Even when this person did read a qualitative report, they would probably skip over many of the quotations. For the person whose role did not usually involve extensive report reading, it was relatively novel to give detailed consideration to the effect of quotations and to discuss the underlying concepts. It had been intriguing to re-read the report in the context of the

methodological focus of the group discussion, rather than the context of evaluation of the service.

What this means is that some of the views expressed in the discussion group were based on reflection on the report in preparation for taking part; some views were based on having already used some of the substantive findings, and some views drew on experiences of reading other research reports. Although taking part in the group discussion meant that participants had read the V4ES report with a particular focus, imposed by the research itself, we believe that the findings from the detailed discussion are valuable. When group members themselves referred to the influences on or sources of their views, this is reported in our analysis of findings.

2.2   General impact of the verbatim quotations

In order to get discussion flowing, the moderator asked at an early stage what people felt generally about the report. Everybody had been interested in the substantive findings and found material in the report which was directly useful for their own current work. The manager of V4ES had found the content of the report clear, informative and useful in developing the programme. Those who regularly received research reports and substantial written material said that the structure and length of the V4Es report were appropriate. One person would have preferred an additional summary sheet at the front of the report, giving the main messages, believing that such summaries generally helped readers capture the important points.

In terms of the general impact of the verbatim quotations used, there were a number of initial responses. The manager of V4ES had already used the report as evidence in discussions with other agencies about ways of developing services to help people move towards work. At the time, she had felt that the quotations had helped her to be in closer touch with the experiences of their service users, and as a result had helped her communicate these experiences better to other people. She mentioned here, for example, people's own words in describing the increased confidence and self-esteem gained from volunteering, and the "passion" with which people talked about changes made in their lives. She had felt the quotations enabled her to bring the service user closer to other readers, and strengthened the evidence she presented in seeking further support or funding for the programme. V4ES staff who had read the report had said to her that the researchers' use of quotations demonstrated their care in representing exactly what had been said to them. Reflecting, subsequently, on the communicative power of the quotations had made this person realise how powerful the authors were when they decided which quotations to include.

Others in the group shared the view that, generally, verbatim quotations from research participants helped to raise readers' levels of understanding about their lives. Quotations could bring a report to life, and personalise the findings in a way

that the researcher's narrative text did not. Reading the research participant's own words could deepen the readers' understanding. This was particularly the case, it was suggested, when authors began to adopt language favoured by policy-makers, for example using generalised terms such as "resilience" and "confidence". However, people agreed that verbatim quotations should certainly not compensate for lack of clarity in the author's narrative text or serve as an alternative to rigorous analysis.

One suggestion was that seeing sufficient verbatim quotations in a report enabled readers to come to their own decisions about what the research participants meant. The person who saw this as a potential advantage had not, however, come to any conclusions different from those of the authors through reading quotations in the V4Es report. Others in the group pointed out that when the government funded research, policy makers generally did not want to spend time themselves wondering what participants meant and expected the researchers to do this analysis.

2.3   Selection of quotations in V4ES report

Although everybody acknowledged that quotations could help to increase readers' understanding, the researchers' selection of quotations in the V4Es report in combination with the number used raised questions for some people. One person was left wondering why some parts of narrative text were accompanied by a quotation while others were not. Not all the quotations seemed to add something to the narrative account. On the other hand, some of the points made by the researchers left one reader keen to have more insight, which might have been supplied by a supporting or explanatory quotation.

There was some speculation as to whether appearance of a quotation was associated with how many people had expressed that view. One person thought that the inclusion of a quotation might indicate that a greater percentage of people shared that view, whereas when the authors made a point without a quotation this might indicate a minority view. Others had not made such assumptions, believing that the authors might capture succinctly views from a range of people where no single quotation would be appropriate to the point captured, and that the quotations were not numerically representative.

There were differences of opinion about the balance between the authors' narrative and participants' spoken words. This seemed "about right" to some members of the group, but for one person there seemed to be a relatively large number of quotations, indeed too many. What had seemed over-use initially led that person to wonder whether the researchers had taken the easier route of leaving the reader to extract meaning rather than doing the analysis themselves. This person valued as succinct a writing style as possible and wanted quotations only when they added to understanding. Another in the group agreed that poorly crafted qualitative research

reports were not unusual, with "long rambling paragraphs", or strings of quotations and little analysis. In their view, the balance between narrative and quotations in the V4ES report compared well.

The number of quotations used had initially given one reader the impression that many more people had taken part in the research than was the case. Being keen to see the findings, this person had skimmed through the introduction which explained how many people had taken part. (There is further discussion on this point later in the chapter, where group members discuss how the quotations were attributed.)

When a quotation lodged in a reader's mind or brought the text to life in a colourful way people said they were more likely to remember the point. However, one person said that this well-known effect had been nullified to some extent when they read the V4ES report because there were so many quotations.

It was felt that there was some danger in the powerful impact of "colourful" quotations or those which expressed strong feelings, particularly if they were based on misunderstandings or partial knowledge. A particular example was a section of the report in which V4ES clients had talked about what had been disappointing in the service received. The authors had included quotations from one person who explained how important it was to understand how volunteering and paid work affected benefits, and had gone on to say that when V4ES guidance workers were asked about this they had said they didn't know. The manager of V4ES believed it was untrue that guidance workers did not understand the impact on benefits. So when V4ES staff read this quotation, or other readers who knew about programme content, the quotation "almost gave credibility" to what they felt was "a false assertion". This might encourage prejudices or stereotypes about the client group, or undermine their credibility. Readers who did not know the programme content and on whom the colourful quotation had made an impact, might go away believing that V4ES guidance workers knew insufficient about benefits to advise clients. Another discussant confirmed that this had happened. Knowing that many people do not understand the relationship between volunteering and benefits, the quotation reinforced his assumption that people were poorly informed about this, in this case by the guidance workers. When the group discussed this further, they agreed that what the V4ES report was showing was how people perceived the guidance workers' knowledge and not whether the workers understood the system. People with experience in doing qualitative research themselves, it was suggested, were more alert to this when reading the report. It would be easy, however, for policy-makers to use a quotation like this as evidence to support their own views.

2.4　Presentation of quotations

The authors' presentation of quotations as indented text using italicised type face had suited all the discussants in making clear distinction between the authors' narrative and participants' spoken words. Quotations marks would have been acceptable in signalling quotations, as long as there was clarity in distinction, which was achieved by indentation of the quotations. Other reports, it was noted, sometimes used the technique of immersing short phrases from transcripts within the author's narrative. This could also be useful if two or three spoken words conveyed meaning better than the author's interpretation. One person would have liked to save italic type face to use to demonstrate emphasis in speech, as explained later.

Discussants agreed that the appearance of the quotations on the printed page and the way that spoken language was represented could generally have a powerful effect. They identified places in the V4Es report where the way words were presented led to some potential for misinterpretation of meaning.

One example was in the section about people's concerns about volunteering. The researchers used the words of one woman (pp.11/12) to show how she made links between the idea of doing some volunteering and managing her illness. She spoke in short phrases, and the researcher's spoken words were also included to show how the dialogue developed. When the report was printed, this dialogue started at the bottom of the page:

>Interviewer 1:　*So the idea of doing some volunteering, how did that seem?*
>
>*Give me a break.*

All the research users in the discussion group had initially interpreted the woman's reply as an expression of feeling at being asked such a question. Group members agreed that when people said "give me a break" during everyday conversation, this was often an expression of frustration or annoyance, and this was the meaning they had taken from this quotation in the V4ES report. It was not until they turned the page and saw the continuation of the dialogue (Interviewer 1: *What sort of things did you think would be good about it – it'd give you a break, you said?)* that they realised the woman's words had been her serious and considered answer to the interviewer's first question.

The extent to which the authors had edited the spoken language interested the research users. The introductory chapter of the V4Es report explained that

>We have not changed people's words, but some people wanted us to make their spoken words look more like written English by putting in more punctuation, and taking out phrases they used in speaking, such as 'like',

'you know' and 'I mean'. We have made all the changes requested. Occasionally we have left out parts of peoples' answers when they went on to talk about something else.
(Corden and Sainsbury, 2005a, p.5)

One person said that he felt comfortable with the idea that the researchers had taken out phrases such as 'you know'. However, thinking about this in preparation for the group discussion had raised doubts about how much editing of this kind had been done. This person was left wondering whether authors had taken out whole sub-clauses which some V4Es clients thought on reflection was not really what they meant even if they did say it at the time. This person also wondered how often the authors had taken out parts of sentences when speakers went on to talk about something else.[1] On balance, this person said their general preference was to see words as spoken rather than "some tidied up version". At the same time they acknowledged that words which expressed matters clearly and powerfully when spoken sometimes "wandered everywhere" when the written version was read.

The discussants agreed that there were many views about the kind and extent of editing of spoken language that was appropriate in presenting verbatim quotations. One person felt that part of the general argument for including quotations was that they showed how people expressed things in their own words, and this was undermined once authors started editing and changing the words. Another general argument against editing was that it allowed researchers to remove some of the meaning, and could lead to qualitative research of low standard. On the other hand, the message which research participants tried to give could be diminished it was suggested, if extraneous spoken words were not taken out of some people's language in a written version. The person who felt like this said they understood why the researchers had enabled the V4ES clients to make decisions themselves about the appearance of their words. It was important to treat all research participants with respect, and this extended to the way participants' language was used.

One person noted that the authors had not made grammatical corrections to transcript extracts when research participants had asked for these, and pointed to one quotation where it seemed quite "harsh" on the speaker to leave the mistake. This was a quotation in which a woman explained how her initial reservations about working without being paid were overcome when she balanced against these the opportunity of gaining valuable work experience:

Experience, that what made me go for it even more because, you know, you're better.

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[1] The technical term for the construction that involves change from one grammatical sequence to another within the same sentence is anacoluthon

It seemed hard on the speaker for the authors to leave the ungrammatical *'that'* as spoken rather than correcting it to '*that's'*, which it was clear she meant. Another discussant raised the question of whether the use of non-standard grammar might produce an image of the respondent which could make the reader question the validity of what was said. This person had been conscious of this happening when they read one quotation in the V4ES report.

Everybody in the group understood the authors' convention, which appeared within some verbatim quotations, of substituting a real name by square brackets around a general term, in order to protect confidentiality. However, one passage of dialogue with more than one set of brackets (p. 10) had been confusing. The context was the way in which people learned about V4ES and got in touch. In the passage of dialogue quoted some of the words were attributed to an interviewer and some to the participant:

> *She said '[person's name], I think maybe you're trying to run before you walk, why don't you try voluntary?' And it came from there. And a couple of the project workers at [supporting organisation] were in constant touch with them [guidance worker] and I went for an interview.*
>
> Interviewer 2: *So it was like a referral from the [supporting organisation]?*
>
> *Referral from the [supporting organisation].*
>
> Interviewer 2: *You hadn't heard of them before, the volunteer service?*
>
> *No.* (man, in 50s)

Discussants agreed that the overall effect was distracting, and the "clutter on the page" broke the flow for the reader.

There was further discussion among group members about the value of including the interviewers' spoken words. One person found the interviewers' words superfluous in some of the dialogue presented, and would have preferred incorporation of the interviewer's question in the sentence preceding the participant's spoken words, for ease of reading. Others agreed that the interviewers' words sometimes broke the continuity of the chapter. However, one person felt that it could be important in some cases to show exactly what question had led to a particular response. Speech was an interaction between people, with response to cues from each other. What was said often depended on what had gone before in the interaction. So in some cases it might be important to show the reader how the response was obtained.

Others agreed that the interaction between interviewer and respondent affected the answers given in interviews. However, one person observed that going into this wider

field of study seemed inappropriate for the type of research report that was useful to policy makers, who had limited time and wanted to get quickly to key findings. What would be useful would be greater transparency and shared understanding of a researcher's purpose in presenting the interviewers' spoken words.

The issue of demonstration of emphasis was raised by one person who would have liked to see how speakers laid stress on words. This person thought that publishing conventions such as those used in some novels might be used, such as underlining words stressed by speakers, or use of italics might be reserved for emphasis. Others were less keen on this idea. One person suggested that current practice in most social research reports is not to try to demonstrate emphasis within quotations. Introducing emphasis would thus be a new idea for research users, which could lead to confusion. Indeed, the other discussant said that, for them, underlining was synonymous with importance not emphasis.

Group members were shown alternative lay-outs of report chapters which the researchers had prepared (Appendix B). In the first alternative version all the quotations in a sub-section were brought together under the heading, followed by the unbroken narrative text. There were immediate responses from two group members, one saying they would have been likely to read all the quotations and skip over much of the text, the other that they would have read the text and ignored the quotations. The third would have read the report but would have found it much harder to match quotations with relevant narrative, and preferred the original version.

The second alternative version comprised the original narrative without any verbatim quotations. The person who was previously in favour of fewer quotations, and ready to skip over them, was surprised to find how "heavy" this alternative version seemed. The pages of unbroken analysis would have seemed "more of a burden", despite the advantage of being much shorter. The person who previously had indicated readiness to read the quotations but skip some of the text said they would "hate" the version without any quotations. They would have wanted to hear from people themselves what their experience was, and would have had doubts about the quality of the research. The third person, again, would have read this version and looked for the lessons relevant to their work, but would not have felt as close to research participants as the original version brought them.

2.5   Attributions

The verbatim quotations in the V4Es report were attributed to people by showing their gender and age group, which were printed in brackets at the end of each quotation, for example (man, in 30s). One potential disadvantage of this approach, for one group member was that speakers were not identified as individuals. Using the previous example, when several quotations were attributed to a man in his 30s

readers did not know whether all came from the same source or from different men of similar age. This had initially led to misunderstanding about the number of people who took part in the study. It also raised questions about whether a single quotation was representative of a number of similar people, or one particular viewpoint. On reflection in the group meeting, others agreed that it might have been better to know more about the distribution of quotations between individual speakers.

When the moderator suggested that the authors might have used people's names for attributing the quotations this did not seem a better approach. Strong feelings were expressed that names were distracting because they raised connotations in readers' minds, and the associations made might even create negative stereotypes. The same applied whether names used by the author were the real names of the speakers or pseudonyms.

People agreed that the way in which quotations are attributed in research reports should depend on the topic under study. In a study in which ethnicity was an issue then the research user would be looking for ethnic background in the attributions; in some studies it would be important to know whether the person speaking was a parent. Locational issues were important in some studies, but it was often more helpful for the researchers to deal with this in the construction of the study group and the analysis, rather than by telling readers that the speaker came from, say Birmingham or Dorset. People also did not want a list of characteristics which were not important for the specific study. In the V4Es report, attribution by gender and age were felt to be appropriate, alongside the contextual information in the accompanying narrative. The manager of V4ES had felt, when first reading the report, that it would also have been helpful to distinguish those people who had found their volunteering opportunity independently but were using V4ES for additional volunteering support or training.

2.6   Ethical issues

The researchers were particularly interested in whether they had been successful in preserving the anonymity of people who took part in the evaluative study of V4ES. The manager of V4ES had not recognised anybody when reading the report. However, she believed that some of the V4ES staff who were more closely in touch with clients thought they did recognise some clients whose words were used.

Other members of the group had thought about ethical issues in this study, and been reassured by the researchers' explanation of the recruitment process, and the opportunities for participants to review the report. Returning to participants in this way was fairly unusual in this kind of research, it was believed, and represented a strong awareness of obligations to those who took part. One person said that such obligations included not only how participants' words were represented but also how

the report was disseminated, and making sure the reports were presented in ways which were appropriate for the relevant audiences.

Chapter 3 Discussion

As explained in Chapter 1, the first two chapters of this report were sent to the three people who took part in the group discussion. They were asked for any comments or observations on the way we had interpreted and reported the discussion, and for agreement to publication of the findings. There were particular issues here for the manager of Volunteering for Employment Skills (V4ES), whose anonymity could not be achieved in the same way as could that of the other group members. There were no suggestions for changes in the text.

In this final chapter we bring together some of the issues arising, and look at the views of the group of research users in comparison with the views of those who spoke the reported words in the context of the original intention and approach in presenting verbatim quotations in the initial evaluative report of V4ES. As explained in Chapter 1, we selected and used quotations in two ways; first to show the kinds of terms and concepts used by people and how these linked together, and secondly to indicate strength of feeling, confusion and hesitation.

3.1   Impact of the spoken words

We saw in the report on speakers' views that, in general, they liked having verbatim quotations from their interviews in the evaluative report. For them, quotations made the report easier to read, and helped to make it interesting. Having people's real words in the report provided evidence that the researchers were presenting the views of the people who had taken part.

The views of the research users mirrored some of the reactions of the speakers. When research users compared versions with and without quotations, they also found the quotations made reading easier. Some spoke about the evidentiary impact, for example enabling readers to draw conclusions from the data, or hearing directly about people's experiences through their own words. So both speakers and users thought that the quotations had enhanced readability and credibility to some extent. However, the researchers had not set out with these purposes in their approach to using quotations, as described above.

Nor did the researchers use quotations with a view to giving people a 'voice'. Nevertheless, this was one of the outcomes perceived by some of those who spoke the words. The way in which the quotations gave people a chance to have their say was often identified among the V4ES clients, and seeing their own words in the report made some people feel that their views were valued. The research users, on the other hand, did not specifically mention an impact of this kind.

There was some evidence from the research user discussion group that our intentions in selecting and using quotations had been achieved to some extent. Some of the research users felt that the quotations helped them get in closer touch with the experiences of the service users, and portrayed some of the 'passion' with which people spoke. But some of the discussion among the research users about the way in which quotations had been blended with narrative suggested that they also perceived an illustrative purpose to the quotations, which again was not our purpose in the selection and presentation of the quotations.

What we draw more generally from such findings is that the impact of quotations on readers is to influence their interpretation and understanding in different ways, some of which might be very different from researchers' intentions. There is room for much further debate about the significance of this. It might be suggested, for example, that in our study the use of the quotations had led to some misinterpretation on the part of the research users. However, it might also be argued for example that the quotations enhanced the quality of the report for users and participants albeit in ways that were outwith the researchers' intentions. In retrospect, we could have anticipated that some research participants would feel it was important for them to be given 'voice' by the inclusion of their words. In most research reports of the type usually written by us it would be unlikely (because of the number of respondents and limitations on size of report) that all participants would have a quotation included. This might be construed as denying people 'voice'. We would welcome further comments and observations here.

3.2   Representation of spoken words as text

One of the most important findings, from our discussions with both the research users and those whose words were quoted, is the responsibility that the researcher takes in making decisions about how spoken words are represented as text. This extends across transcribing conventions, and the various stages at which the researcher may decide to do further editing, or adjust punctuation, or not. Both research users and speakers saw a fine balance between representing speech exactly as spoken, and the risk of creating negative effects such as making the report tedious or hard to understand, or casting the speaker in a negative light.

The discussion with research users demonstrated that some forms of non-standard grammar or speech patterns, when represented as text, could produce different images in the minds of different readers and possibly lead to their questioning the validity and importance of what had been said. This was also what some of the research participants had feared. Such findings do not lead easily to any suggestions or guidelines for good practice for researchers in using quotations however. Research users agreed that it was important to treat respondents' language with respect. For some research participants and research users this might mean

presenting text as spoken, unedited, in order to avoid either misrepresentation of the speaker or devaluing of diversity. For others however, it could require some editing to avoid potential negative connotations or devaluing the speaker's contribution.

3.3   Anonymity

Anonymity was very important to the service users whose quotations were included in the research report on V4ES. Most of them did not want staff at V4ES to know that they had taken part in the research or what they had said. Others did not want any possibility that they might be identified in the report by employers or colleagues. The researchers took considerable care to protect people's anonymity, both in their own narrative text, in the links between their narrative and the quotations, and in the form of attributions used. (We say more about attribution in the next section.) Those people who took part in the evaluation and saw the report did perceive themselves as anonymous.

However, in the discussion group with research users, the V4ES manager reported that some members of staff had thought they probably did recognise some clients whose words were used from the ways in which individual people talked about their experiences.

3.4   Attribution

The style of attribution used in the V4ES evaluation report (gender and age range) was chosen partly to ensure the speakers remained anonymous and partly to avoid descriptive categories that previous research had shown to be unwelcome among some research participants. The interviews and discussions with both users of V4ES and research users showed that attribution was very important to both groups but their reasons varied.

V4ES users were generally content with being described by gender and age, and some had strong views that other descriptive categories that might be construed by readers as negative (for example those connected to health conditions) should not be used. There was dislike of the idea of using pseudonyms. The views of research users generally concurred with the research participants but also went wider (as explained in section 2.5). Importantly, users wanted attributions to contain contextual information about speakers appropriate to the subject being researched to help their understanding of the analysis presented.

Our findings so far suggest that researchers need to consider attribution very seriously from the perspectives of research participants and readers. There may be

occasions when the requirement for anonymity does not always allow researchers to provide the sort of contextual information that readers might want. The risk of breaching anonymity has been highlighted in our study of V4ES. How we chose to attribute quotations (by gender and age group) could still be linked with the content of quotations to enable some readers to identify the speakers.

3.5   Conclusion

It is not our intention at this stage of the whole research project to draw definitive conclusions about the use of quotations by researchers. What is clear so far however is that there are serious issues to consider. Researchers are faced with the difficult task of balancing their obligations to the research participants who are the source of quotations with the objectives of whatever research they are conducting.

The choices researchers make in the selection and presentation of quotations can affect perceptions, understanding and interpretation by research participants and readers alike about the quality of the research (analysis, findings and conclusions), the competence and ethical standards of the researchers, and importantly about the validity and usefulness of the participants' contributions. We will be able to reflect further on these issues at later stages of the project.

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Appendix A

Invitation Letter

E-mail: pac2@york.ac.uk

14 April 2005

Dear

I am writing to introduce ourselves, and to invite you to take part in a research study which I am undertaking with Roy Sainsbury, at the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York. As you may know, we have an ESRC grant in the current Research Methods programme for a project entitled 'Verbatim quotations in applied social research: theory, practice and impact'. I enclose a flier which summarises our aims and approach, and relevant extracts from the research proposal.

The work is going well, and we are now in the final phase of fieldwork in the empirical study to test the impact of verbatim quotations on readers of research reports. Last year, we conducted a small qualitative study as part of an evaluation of 'Volunteering for Employment Skills'. Volunteering for Employment Skills (V4ES) is a service offered by Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service, which aims to help people move towards paid work by supporting them in finding and participating in a period of volunteering. Most of the people who use V4ES are long term benefit recipients, including lone parents, people with health conditions or impairments, people referred by probation services, hostels and rehabilitation units.

The study involved depth interviews with 13 V4ES clients, talking about their experiences and views of the V4ES service, and volunteering undertaken (or not). Findings were interesting; and directly relevant to current government policy, both in terms of encouraging everybody who would like to do some paid work to try, and in terms of promoting volunteering as a route towards social inclusion.

A short report, including verbatim quotations, has been discussed with the research participants and the agreed final version was sent to Nottingham CVS earlier this month.

We now wish to conclude this part of our study by discussing with potential users and readers of research on volunteering, employability and social inclusion the impact of the verbatim quotations in the report. We are inviting you to join a small group discussion between five or six people, on Wednesday 25 May at 2.00 pm. The discussion will take one and a half hours, in a London venue close to Kings Cross/Euston. We will send you in advance the final report (around 30 pages with a methods appendix) which we ask you to read, and to think about our use of quotations from respondents. The purpose of the discussion is for people to share their views about our use of these quotations, and to hear about any preferences for other ways of presenting findings.

I know you are very busy, but I do hope you will be interested and able to take part. It is important that the group includes people familiar with the topic area and experienced in reading and using qualitative research findings. Other participants will include the manager of V4ES, and representatives of other organisations which commission and use research on volunteering and employability. In return for your help, we are offering you early sight of this interesting research report, which you may use as you wish. If you are unable to come yourself, you may be able to point us to another appropriate person within your Department.

I hope to hear from you soon, and if you able to join us I will send you the report and details of venue.

Yours sincerely

Anne Corden

Appendix B

Topic Guide

DRAFT TOPIC GUIDE FOR GROUP DISCUSSION - USE OF QUOTATIONS

25 May 2005

INTRODUCTION
Outline of project
Outline of 'user' element
Aim of group discussion
Use of tape recorder

Any questions?

CONTEXT
What is your interest in volunteering?

How much do you know about volunteering and work?

What did you think of the report?

IMPACT OF QUOTATIONS
Did the quotations have any impact or effect on you?

Can you describe what impact or effect you are thinking about?

Are we talking about an overall effect or are we talking about the effect of individual quotations? Or both?

PROBES:
(*ask respondents to cite examples if possible*)
If <u>understanding</u> is mentioned …
how did quotation(s) help understanding? Did it *add* anything not in the author's text? Was author's text not clear without quotation?

If <u>Colour/flavouring/sense of real people</u> mentioned …
Is this related to understanding? How?
How important is it to achieve these things? Why?

If '<u>Break up the text</u>' mentioned …
Is this related to understanding? How?
How important is it to achieve these things? Why?

If not raised already - did any (other) individual quotations have a particular impact?
Why? How? Probe fully.

ASPECTS OF PRESENTATION
(*use alternative versions of presentation as appropriate*)

We are interested in your views and reflections on some aspects of the way we physically presented the quotes.

Including interviewer's words
Did you notice this? Did such quotations have any different impact?

Layout
We adopted a consistent set of conventions (italics, indented, no quotation marks). Did the choices we made have any impact?

Attribution
We also adopted a particular way of attributing the quotations (gender, age group) Do you have any reflections on this choice? Did you know what you needed to know about the respondents?

Length of quotations
Do you have any reflections on the length of quotations?

Number of quotations and balance with author's text
Do you have any reflections on the number of quotations and on the balance between quotes and text?

Would you like to have seen more or fewer quotes?

AUTHOR'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Did the authors fulfil their responsibilities towards the research respondents?

FINAL QUESTION

Is there a relationship between the quotations and your view of this report?

Any final comments?

Appendix C

Alternative Versions of Report Chapters

Alternative versions of report chapters

Version 1: Chapter without any quotations

This chapter explains what people said about their experiences of the volunteering project and any volunteering they had gone on to do.

People who took part in the research

Eight women and five men took part. Seven had done some volunteering or training arranged through V4ES and six had not. Several people had done some volunteering arranged without V4ES. People had done various kinds of work as volunteers including reception, administrative, secretarial and financial work; care and support in residential settings and day centres; staffing parent and toddler groups; leading community groups; catering and shop work; resource centre and library work. The settings in which people had worked as volunteers were mainly in the voluntary or charitable sectors, or community settings. Nobody in this group had recently been volunteering for an employer in the private sector.

People had been doing different amounts of volunteering when we talked to them. As examples, one person had been working for a year in a centre for parents and children, and spent one morning each week at this work. Another person who had been volunteering for nearly a year had built up her administrative work to four or five days each week when things were really busy, but changes in the organisation where she worked had led to having to cut down her work recently. Another person had just started working in a shop for two half days each week, and one man spent time with different organisations each week as a volunteer.

People were of various ages. Two people were under 30 years old; four aged between 31 and 40 years; four aged between 41 and 50 years and one over 50 years old. Some of those interviewed lived alone, and some with their partner and/or children, or their parents.

The group included people living in central parts of Nottingham city, and in outer suburbs and residential estates. People lived in different kinds of accommodation including owner-occupied houses, and flats or houses rented from the local authority or housing associations. Some of those who took part lived in supported accommodation of different kinds.

Getting in touch

This part of the chapter explains people's work circumstances when they first got in touch with the volunteering project and their reasons for getting in touch.

Work circumstances

Most people could remember a bit about how they first heard about or got in touch with the volunteering project. Some heard about the project when they were already thinking about having paid work eventually. Some people were getting job advice from staff in Connexions or Jobcentre Plus. One person had decided on a career change and spent time retraining and getting new qualifications. One person was enrolled on a college course to increase skills in reading and writing, arranged by Jobcentre Plus. Some of those who were keen to get back to work were already looking for suitable jobs.

Others hoped they might do some paid work at some time in the future. They did not feel ready yet to try paid work but they wanted to take part in some kind of activity. Some had been away from work for a long period while they recovered from illness, or took part in rehabilitation programmes. Some had been spending time looking after their children. Some of these people had already started working as a volunteer when they heard about the volunteering project, for example spending time helping with community activities or groups for parents and children.

There were also people who did not have the idea of paid work at the front of their mind when they first heard about the volunteering project. Some had not done paid work for many years. Some had no previous experience of paid work although they had workplace experience, for example helping in family businesses, or working alongside catering staff in day centres. Social security benefits such as income support or incapacity benefit had been important for most of their adult lives. People like this remembered hearing about the volunteering project from a community psychiatric nurse and at a women's centre. As they remembered it, their advisers had emphasised the opportunity to take part in a voluntary activity, rather than taking a step towards paid work.

One person receiving incapacity benefits already understood what volunteering meant through the experience of family members, and had called into the Mansfield Road office a couple of times to look through the leaflets on display.

Reasons for getting in touch

As a result of people's different backgrounds and expectations there were various reasons for getting in touch with the volunteering project. People keen to move quite soon into jobs or self-employed work were attracted by the idea of getting some help with further training or increasing their qualifications. Some hoped for some workplace experience to tell potential employers about, and a reference. One young

man was hoping for a volunteering opportunity that would demonstrate to future possible employers that he had experience of responsibility and dealing with people.

Another young man thought that volunteering was the main route to paid work in the area he was interested in. In his experience, the paid jobs available seemed to be offered to experienced volunteers already working there.

Some got in touch with the project because they wanted to try an activity outside the home. They thought this might be a possible first step towards paid work although they were not ready yet to think about having a paid job, because of health conditions or family responsibilities. They wanted to hear more about volunteering. Other people who were not ready yet to have a paid job had already started doing some volunteering, and they got in touch with a guidance worker to talk about having some training or more support for what they were doing. One woman was already enjoying some volunteering work, but was encouraged to go for some training.

Another person was looking for more support or training for the community activity in which she was already involved. She met a guidance worker from the project and talked things through.

Some people were looking for something new and interesting to do when they got in touch with the project, or happened to meet a guidance worker in a community location. People building up lives interrupted by illness or difficult personal circumstances felt taking part in something outside home would help them, and were interested in the idea of volunteering. One person had herself had help from an organisation which relied on volunteers, and liked the idea of giving something back.

It was clear that suggestions from other people were important in encouraging people to get in touch with the volunteering project. People had acted on suggestions from a Community Psychiatric Nurse and workers in organisations and centres people were already attending. One man remembered that he was about to take some paid work but rehabilitation staff advised moving more gradually towards work rather than rushing into the first paid opportunity, and suggested getting in touch with the project.

It was also clear that hearing about the volunteering project or meeting a guidance worker often happened by chance, when the worker was visiting community locations. These chance meetings could be important first contacts that led people to use the volunteering project.

People's concerns about volunteering

Some people said that, at first, they had concerns about talking to somebody at the volunteering project, or were unsure they wanted to get involved in volunteering.

Some people who had previous experience of working in professional jobs were not sure they wanted to work without being paid.

Some had images of 'volunteering' in their minds that did not match what they themselves wanted to do. They linked volunteering with hospital work, Barnardos homes or working in the countryside. Some were anxious about being drawn into something they would find out they did not really want to do. Some people generally found it hard to meet new people or go into new situations. For people like this, encouragement from employment advisers and community workers was important, but people who felt they were expected to get in touch with the volunteering project had sometimes felt a bit resentful about this.

Feeling very keen to get back to work helped some people overcome initial concerns. For example, they balanced the possibility of getting valuable work experience against the idea of working for no pay.

People for whom volunteering was a new idea altogether and who had been unsure about what was involved when they got in touch with the project found they liked the idea of a new activity to fill empty or boring days or help them manage depression.

Experience of the volunteering project

Everybody interviewed in the research remembered one or both of the guidance workers, and most remembered their first names. People generally found the guidance workers easy to talk to, friendly, polite and keen to help them. This was specially important for people who had been anxious about going to Mansfield Road.

People had different memories about what they talked about in the first interview with guidance workers. One or two people remembered talking in detail about their personal circumstances, health, skills and interests, and said this first interview took around an hour or more. Such people thought that the guidance worker got a good picture of themselves and their needs. On the other hand, some did not remember talking much about themselves with the guidance worker, and not everybody remembered filling in a questionnaire or form. Some explained that filling in forms was hard for them. One person was surprised at how quick the interview was, remembering this as around 15 minutes, with no discussion about her background or needs, or what she might be interested in.

What several people did remember about the first interview, however, was being told about lots of different kinds of activities where volunteers might work. They remembered the guidance worker looking in the computer for opportunities available, and turning up names of organisations. Some also remembered the guidance worker saying she would go on looking for other opportunities. Some people said the guidance worker had suggested training courses that might be helpful, including courses at the CVS office and short courses at local colleges. Some people remembered being given a leaflet about a centre which offered help with reading and writing skills.

For most people the first meeting was generally fairly positive. They were often surprised when they heard about all the activities and services that happened at CVS. Everybody said that after the first meeting they were expecting some further contact with the guidance worker, either in another appointment, or by receiving information through the post or by phone.

What happened next varied. Some people enrolled on the 12 week course on volunteering run at CVS, or the shorter courses suggested. Some went on to get in touch with one or more of the organisations suggested, made arrangements for a volunteering placement and started working. Others had tried to follow up some of the suggestions for volunteering, but were not able to make arrangements for a placement. Other people did not act on any of the suggestions made by the guidance worker, although some of these had gone on to make their own arrangements, and found volunteering placements which suited them.

What was helpful in the service offered?

Some people spoke positively about parts of the service they had experienced. Things that some people found helpful were:

The way guidance workers dealt with them
Several people found the guidance workers to be polite and friendly, and generally *'nice people'*. Some people appreciated their guidance worker being prepared to go on helping them when things went badly. Some people said that although they had been asked to leave volunteering jobs, the guidance workers went on supporting and encouraging them through the problems.

Guidance workers going into the community
People appreciated the fact that guidance workers went out to different places in the community. This meant they took information about volunteering to people who might otherwise not get it. Some people said it was easier to talk to guidance workers about their circumstances and interests in the local centres which they normally visited.

People who would find it hard to go into town to an office interview had appreciated being visited at home.

Feeling good about themselves
People said it was good to feel somebody was interested in them and to feel encouraged and supported in what they would like to do. They felt valued, and had their self-confidence built while dealing with the project.

Practical help received
People talked positively about the practical help they had received. This included getting new information; joining courses; receiving training; being told about volunteering opportunities; having a guidance worker go with them on a first visit; getting a good voluntary job and having support during a volunteering placement.

Being able to be in control
Some people said they valued being in control of making enquiries and arrangements for volunteering. For some people it was important to make their own telephone calls. People appreciated the guidance worker offering to go with them on a first visit, but liked to be able to choose to go alone.

The social activities
Those who had taken part in the programme of social activities counted these as an important part of the project. People had been to interesting places such as the castle and a boat trip and they valued these opportunities for meeting people socially.

What was not helpful or disappointing?

Some people remembered negative experiences and some had been disappointed about what happened. Reasons for being dissatisfied or disappointed included:

Feeling uncomfortable in talking to guidance workers
Some people who had not felt comfortable in their first interview said they found the busy atmosphere of the open plan office overwhelming. One woman didn't like feeling so different from the paid workers in the CVS office. Another would have liked a more private environment, so other people could not listen to what she said. One woman who used the volunteering project for some training had felt pressured. She felt expected to improve.

Discussion in first interview
Some people would have liked to be asked more about themselves in the first interview, and felt that the guidance worker did not get a good picture of their particular circumstances and needs. One person who felt like this said the interview

went too quickly, and they were given too much information in words that were hard to understand.

Another person also felt that things had gone too quickly, and there had not been enough information about the content and intensity of the 12 week course on volunteering before being enrolled for it.

Follow-up action by guidance workers
Some people were disappointed in what happened after the first interview. It was irritating to receive information about and encouragement to take part in activities they thought inappropriate, for example courses they had already done. One person waited to hear about opportunities the guidance worker had spoken confidently about, but nothing happened. This confirmed her view that possibilities she had been told about for getting more experience in her field, by volunteering, was '*too good to be true*'.

Lack of communication
Some people would have liked more communication from guidance workers after the first interview. It was disappointing not to get telephone calls asking what happened when they tried to arrange a placement. Some people felt they did not know what guidance workers were still doing on their behalf. One person said that the guidance worker did not remake a cancelled appointment to visit her at the place she volunteered. Although she understood that the workers were busy, it would have been nice if the guidance worker had come to see her at work.

Guidance workers' lack of knowledge about social security benefits
For some people, understanding the impact on social security benefits was one of the most important bits of information in deciding what to do, in terms of volunteering and trying paid work. A young woman who had received disability living allowance (DLA) all her life said she had nothing to fall back on if she lost her benefits, but guidance workers had not been able to explain links between benefits, volunteering and paid work.

Contacts between guidance worker and volunteering supervisor
For one person, requests from the guidance worker to the supervisor where she volunteered had led to awkwardness. The supervisor told the volunteer that requests for written feedback about her were too frequent and the wording on the forms seemed '*patronising*'. The volunteer had felt uncomfortable about this for some time.

Being unable to take part in the social activities
It was disappointing for some people not to be able to take part in the social activities because of the timing. Afternoon activities lasting beyond mid-afternoon were not possible for people who had to get back for children after school.

The end of involvement with the volunteering project
People who had received a lot of support from guidance workers and made good relationships found it hard when they came to the end of a period of support, and were encouraged to break links. There was a feeling of being pushed to one side.

Did the project help people move into or towards paid work?

Nobody who took part in this research said they had moved into paid work as a result of taking part in the volunteering project. One person who planned to apply for a particular paid job which was coming up soon felt that the training, information and support from the volunteering project had been a great help in being ready to apply for this job.

Some people were getting help and advice from employment advisers or personal advisers at Jobcentre Plus when they took part in the research. One had started a college course in reading and writing skills, and was finding this enjoyable. As explained earlier, not everybody was aiming towards paid work immediately.

Although nobody had yet moved directly from volunteering into paid work, some did feel that they had been helped, and that they had moved forward in various ways. Those who wanted to do paid work eventually felt it might be easier to get and keep paid work in the future, after taking part in the project.

People talked about various ways in which they had been helped:

Some had learned new skills
New skills learned during training courses arranged by CVS included basic computer skills and anger management. New skills learned during volunteering including computer skills, business management skills, food hygiene, first aid and people handling.

People who had taken part in volunteering talked about gaining workplace-related skills such as routine and time keeping, and how to get along with colleagues and supervisors in a workplace.

Some had built up confidence and self-esteem
The project increased people's confidence and self-esteem in various ways. This happened as a result of taking part in and completing training courses arranged by the project.

Volunteering jobs which worked well helped to build up confidence in going outside the home environment and mixing with people.

Taking part in the social activities and going out with other people had also been useful. A young man talked about the way '*my confidence was built up'* by going out with the group to places that would have been tricky for him without a bit of help.

New friendships
Some people made new friends through their volunteering, increasing their general support network. However, as we see in the next section, it could be hurtful when such networks broke up at the end of the volunteering.

Feelings of contributing to society
A successful volunteering experience gave people satisfaction that they were contributing something, and generally fitting in.

Better understanding of themselves
For some people, doing some volunteering, or even investigating different kinds of volunteering helped them understand better the kind of paid work that would suit them. Their experience could confirm intentions to aim towards a particular kind of work that they enjoyed doing, or help them understand that some kinds of work might not help their condition or psychological state. For example, going for initial appointments to meet staff and patients at a hospice and a centre for Alzheimers' patients had helped different people realise that this kind of work might not be helpful for them, in the light of their family experiences.

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Some parents felt that their enjoyment of a volunteering placement and the improvement in their own lives had, as a consequence, enriched their children's lives. Some parents felt their children were benefiting by the nursery placements arranged during their volunteering, and by their parent's feelings of increased well-being.

It is important to say that these positive experiences were reported by some people who had made arrangements to volunteer independently, without support from CVS.

What were the barriers in moving forwards?

People talked about a number of negative experiences or barriers which had prevented or delayed their moving forwards through volunteering or contact with the volunteering project.

When reading was hard, people could not themselves use the written information or print-outs of opportunities provided by volunteering project staff. Some people depended on relatives or advisers to deal with the information, or help them get in touch with organisations listed. This meant some delays and bottlenecks in communication for some, and it was hard to feel in control.

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One element which had stopped some people taking any further steps towards volunteering had been strong advice not to from Jobcentre Plus. One person who had been hopeful about volunteering after a first meeting at CVS checked with Jobcentre Plus whether this was all right. As she remembered it, staff strongly advised her not to because if she was well enough to volunteer, she could work.

There were also examples of people being urged to reduce their volunteering commitments, in order to give priority to finding paid work. At the time this had been a negative experience for a young man who was really enjoying his volunteering, had built up to full time hours and been there for around a year. Looking back, it seemed that it was probably right to leave, but at the time reducing his hours had changed relationships at work and he was not enjoying it so much. Then leaving altogether meant a gap in life that was hard to fill.

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Version 2: Chapter with quotations brought to front of sub-sections

Chapter 2   Views about the volunteering project

This chapter explains what people said about their experiences of the volunteering project and any volunteering they had gone on to do.

People who took part in the research

Eight women and five men took part. Seven had done some volunteering or training arranged through V4ES and six had not. Several people had done some volunteering arranged without V4ES. People had done various kinds of work as volunteers including reception, administrative, secretarial and financial work; care and support in residential settings and day centres; staffing parent and toddler groups; leading community groups; catering and shop work; resource centre and library work. The settings in which people had worked as volunteers were mainly in the voluntary or charitable sectors, or community settings. Nobody in this group had recently been volunteering for an employer in the private sector.

People had been doing different amounts of volunteering when we talked to them. As examples, one person had been working for a year in a centre for parents and children, and spent one morning each week at this work. Another person who had been volunteering for nearly a year had built up her administrative work to four or five days each week when things were really busy, but changes in the organisation where she worked had led to having to cut down her work recently. Another person had just started working in a shop for two half days each week, and one man spent time with different organisations each week as a volunteer.

People were of various ages. Two people were under 30 years old; four aged between 31 and 40 years; four aged between 41 and 50 years and one over 50 years old. Some of those interviewed lived alone, and some with their partner and/or children, or their parents.

The group included people living in central parts of Nottingham city, and in outer suburbs and residential estates. People lived in different kinds of accommodation including owner-occupied houses, and flats or houses rented from the local authority or housing associations. Some of those who took part lived in supported accommodation of different kinds.

Getting in touch

This part of the chapter explains people's work circumstances when they first got in touch with the volunteering project and their reasons for getting in touch.

Work circumstances

Most people could remember a bit about how they first heard about or got in touch with the volunteering project. Some heard about the project when they were already thinking about having paid work eventually. Some people were getting job advice from staff in Connexions or Jobcentre Plus. One person had decided on a career change and spent time retraining and getting new qualifications. One person was enrolled on a college course to increase skills in reading and writing, arranged by Jobcentre Plus. Some of those who were keen to get back to work were already looking for suitable jobs.

Others hoped they might do some paid work at some time in the future. They did not feel ready yet to try paid work but they wanted to take part in some kind of activity. Some had been away from work for a long period while they recovered from illness, or took part in rehabilitation programmes. Some had been spending time looking after their children. Some of these people had already started working as a volunteer when they heard about the volunteering project, for example spending time helping with community activities or groups for parents and children.

There were also people who did not have the idea of paid work at the front of their mind when they first heard about the volunteering project. Some had not done paid work for many years. Some had no previous experience of paid work although they had workplace experience, for example helping in family businesses, or working alongside catering staff in day centres. Social security benefits such as income support or incapacity benefit had been important for most of their adult lives. People like this remembered hearing about the volunteering project from a community psychiatric nurse and at a women's centre. As they remembered it, their advisers had emphasised the opportunity to take part in a voluntary activity, rather than taking a step towards paid work.

One person receiving incapacity benefits already understood what volunteering meant through the experience of family members, and had called into the Mansfield Road office a couple of times to look through the leaflets on display.

Reasons for getting in touch

I wanted something involved so that I could, I mean if I was going to use it towards getting work, I wanted to be able to say 'well, I've done this volunteering, and this is what I've done, and, you know, it involved this, that and the other'. Not, you know 'I've done this volunteering and handed out cups of tea'. (man, in 30s)

Basically 'cos I want to get into, like, the homeless sector kind of thing, you know, that kind of work, and its best to do that through volunteering. (man, in 20s)

I wanted to do something but I didn't feel ready to go back to a paid job, where there's the commitment there … with me sometimes not being well I needed something where I didn't have to commit myself too much.

One of the workers at [where she worked] put me in touch with the CVS because they were doing a course on volunteering, so I went to the course about volunteering. It was learning about how volunteering started, where it originated from and what had happened to it since. I got a certificate at the end of it.

(woman, in 40s)

I was thinking, you know, of just getting some qualifications, getting something done, and seeing what I can do. (woman, in 30s)

I wanted, cos of my past, I just wanted to help out and I thought volunteering sounded interesting. (woman, in 20s)

She said '[person's name], I think maybe you're trying to run before you walk, why don't you try voluntary?' And it came from there. And a couple of the project workers at [supporting organisation] were in constant touch with them [guidance worker] and I went for an interview.

Interviewer: *So it was like a referral from the [supporting organisation]?*

Referral from the [supporting organisation].

Interviewer: *You hadn't heard of them before, the volunteer service?*

No. (man, in 50s)

As a result of people's different backgrounds and expectations there were various reasons for getting in touch with the volunteering project. People keen to move quite soon into jobs or self-employed work were attracted by the idea of getting some help with further training or increasing their qualifications. Some hoped for some workplace experience to tell potential employers about, and a reference. One young man was hoping for a volunteering opportunity that would demonstrate to future possible employers that he had experience of responsibility and dealing with people.

Another young man thought that volunteering was the main route to paid work in the area he was interested in. In his experience, the paid jobs available seemed to be offered to experienced volunteers already working there.

Some got in touch with the project because they wanted to try an activity outside the home. They thought this might be a possible first step towards paid work although they were not ready yet to think about having a paid job, because of health conditions or family responsibilities. They wanted to hear more about volunteering. Other people who were not ready yet to have a paid job had already started doing some volunteering, and they got in touch with a guidance worker to talk about having some training or more support for what they were doing. One woman was already enjoying some volunteering work, but was encouraged to go for some training.

Another person was looking for more support or training for the community activity in which she was already involved. She met a guidance worker from the project and talked things through.

Some people were looking for something new and interesting to do when they got in touch with the project, or happened to meet a guidance worker in a community location. People building up lives interrupted by illness or difficult personal circumstances felt taking part in something outside home would help them, and were interested in the idea of volunteering. One person had herself had help from an organisation which relied on volunteers, and liked the idea of giving something back.

It was clear that suggestions from other people were important in encouraging people to get in touch with the volunteering project. People had acted on suggestions from a Community Psychiatric Nurse and workers in organisations and centres people were already attending. One man remembered that he was about to take some paid work but rehabilitation staff advised moving more gradually towards work rather than rushing into the first paid opportunity, and suggested getting in touch with the project.

It was also clear that hearing about the volunteering project or meeting a guidance worker often happened by chance, when the worker was visiting community locations. These chance meetings could be important first contacts that led people to use the volunteering project.

People's concerns about volunteering

Volunteer? Unpaid, that's what I was thinking. Voluntary is to do with unpaid.

Interviewer: *So what made you go, what overcame the hesitations?*

Experience, that what made me go for it even more because, you know, you're better. Getting paid or unpaid you're getting experience, like hands-on sort of thing, which is good.   (woman, in 40s)

Some people said that, at first, they had concerns about talking to somebody at the volunteering project, or were unsure they wanted to get involved in volunteering.

Some people who had previous experience of working in professional jobs were not sure they wanted to work without being paid.

Some had images of 'volunteering' in their minds that did not match what they themselves wanted to do. They linked volunteering with hospital work, Barnardos homes or working in the countryside. Some were anxious about being drawn into something they would find out they did not really want to do. Some people generally found it hard to meet new people or go into new situations. For people like this, encouragement from employment advisers and community workers was important, but people who felt they were expected to get in touch with the volunteering project had sometimes felt a bit resentful about this.

Feeling very keen to get back to work helped some people overcome initial concerns. For example, they balanced the possibility of getting valuable work experience against the idea of working for no pay.

People for whom volunteering was a new idea altogether and who had been unsure about what was involved when they got in touch with the project found they liked the idea of a new activity to fill empty or boring days or help them manage depression.

Experience of the volunteering project

Everybody interviewed in the research remembered one or both of the guidance workers, and most remembered their first names. People generally found the guidance workers easy to talk to, friendly, polite and keen to help them. This was specially important for people who had been anxious about going to Mansfield Road.

People had different memories about what they talked about in the first interview with guidance workers. One or two people remembered talking in detail about their personal circumstances, health, skills and interests, and said this first interview took around an hour or more. Such people thought that the guidance worker got a good picture of themselves and their needs. On the other hand, some did not remember talking much about themselves with the guidance worker, and not everybody remembered filling in a questionnaire or form. Some explained that filling in forms was hard for them. One person was surprised at how quick the interview was, remembering this as around 15 minutes, with no discussion about her background or needs, or what she might be interested in.

What several people did remember about the first interview, however, was being told about lots of different kinds of activities where volunteers might work. They remembered the guidance worker looking in the computer for opportunities available, and turning up names of organisations. Some also remembered the guidance worker saying she would go on looking for other opportunities. Some people said the guidance worker had suggested training courses that might be helpful, including courses at the CVS office and short courses at local colleges. Some people remembered being given a leaflet about a centre which offered help with reading and writing skills.

For most people the first meeting was generally fairly positive. They were often surprised when they heard about all the activities and services that happened at CVS. Everybody said that after the first meeting they were expecting some further contact with the guidance worker, either in another appointment, or by receiving information through the post or by phone.

What happened next varied. Some people enrolled on the 12 week course on volunteering run at CVS, or the shorter courses suggested. Some went on to get in touch with one or more of the organisations suggested, made arrangements for a volunteering placement and started working. Others had tried to follow up some of the suggestions for volunteering, but were not able to make arrangements for a placement. Other people did not act on any of the suggestions made by the guidance worker, although some of these had gone on to make their own arrangements, and found volunteering placements which suited them.

What was helpful in the service offered?

> *They're very helpful, cos at one time I wouldn't have come out, I wouldn't mix with people, so during that [guidance worker] gave me the support to actually go and volunteer, and from there, that's how I got a start with [an organisation], even though they're two different things.*
> (woman, in 20s)
>
> *It's just like building my confidence up and that's what I need* (and, later in interview) *I didn't know anything like that happened. I couldn't wait to get there. There seemed to be a lot of opportunities.*
> (woman, in 30s)
>
> *She said to me, 'Well, we've got lots of jobs in voluntary shops.' And I thought that would be brilliant to get into social contact with people, relating to people, relating to what I'm doing, so that's what I did.*
> (man, in 30s)

Some people spoke positively about parts of the service they had experienced. Things that some people found helpful were:

The way guidance workers dealt with them
Several people found the guidance workers to be polite and friendly, and generally *'nice people'.* Some people appreciated their guidance worker being prepared to go on helping them when things went badly. Some people said that although they had been asked to leave volunteering jobs, the guidance workers went on supporting and encouraging them through the problems.

Guidance workers going into the community
People appreciated the fact that guidance workers went out to different places in the community. This meant they took information about volunteering to people who might otherwise not get it. Some people said it was easier to talk to guidance workers about their circumstances and interests in the local centres which they normally visited. People who would find it hard to go into town to an office interview had appreciated being visited at home.

Feeling good about themselves
People said it was good to feel somebody was interested in them and to feel encouraged and supported in what they would like to do. They felt valued, and had their self-confidence built while dealing with the project.

Practical help received

People talked positively about the practical help they had received. This included getting new information; joining courses; receiving training; being told about volunteering opportunities; having a guidance worker go with them on a first visit; getting a good voluntary job and having support during a volunteering placement.

Being able to be in control

Some people said they valued being in control of making enquiries and arrangements for volunteering. For some people it was important to make their own telephone calls. People appreciated the guidance worker offering to go with them on a first visit, but liked to be able to choose to go alone.

The social activities

Those who had taken part in the programme of social activities counted these as an important part of the project. People had been to interesting places such as the castle and a boat trip and they valued these opportunities for meeting people socially.

What was not helpful or disappointing?

I felt a bit pressured …

Interviewer: *Can you go on? Pressured to talk or pressured to do something?*

… to answer the questions that were put to me. (woman, in 40s)

Because I'm never sure whether people will give me the right advice or not, or whether its something I should be doing. Because, you know, with being on DLA you've got to be really careful what you're doing because you're only allowed to work a set amount of hours or you're only allowed to earn a certain amount of money.

Interviewer: *So keeping your benefits is very important to you?*

Well yeah, because if you lose your benefits it means that you've got nothing to fall back on.

Interviewer: *have you asked them at the volunteering project?*

I've asked them before, and they've always said, we don't, we don't know anything about it. (woman, in 20s)

Some people remembered negative experiences and some had been disappointed about what happened. Reasons for being dissatisfied or disappointed included:

Feeling uncomfortable in talking to guidance workers

Some people who had not felt comfortable in their first interview said they found the busy atmosphere of the open plan office overwhelming. One woman didn't like feeling so different from the paid workers in the CVS office. Another would have liked a more private environment, so other people could not listen to what she said. One woman who used the volunteering project for some training had felt pressured. She felt expected to improve.

Discussion in first interview

Some people would have liked to be asked more about themselves in the first interview, and felt that the guidance worker did not get a good picture of their particular circumstances and needs. One person who felt like this said the interview went too quickly, and they were given too much information in words that were hard to understand.

Another person also felt that things had gone too quickly, and there had not been enough information about the content and intensity of the 12 week course on volunteering before being enrolled for it.

Follow-up action by guidance workers

Some people were disappointed in what happened after the first interview. It was irritating to receive information about and encouragement to take part in activities they thought inappropriate, for example courses they had already done. One person waited to hear about opportunities the guidance worker had spoken confidently about, but nothing happened. This confirmed her view that possibilities she had been told about for getting more experience in her field, by volunteering, was '*too good to be true'.*

Lack of communication

Some people would have liked more communication from guidance workers after the first interview. It was disappointing not to get telephone calls asking what happened when they tried to arrange a placement. Some people felt they did not know what guidance workers were still doing on their behalf. One person said that the guidance worker did not remake a cancelled appointment to visit her at the place she volunteered. Although she understood that the workers were busy, it would have been nice if the guidance worker had come to see her at work.

Guidance workers' lack of knowledge about social security benefits

For some people, understanding the impact on social security benefits was one of the most important bits of information in deciding what to do, in terms of volunteering and trying paid work. A young woman who had received disability living allowance (DLA) all her life said she had nothing to fall back on if she lost her benefits, but guidance workers had not been able to explain links between benefits, volunteering and paid work.

Contacts between guidance worker and volunteering supervisor

For one person, requests from the guidance worker to the supervisor where she volunteered had led to awkwardness. The supervisor told the volunteer that requests for written feedback about her were too frequent and the wording on the forms seemed *'patronising'*. The volunteer had felt uncomfortable about this for some time.

Being unable to take part in the social activities

It was disappointing for some people not to be able to take part in the social activities because of the timing. Afternoon activities lasting beyond mid-afternoon were not possible for people who had to get back for children after school.

The end of involvement with the volunteering project

People who had received a lot of support from guidance workers and made good relationships found it hard when they came to the end of a period of support, and were encouraged to break links. There was a feeling of being pushed to one side.

Did the project help people move into or towards paid work?

I've learned different things there. I've leaned new skills. I've learned new people skills which has been really important to me. I've learned meeting skills, which I didn't know. You know, I never used to go to meetings before, so I've learned meeting skills. And also being on the board I've learned what boards are all about and how workplaces work a bit more as well; how different workplaces work, which is really good.
(woman, in 30s)

I'm just learning work experience and learning how to get along with people in the workplace, and just getting along. (man, in 30s)

I enjoyed all of it really. Contact with people. I was getting experience. I also had something to do. (man, in 30s)

Interviewer: *You said the work itself didn't help you very much but the other things did?*

Yeah, it is a case of getting back in, which you can't measure, as such, it is getting people back in touch with people, and that is something which you can't measure, you know. That confidence, that being a part of society. (man, in 50s)

It feels like you're fitting in in society and it feels like you're a normal person living in society, cos I feel like if you haven't got a job, you're not in society. (man, in 30s)

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