

**Volunteering for Employment Skills –
A Qualitative Research Study**

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Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	i
Chapter 1 About this research	1
Chapter 2 Views about the volunteering project	7
Chapter 3 Suggestions for developing the volunteering project, and other similar services	23
Chapter 4 Discussion of findings	27
More details about the research	33

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Chapter 1 About this research

Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service wanted a small study of their project Volunteering for Employment Skills. This work was done by Anne Corden and Roy Sainsbury who are researchers at the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York. This report presents our main findings from the research.

This chapter describes Volunteering for Employment Skills (V4ES) and the reasons for this research. It explains how we did the research and invited people who had been in touch with V4ES to take part in research interviews. In Chapter 2 are the views and experiences of those people who took part in the research. Chapter 3 contains their suggestions for developing and improving V4ES and similar projects. In Chapter 4 the researchers discuss the findings generally, within the wider context of government policy to help everybody who wants to try paid work to do this. At the back of the report there are further details about the way we did the research.

Volunteering for Employment Skills

Volunteering for Employment Skills (V4ES) is one of the services and programmes managed by Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service (CVS). V4ES is funded by the European Social Fund, and is now into its third year. The project offers advice and support to people who are interested in trying volunteering as a way of helping them towards paid work. The aim of V4ES is to improve people's chances of getting a paid job by supporting them in a suitable volunteering opportunity. Taking part in volunteering may help to build confidence, communication skills and experience of the world of work, and strengthen work-related abilities such as time-keeping, punctuality and dealing with other people.

V4ES has an office in the main CVS building on Mansfield Road, close to Nottingham city centre. V4ES staff include a manager and two guidance workers. One full-time guidance worker works mainly with people to put together individual plans for preparing for, finding and doing some suitable volunteering. The other part-time guidance worker also works with people in this way, but is mainly concerned with finding places where people can volunteer and supporting the voluntary organisations.

People using V4ES typically start with an interview with a guidance worker, which may include discussing different opportunities for volunteering and support in choosing one. People may use the Volunteer Shop (VolShop) to identify an appropriate opportunity. VolShop is a high street bureau on the ground floor of the main CVS building, coordinated by the Advice/Careers office. VolShop has lists on

computers of local agencies and organisations which are looking for volunteers, and the type of work involved.

The guidance worker may offer to go with a person to visit a volunteering opportunity, to meet the supervisor and find out more. There may be opportunities for some people to take part in training courses and events, organised at the CVS office or by other agencies in the area. The guidance worker aims to stay in contact with the person during their volunteering, according to needs and opportunities, but then gradually withdraw. V4ES makes separate contacts with the organisations where people are volunteering, and asks for monthly time sheets and reports on how things are going. The guidance workers aim to support people for around three months, but this is flexible because it can take some time to find a suitable volunteering opportunity. People who take part in volunteering can stay in touch with the guidance workers and other volunteers by joining in a programme of social activities, such as visits and trips. V4ES supports around 40 people at a time, and the guidance workers aim to be in touch with such people about once a week.

People can visit the guidance workers at their office in the CVS building and get in touch by telephone. The guidance workers also spend time in the local communities, explaining what volunteering means and how people might take part. So they visit community centres on the main housing estates, and places such as day centres, health and social services venues and hostels.

Why do the research?

Staff in V4ES were keen to know if and how this service helps people, and whether they could improve it. There is some information about this from supervisors of those people who go on to do some volunteering. The guidance workers also ask for feedback from people who use the service, for example in questionnaires. Some people like to keep in touch with the guidance workers, and call into the office to say how they are getting on. But the guidance workers lose touch with some people. It is easier for the guidance workers to get feedback from people who go on to do some volunteering than from people who do not. It is harder for staff to get feedback from people who may be dissatisfied or disappointed with the service and people who may have bad experiences while volunteering.

So the manager at V4ES asked us at the University of York to help find out more about:

- if and how V4ES helps people towards paid work
- what works well for people, and what has not been helpful
- how might they develop the service so it is more useful in helping people towards paid work.

We set out to hear 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.

Doing the research

In order to do this research we decided to meet a small group of people who had been in touch recently with V4ES and talk to them about their views and experiences. We decided to talk to people who had been in touch with the service more recently, as it might be easier for them to remember what happened. We set out to hear a full range of views, so we invited people of different ages; men and women; people who had done some volunteering and people who had decided not to volunteer or left V4ES.

It was important that V4ES dealt confidentially with their clients. The first step was for the guidance workers at V4ES to send a letter to those 57 people who had been in touch with them during the past year. The letter explained the research, and how to get in touch to say they did not want to take part. There is a copy of the letter at the back of the report. Three people got in touch with the guidance workers at this stage to say they did not want to take part.

After a fortnight, V4ES sent to us the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the remaining 54 people. We then got in touch with some of them by telephone to see if they were interested in taking part.

Thirteen people agreed to meet one of us and take part in a research interview.

The research interviews

Most people taking part chose to meet a researcher at home, and people chose a time convenient to them. Everybody gave permission for us to use a tape recorder, so that we could concentrate on the discussion without having to write notes.

At the start of the interview, we explained again the reasons for doing this research. We said that the discussion was confidential. We would write a report for the manager and staff at V4ES but it would not be possible for anybody to identify who took part. We explained that it was important that everybody who took part felt happy with the way they were included in the written report. To make sure about this, we said we would like to return, to show people a copy of the report and how their views

were included. Everybody said they would be interested to do this. Some people said that reading was hard for them and they were not likely to read a long report. Most of the interviews took around one hour. There was a small money gift for people who took part and gave up their time to talk to us. At the end of the interview we checked that the person was happy for their views to be included in a report. Everybody said we might get in touch again in the autumn, to talk about the report.

Three months later we tried to make contact again by telephone, to explain that we had written the report and would like to show it to people. Everybody we spoke to wanted to take part again. We made appointments, and posted copies of Chapters 1, 2 and 3 for people to read in advance. We also sent a tape recording of these chapters to those people who had told us that reading was hard for them.

We were unable to make any contact with two men from the original group, despite several telephone calls and answer-phone messages, and calling personally at their previous home addresses. Eventually we mailed them copies of the report, encouraging them to get in touch if they wanted to give us their views. These letters and reports have not been returned to the researchers by Royal Mail, and we hope they reached the men concerned.

Eleven people took part in a second research interview, discussing what was in the three chapters, and the way in which their views, experiences and actual spoken words were represented. This version of the report takes into account all their suggestions for improvement. Everybody who took part in a second interview was happy for the researchers to amend the report and give it to V4ES for circulation and discussion.

The next chapter of the report is about people's views of the volunteering project and their experiences of volunteering, from both sets of research interviews. Chapter 3 brings together peoples' suggestions for developing the volunteering project and other similar services. In the last chapter the researchers discuss the main findings from the interviews within the wider context of volunteering, and current government policy to provide opportunities and help to long-term benefit recipients who would like to try paid work.

Including people's spoken words

Chapters 2 and 3 contain examples of people's words, as spoken in the interviews. This is because we believe that using people's own words helps those who read the report to understand better what we found out in the interviews. People's own words provide illustrations or examples of some of the issues raised. Everybody who took part in the interviews had useful things to say, so there are some words from all the people interviewed. People's spoken words are shown in italic type, and we show

whether a man or woman spoke the words, and their age group. Sometimes we include the researchers' own words, when they asked questions and spoke to people in the interviews. Interviewer 1 was a woman and Interviewer 2 was a man.

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 people's answers, when they went on to talk about something else. When the words include three dots (...) this means that the person speaking paused a bit, to think. We use square brackets when we take out somebody's real name, for example [guidance worker]. All those who took part in a second interview are happy with the way in which they and their spoken words are represented in this report. The views and some of the spoken words of the two men who were not recontacted are also included. We have assumed that they have received the report and would have got in touch if they were unhappy with it.

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 themselves did not use the name V4ES. They generally spoke of CVS or used words like 'the volunteering centre'; some used the real name of the guidance workers, or 'Mansfield Road'. In this chapter and the next we use the term 'volunteering project' to cover all these names.

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.

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 people who took part were from minority ethnic groups. 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 man in his 30s said:

I thought it'd help with job prospects ... give me something to do ...

He was hoping for a volunteering opportunity that would demonstrate to future possible employers that he had experience of responsibility and dealing with people, and said:

I wanted something involved. 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 it involved this, that and the other'. Not 'I've done this volunteering and handed out cups of tea'. (man, in 30s)

Another 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:

Basically because 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)

Some people 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 explained:

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. (woman, in 40s)

This person was already enjoying some volunteering work, but was encouraged to go for some training:

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.

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:

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

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:

Interviewer 1: So what was it about the idea of volunteering that you were interested in?

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

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 said he had been about to take a paid job 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:

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)

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:

Volunteer? Unpaid, that's what I was thinking. Voluntary is to do with unpaid (woman, in 40s)

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:

Interviewer 1: 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)

In another interview, a man explained that he had felt the same way:

Well, getting paid or unpaid, you're getting experience (man, in 50s)

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. This is how it was explained by a woman in her 40s, who received treatment for long-term illness and had some previous experience of unpaid work:

Interviewer 1: So the idea of doing some volunteering, how did that seem?

Give me a break.

Interviewer 1: *What sort of things did you think would be good about it – it'd give you a break, you said?*

Yeah, get me out of my depression

Interviewer 1: *Did you think it would help?*

Yeah ... people, meeting different people and talking and that.

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:

Yes, I was worried, but when I got there I calmed down. (woman, in 30s)

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 job and started working. Others had tried to follow up some of the suggestions for volunteering, but were not able to make arrangements to work. 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 work 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 local centres which they normally visited, and some said it would have been hard to go into town to an office interview if they had not already met the guidance worker.

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, as these two women explained:

They're very helpful, because 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)

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 their volunteering.

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)

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:

Well I'm not best on the phone, but I'd probably prefer to have done it myself, because otherwise it looks like, it gives an image that you're hiding behind [the volunteering project]. (man, in 30s)

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 or had 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 did not like feeling so different from the women 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 in follow-up interviews:

I felt a bit pressured ...

Interviewer 1: *Can you go on? Pressured to talk or pressured to do something?*

... to answer the questions that were put to me.

(later) When I first started there was a questionnaire, and then halfway through they went through the questionnaire again, and I felt a bit pressured to have improved. (woman, in 40s)

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:

I think it could have been explained to me better at the beginning what it was about, because I just found myself on it. (woman, in 40s)

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, were '*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 voluntary job. 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 where 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 woman who had received disability living allowance (DLA) all her life said:

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 1: *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. (woman, in 20s)

Later in the same interview, asked whether she might do paid work sometime, this person mentions again the importance of knowing what effect there will be on benefits:

Interviewer 1: *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.

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:

I do feel that a bit of that has been a cut off point really, because they work with you and all the rest of it, support you and everything, but then after that its done with and that lot, and you're sort of like pushed to one side. (woman, in 20s)

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

In the first set of research interviews nobody said they had done any paid work since their contacts with the volunteering project. One person planned to apply for a particular paid job which was coming up soon and 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 told the researchers they were getting help and advice from employment advisers or personal advisers at Jobcentre Plus. 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 when they first spoke to the researcher, 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 included computer skills, business management skills, food hygiene, first aid and people handling. A woman who had been volunteering in a community group said:

I've learned different things there. I've learned 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)

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. A man who had not had paid work for several years said:

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

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:

and it gave me some confidence ... mixing with people. I felt valued, yes. It got me out, and got me thinking and ... doing something positive.
(woman, in 40s)

Volunteering jobs which worked well helped to build up confidence in going outside the home environment and mixing with people. A man who had been volunteering in the same workplace for a year said:

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

Another man also told the interviewer how his volunteering had built confidence:

Interviewer 2: *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)

Taking part in the social activities and going out with other people had also been useful. A man in his 30s 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:

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

He went on to say that he would also like to learn to drive, like other people. Having a job and being able to drive were what people usually did '*... I just wanna be normal in the world you know, that's the reason*'.

He also felt he was making a contribution by working for a charity:

All the money's going towards a good cause and so that's why I like it so much, because you know you put in a bit of work, and I'm pleased that it's working for other people.

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 confirmed intentions to aim towards a particular kind of work that they enjoyed doing, or helped 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.

Making children's lives richer

Some parents felt that their enjoyment of volunteering 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 places arranged during their volunteering, and by their parent's feelings of increased well-being.

It is important to say that these positive experiences of volunteering 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.

Some people had been asked for references by organisations they had approached with a view to volunteering, and been unable to provide any.

Some volunteering opportunities ended when there were changes in structure or funding in the organisations where they were working, and their jobs just disappeared. This could be unexpected and disappointing, and a setback to progress. People understood that this was linked to the way some voluntary

organisations were organised, and not something the volunteering project could control.

Some voluntary jobs ended through problems in relationships with supervisors or other colleagues. This could be hurtful, confusing, and generally negative in impact. When problems were discussed with guidance workers, some people had been supported through the problem, for example going to anger management training before trying another voluntary job. But some people did not want to go back to CVS because they felt a bit of a failure.

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 the social security office whether this was all right. As she remembered it,

They said 'not really, because if you're well enough to go to the volunteering, you can work.' You have to be careful on benefits, and I didn't want to get into trouble. (woman, in 20s)

The person concerned mentioned this advice to a course tutor, who was surprised. However, the person said '*I just stopped. It stopped me from doing anything else. They didn't say I couldn't but said they strongly advised me not to*'.

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 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 and he had strong feelings:

It was difficult, because it was ... like I was not wanted ... (man, in 30s)

Finally, some people ended volunteering jobs because other opportunities seemed more important. For example, one person came to the top of a long waiting list for a different volunteering opportunity particularly designed to help lone parents, and felt it was important not to miss this. For the volunteering project this meant that people left the project before completing, but the people themselves saw the alternative opportunities as more helpful in the long term.

Changes in circumstances

The aim of the second set of research interviews was to show people how their views about the volunteering project had been included in the report. During the second contact, people generally mentioned their current work circumstances, and some also spoke about changes in their health since first meeting the researchers. It was not the aim of the second set of interviews to provide a longitudinal perspective on the impact of the volunteering project. However, some information is available, which may be useful. This chapter thus ends with a short summary of the current work circumstances at the time of the second research interview with 11 of the 13 people who initially took part. The people concerned agreed to this new information appearing in the report. Some also suggested that the report would be more interesting if readers knew what had happened to people and how things were working out for them.

People who were not volunteering at the time of the second interview included some who were actively seeking paid work and had appointments for job interviews, and one person who was building up qualifications through web-based training. People who had experienced more illness or a relapse in their condition were focusing on regaining health or greater stability before doing any more towards voluntary or paid work. Some people were still working in the same voluntary jobs, including some who eventually hoped to have some paid work, and some who thought it was unlikely that they would do paid work again. There were, among the 11 people interviewed again, some who had started paid work during the past three months. They talked about things that had helped them achieve their jobs. Included here was help, support and training received from the volunteering project.

Chapter 3 Suggestions for developing the volunteering project, and other similar services

Not everybody had suggestions for improving or changing the volunteering project. Some were pleased with all parts of the experience, including people who had left the project early, as explained in Chapter 2. People who found the service useful had sometimes mentioned it to friends and encouraged them to get in touch.

There were a number of helpful suggestions for doing things differently or better. Most of these suggestions were made in the first interview. Some people said, however, that they thought of other points after the first interview, and took the opportunity of the second interview to share their views. Some said that seeing the first version of this chapter, and all the suggestions made by other people, had helped their own thinking and encouraged them to offer new ideas the second time they spoke to the researcher.

Suggestions about the way project staff deal with people

- Some people would like a quicker service, with shorter waiting times for appointments with guidance workers.
- People who lived outside the city centre said it was really important for the guidance workers to continue to come out into community locations. It was thought important to keep this way of working, and increase it if possible.
- Some people who did usually meet their guidance worker in the Mansfield Road office said it would be good to have a more open and informal office, with drop-in facilities. It was sometimes not helpful to have to wait for an appointment. At the same time, some people wanted more privacy in talking to staff.
- Some people felt that what was offered could better match their needs and interests. More discussion about personal circumstances in an initial interview might be helpful here.
- People who needed to have things explained slowly, in simple language, said it would be helpful if the guidance workers were more skilled in dealing with this. Suggestions included asking people directly at the beginning and during interviews what would make things easier; checking their understanding during discussions, and not covering too much.
- Letters from the project and print-outs of names and details of volunteering opportunities were not useful ways of communicating for people with limited

reading skills. Items might be left unread, or people would have to depend on help from others, with risk of delays and misunderstandings. Face to face communications or visits, or using the telephone was preferred and more effective. People stressed the importance of guidance workers dealing directly with themselves, even when communication was not so easy, rather than going through a third party.

- It was important that guidance workers always followed up what they said they would do.
- Some people wanted to be kept more in touch with what was happening, for example how far guidance workers had got in making enquiries for them about voluntary jobs.

Suggestions about what the service offered

- There were suggestions that the project would work better if direct help in looking for paid work was also included, along with help in volunteering. This might help people keep paid work in mind at the same time as benefiting from the volunteering. It might help prevent people getting 'stuck' in voluntary jobs which suited them so well that they took the place of paid work. One man felt:

It would be useful if they were to actually have job search personnel who worked with the volunteer in searching for jobs ... but a tailored job search as well, tailored to the individual ... (man, in 30s)

In talking about how this might work, he emphasised the importance of including help with looking for jobs within the volunteering project itself, rather than having links with other organisations who could help with looking for jobs. In his experience:

Some people who work, feel better if they're dealing with the same people in the same building, with one organisation that's helping them.

He stressed that offering help in looking for jobs at the end of a period of volunteering would not be useful – it should be built into what was offered from the beginning:

I don't think it should be done at the end of the volunteering, this is what I'm saying, I'm saying if they had that, the job search should be ongoing throughout the volunteering.

- There were suggestions that it would be helpful if the project staff were trained to be knowledgeable about the links between volunteering and benefits, and paid work and benefits, and talked to people about this.
- Some people said it would be helpful if guidance workers were more prepared to talk about personal issues and problems, rather than suggesting people go to see a counsellor.
- Some people who were in touch with several supporting organisations including the volunteering project said it would be helpful if there was more and better communication between them.
- Some people would like more opportunities for social activities within the volunteering project. Having some events well within school hours, or in the evenings would enable some people to take part who had been unable to go to afternoon events.
- Although the researchers asked if there were any suggestions about practicalities of volunteering such as reimbursement of expenses or their transport arrangements, people interviewed generally found these satisfactory.
- Some people were interested in developing the project for people who wanted to do some volunteering and stay in an opportunity which suited them without an expectation of moving towards paid work. Some people taking part in the research said they did not now want to move towards a paid job. They were pleased with the project for having found them some volunteering which they enjoyed and they wanted to go on working there.

It's just ... what I do now is all right. I don't want to go in another place where I don't know people ... I'm getting a bit shy and I don't talk well.
(woman, in 40s)

For this person, encouragement from Jobcentre Plus to think about paid work was unwelcome, but in terms of her volunteering '*everything's perfect*'.

Suggestions for organisations using volunteers

Some people had suggestions about volunteering which they knew went wider than the service offered by the volunteering project. These suggestions were about the way in which organisations used volunteers, and the agreements and expectations which went along with the arrangements. People making these points understood that the volunteering project often could not control what happened here. However,

they felt that there was a role for the volunteering project in educating organisations about the impact on the volunteer and looking for ways of influencing good practice.

- There were suggestions for '*tightening*' the agreements between volunteers and employing organisations, for example, a more transparent '*job description*' which set out what work the '*employer*' expected from the volunteer, and what both the '*employer*' and the volunteer expected to gain from the arrangement. This would introduce a more formal recognition of responsibilities on both sides, and might lessen opportunities for some organisations to see volunteers as a source of free labour. Organisations might also be encouraged to think whether they had responsibility to start paying people who had been doing valuable work on a voluntary basis for long periods of time.
- There were suggestions for certificates to be issued to people who completed a period of volunteering. People who had worked in a voluntary job for as long as a year said that when they left they had no signed certificate to show how much and what kind of work they had done, and their skills and responsibilities. They had nothing to show potential employers to demonstrate the value of their volunteering experience. Returning later to the organisation where they had volunteered, to ask for a reference, was problematic if relevant staff were no longer there, or if the organisation no longer existed. Such people felt that they had nothing to show for their year's work.

Furthermore, it would be more of an incentive if there were recognised certificates to be gained whilst working voluntarily. (woman, in 40s)

- Linked to both the previous suggestions, it was suggested that there should be an obligation on employing organisations to give priority to established and competent volunteers when paid posts were advertised. People saw injustice if they appeared to be passed over when paid jobs were advertised, especially when they felt that the creation of a new paid job had partly resulted from the work they had built up voluntarily.

for example, voluntary work gives you the opportunity to gain hands on experience and training, to some degree. However, on the other hand it does not appear to give real help towards getting suitable employment'. (woman, in 40s)

Chapter 4 Discussion of findings

This chapter discusses the findings from the two sets of interviews with people who have used V4ES, within the general context of volunteering and employability. The views expressed in this chapter are the researchers' own. People who took part in the interviews understood that the researchers would write this final chapter to complete the report, and did not expect to contribute directly.

The aim of the V4ES project is to improve people's chances of getting a paid job by supporting them in a suitable volunteering opportunity. Of key interest to CVS managers and staff is how well suited the design and service components of V4ES are to achieve the aim. Care is needed here, in commenting. The researchers spoke to a good mix of people who had been in touch with the project, including some who were considered to have left without 'completing' the programme. Further interviews three months later with most of the initial participants provided a useful perspective on their trajectories of health and employment circumstances. However, we do not have a perspective from the organisations using volunteers, and we did not undertake any structured interviews with guidance workers or other significant people such as local Jobcentre Plus advisers. A full evaluation of V4ES might also include systematic analysis of administrative records, to provide a statistical pattern of contacts and outcomes. It is possible, however, to make the following observations.

Recruitment

The project was successful in establishing a range of ways of recruiting people. People came to V4ES by referral from a variety of local agencies and organisations which support people in the community; through word of mouth suggestions from family or friends; from organisations which use volunteers, and by 'dropping-in' to the CVS office, which offers a range of services. A key finding for V4ES is that the guidance workers' outreach work was highly valued, bringing people into contact with the project in familiar locations or as part of normal activities.

V4ES was recruiting people with a wide range of interest in and motivation to do both paid and voluntary work. Some people were already highly motivated towards paid employment when they got in touch, for example some lone parents who expected to work when they could fit this around caring for their children. For people whose eventual aim was definitely paid work, doing some voluntary work did seem like taking a step along the way. Other people liked the idea of paid work, at some time in the future, but saw a number of barriers related to ill-health, impairments or aging. They thought they would need help and support, and it might take a long time to feel ready to try paid work. People like this were hoping primarily for support in achieving some voluntary work, which might prove helpful in moving towards a paid job

eventually but for the time being would be valuable to them in its own right. Some of those who took part in the research said the main motivation in getting in touch with the volunteering project had been to find something interesting to do, to help fill otherwise empty days, and to combat depression. This wide range of motivation towards and capacity for paid work among people recruited has major implications for V4ES, in terms of resources and outcomes, as discussed later.

Guidance workers' approach

Findings show that the guidance workers were skilled in establishing rapport and trust among a range of people who approached the project, some of whom found talking to people and making relationships hard. Among people who took part in the research, there was general satisfaction with the manner and approach of the guidance workers when people first made contact with V4ES. Some people, including people who left the project early, spoke highly of their patience, pleasant manner and hard work. Taking the first step in getting in touch with the project, for example phoning for an appointment or going into the Mansfield Road CVS office, could be daunting for some people and hard to do. The number of other people in the building could be overwhelming, especially if they all seemed competent and purposeful to somebody who was unsure of themselves and unused to being with other people. Findings underlined the importance of being welcomed into the building and not having to wait to see somebody, having privacy and being able to talk to guidance workers in a separate space within the CVS building.

The main criticisms of the guidance workers' approach concerned pace and communication. People with learning difficulties, people who felt stressed and people whose thinking was affected by medication felt that too much information or too many new ideas had been offered to them too quickly. Asking questions or indicating lack of understanding requires a lot of confidence. If reading was hard, people could not rely on taking away printed material to jog their memories or explain what they had not wanted to ask. Print-outs of volunteering opportunities were not useful to people who did not read.

In this way, guidance workers' efforts to interest people and provide information had sometimes been negative experiences, reinforcing feelings of dependency and inadequacy, and patterns of pretending to understand. People who felt like this said that helpful and positive discussions with a guidance worker might include just two or three key pieces of information or ideas, repeated in different ways, with checking back all the time to see what was understood, or what particularly interested or puzzled the person. Several meetings with guidance workers might be necessary to build up understanding, while also building confidence and interest, and cover the same ground as would be expected in one interview with a person with average learning and literacy skills. Adopting such a relatively slow pace of working for some

people has various implications for V4ES, of course. There are major resource issues in increasing considerably the amount of time spent with individual people. There are also issues related to the duration of contact with individual people, which will affect programme monitoring and performance assessment. V4ES may want to consider these issues in developing and funding similar projects.

The second criticism in the area of communication was that guidance workers did not keep in touch with people after initial meetings, or follow up on what people thought had been promised. Care is needed in interpreting this, because we do not have the guidance workers' perspective. Similar findings emerge from evaluations of other programmes which help people move to paid work. For example, in the evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People (Stafford *et al.*, 2004) some participants said they were left uncertain about what was happening next and some had no or few further contacts with their Job Broker. What seems likely, in programmes offering personalised advice and confidence building, is that a positive early meeting with an adviser in which good relations are established may result in high expectations of follow-up and outcome, such that the risk of disappointment is also high.

Findings point to the importance of V4ES guidance workers making clear at the end of every interaction what has been decided about further action, who will take the initiative and within what timeframe. If guidance workers are unable to follow-up on what they have undertaken to do, it would be helpful to get in touch quickly with the person concerned to explain what has happened and decide together how to go forward. How far guidance workers take the initiative in getting in touch with people to see how they are getting on will depend on individual situations and circumstances; what is important is that this meets people's expectations.

Finding suitable voluntary jobs

There was considerable evidence of the success of V4ES in helping people identify and achieve a voluntary job that suited them well. Indeed, some people had enjoyed the voluntary work accessed with V4ES so much that they continued doing it for 12 months or more. A suitable and enjoyable voluntary job was not always the first one tried. Findings showed the importance of the readiness of V4ES to go on supporting people when voluntary jobs broke down, to help them understand what would suit them better, and then to look for such a job.

There are lessons to learn from the situations in which V4ES was not successful in that people approached the project with an interest in volunteering and did not find a suitable opportunity with help from the project. Some of these people started to take steps themselves, as agreed with guidance workers, but were quickly put off by negative comments from Jobcentre Plus staff, or found obstacles in being unable to provide references. It appeared to the researchers that the problems perceived might

have been overcome if guidance workers had known quickly what had happened, and intervened. These might be examples of situations where more proactive enquiries by guidance workers could have been helpful. However, some of the people concerned lived unsettled lives and, from the researchers' own experience, were hard to contact or had periods of severe illness.

There were also some situations where it is hard for the researchers to see what V4ES might have done differently. For example, some people who did not find voluntary work with V4ES were looking for specific kinds of work and, when these proved hard for guidance workers to find, were not interested in alternative suggestions. One such person, waiting for suggestions from V4ES, independently found an opportunity which suited her well. Another discovered that the police checks required for volunteering took a long time, and started to think more towards returning to education.

Supporting people in voluntary jobs

There was evidence that some people valued the extra support and training available from V4ES while they were doing their voluntary job, but this came mainly from people who had already found a position when they got in touch with V4ES.

Apart from the person who said that the follow-up enquiries from V4ES to her supervisor had caused awkwardness at work, people had rather little to say about the way that guidance workers supported them in jobs they had accessed through the project. This must not be interpreted as indicating that on-the-job support had not been offered or received. All we can say is that this part of the service was not something that people remembered much about or wanted to comment on.

Improving chances of getting paid work

There was evidence, in the second set of interviews, that some people who did move from a voluntary job to paid work considered that the support and help received from V4ES while volunteering had been of key significance in equipping them to apply for and get the paid job. The boost to self-esteem and confidence, skills and qualifications gained, and workplace experience had been of great help.

Others who had not yet moved to paid work felt that they were now better equipped if and when they wanted to try. They had gained new skills and experience, learned or regained work-place related skills; and increased their confidence and self-esteem. However, the group also included people who had spent relatively long periods in their voluntary work, building it up to almost full-time occupation. When such jobs

ended and the people concerned focused on getting paid work, they regretted very much that they had no formal certification from the volunteering, to demonstrate their capacities. In retrospect, they wondered if they should have stayed so long in the voluntary work. There are issues for V4ES to consider here, in terms of project design, and whether the service would be more helpful if extended to supporting people through volunteering into paid work.

It is important to re-emphasise that some of the people recruited to V4ES faced many disadvantages, in terms of ill-health, impairment, histories of addiction and homelessness. By the time of the research interviews, some of the study group thought that it was now unlikely that they would do paid work, and some did not want to try. People like this were sometimes very satisfied with V4ES if they had found an enjoyable and life-enhancing voluntary job.

Wider welfare to work environment

One of the main components of the government's social policy agenda since 1997 has been its 'welfare to work' strategy, based on the belief that one of the best routes out of poverty and social exclusion is through paid employment. There have been numerous programmes and policy initiatives designed to achieve this, including the range of New Deals for different types of people out of the labour market. Of most relevance to the clients of V4ES in Nottingham is probably the New Deal for Disabled People (though the New Deals for lone parents and for people over 50, for example, will also be relevant). There have also been changes to the social security benefit system aimed at removing some of the financial barriers to working and encouraging people to engage in part-time paid and unpaid work.

Research to evaluate the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) (Stafford *et al.*, 2004) has shown that people who are a long way from the labour market (in terms of length of unemployment, education and skills, and personal confidence) require individualised packages of help that might include a wide range of inputs such as occupational assessments, training, work trials, confidence-building courses, tax and benefit advice, assistance with job searching, and personal support from an adviser *before and after* starting a job. Such help typically lasts over an extended period of time, such as six months to a year and beyond. The skills and knowledge to help people through the whole of the journey into work are considerable, and Jobcentre Plus and NDDP providers typically do not expect individual staff members to master them all. Instead teams of staff are set up, with individuals perhaps having specific skills, or collaborative arrangements are made with other organisations. One example concerns social security benefits. NDDP advisers (job brokers) are often not benefit experts and may establish arrangements with a Jobcentre Plus office or welfare rights organisation to provide information and advice about benefits and in-work payments when required.

In deciding how to develop its services aimed at helping people into work, therefore, CVS could consider how best to 'position' the V4ES programme within the wider context of government and other provision. It would appear sensible that CVS plays to its strengths and does not try to duplicate services and help already available from central government through its Jobcentre Plus offices and from NDDP provider organisations. Our view is that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for CVS staff to become experts in all aspects of moving people from long-term unemployment into paid work. There is probably more scope for forging relationships locally with other key actors, particularly in Jobcentre Plus, NDDP provider organisations and the welfare rights sector, to ensure that clients of V4ES have access to the full range of resources that can help them move towards paid work. CVS is particularly well-placed to complement existing services because the role that voluntary activity can play in people's route to work is not as well developed in Jobcentre Plus or NDDP as other inputs, such as training or work trials. (It is likely that this is a partly consequence of performance measurement structures within Jobcentre Plus and financial incentives to NDDP providers, which emphasise entries into paid employment.)

This study demonstrates some of the strengths of CVS on which it might build, in order to position V4ES and other similar programmes: well-developed recruitment strategies for people who might volunteer; wide knowledge and understanding of local organisations and agencies which might offer volunteering opportunities; skills in making contacts and building relationships with organisations; skills in helping people choose an appropriate voluntary job, and get a position; support and training for people who are volunteering, including continuing support for those people who discover that they are unlikely to move much further towards paid work, but value their voluntary work.

Reference

Stafford, B. *et al.* (2004) *New Deal for Disabled People: First Synthesis Report*, Sheffield: Department for Work and Pensions.

More details about the research

First interviews

First, staff at Nottingham CVS sent a letter to 57 people who had recently been in touch with V4ES programme. There is a copy of this letter at the end.

V4ES waited for two weeks. Three people got in touch with V4ES to say they did not want to take part. After the two weeks, V4ES sent to the researchers the names addresses and telephone numbers of everybody else.

We then tried to get in touch with people by telephone. Some were not living any longer at the addresses which V4ES knew, or had a different telephone number so we could not contact them. Some calls to men were answered by support staff in hostels or supported accommodation who undertook to pass messages on, but we do not know if this happened and we did not hear from these people. Six of the people we contacted directly said they did not want to take part. They said they were too busy, or could not remember any contacts with the project, or they were not interested. Overall, we contacted 19 people and 13 agreed to take part in the research. We visited them at home or somewhere else that suited them. The interviews took place in August and September, 2004.

Second interviews

Three months later we tried to re-contact the 13 people who took part in the research, and sent them copies of Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the report and, to some people, a tape-recorded version of these chapters. Eleven people agreed to take part in a second interview to discuss the report. Most of these interviews took place in people's homes; one person preferred to speak to the researcher at their place of voluntary work.

People gave permission for tape-recording of these second interviews.

Writing the report

First, we listened to the tapes. Then the interviews were typed up by office staff working for the university, and we read them carefully.

We made notes and lists of what people said in the first set of interviews. We looked for the general picture – whether people all felt the same about the volunteering project, or whether some people had different views, and why this might be. We

looked for what people said was helpful about the volunteering project and the volunteering experience, and what people said had not been helpful, or why they were disappointed. We looked carefully at the suggestions some people made about how the volunteering project might be improved or done differently. We have written up in the report what we found out.

In the second set of interviews we looked for suggestions about improving the report, and amended the first version as requested.

Chapter Four is based on the researchers' views, taking into account all the views and experiences of people who took part.

Name and address

Date

Dear

I am writing to invite you to take part in some research on the Volunteering for Employment Skills programme (V4ES) which is organised at NCVS, 7 Mansfield Road, Nottingham.

We want to find out how to improve V4ES and what else would help people when they are thinking about returning to work. We are keen to know more about the views and experiences of people who have taken part in the V4ES programme.

We have asked some researchers at the University of York to help us with this. Their names are Anne Corden and Roy Sainsbury. They would like to meet some people who have recently taken part in V4ES, to hear about their experiences. You recently tried the V4ES programme so we are inviting you to take part. Whatever you have to say about V4ES will be helpful, whether you found it useful or not.

The meeting with Anne or Roy would take about one hour, at a place convenient for you. Everything that you talk about will be dealt with **confidentially** and Anne and Roy will not tell us whom they speak to. They will be interviewing several people and will write a report for us, but before they give the report to us they would like to show it to you, so that you are quite happy with it.

Everybody who takes part in the research will have a small money gift of £15 to thank them for their time.

Some people will prefer not to take part. **If you do not want to take part, please will you tell us before 4 August.** You can telephone Julie on 0115 9348427, e-mail juliew@nottinghamcvcs.co.uk , or you can send back the enclosed card.

If you would like to take part you don't need to do anything at this stage. If you have not contacted us by 4 August we will pass your name and address to Anne and Roy at the University of York and they will get in touch during August.

We do hope you would like to take part. The researchers will be very pleased to meet you and hear your views, whatever these are.

Yours sincerely

Julie Whitby

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