
Formative Evaluation of v

The National Young Volunteers' Service

Final Report –

Summary of Key Findings



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v – The National Young Volunteers' Service

v is a national charity, launched in 2006, with the aim of inspiring a new generation of young volunteers aged 16-25. **v** was set up following a report from the government-initiated Russell Commission, and was tasked with implementing 12 of the Russell Commission's 16 recommendations. **v** was responsible for leading a national investment programme designed to create a step change in the **quality, quantity and diversity** of youth volunteering. This investment programme consisted of a funded network of organisations through which youth-led volunteering opportunities for young people aged 16 to 25 could be delivered. The programme was designed along a number of distinct schemes, each with different outcomes in mind. For example **vtalentyear** was a full time volunteering programme, delivered via local authorities and further education colleges, with the aim being to engage NEET (Not in education, employment or training) young people and provide them with structured training and work experience opportunities; **vcashpoint** directly funded young people to set up and manage their own volunteering projects; and Match Fund worked with private companies and charitable trusts to match the funding they would provide to set up youth volunteering opportunities within different sectors, in partnership with **v**. **v**'s aim from the outset was to inspire a million more young people to volunteer, and **v** also performed other functions (listed below) such as marketing and promotion of youth volunteering.

Due to the ending of the **v** funding programme and recent cuts in public sector funding, **v** has been unable to sustain its investments in a network of volunteer-involving organisations. However, **v** continue to support: marketing and communications around youth volunteering; developing and fostering innovation modes of youth-led action; utilising web and social media to engage and inspire young people; creating partnerships with the public and private sectors; and, research and public affairs activities to support youth volunteering.

This summary of findings from the formative evaluation of the **v** programme (represented by the funded network), focuses on the experiences of the young volunteers, and impact of the **v** volunteering programme on the young volunteers, the grant funded network and wider sector. The summary will be of interest to anyone with an interest in youth volunteering and particularly **v** stakeholders.

Context – why volunteering matters

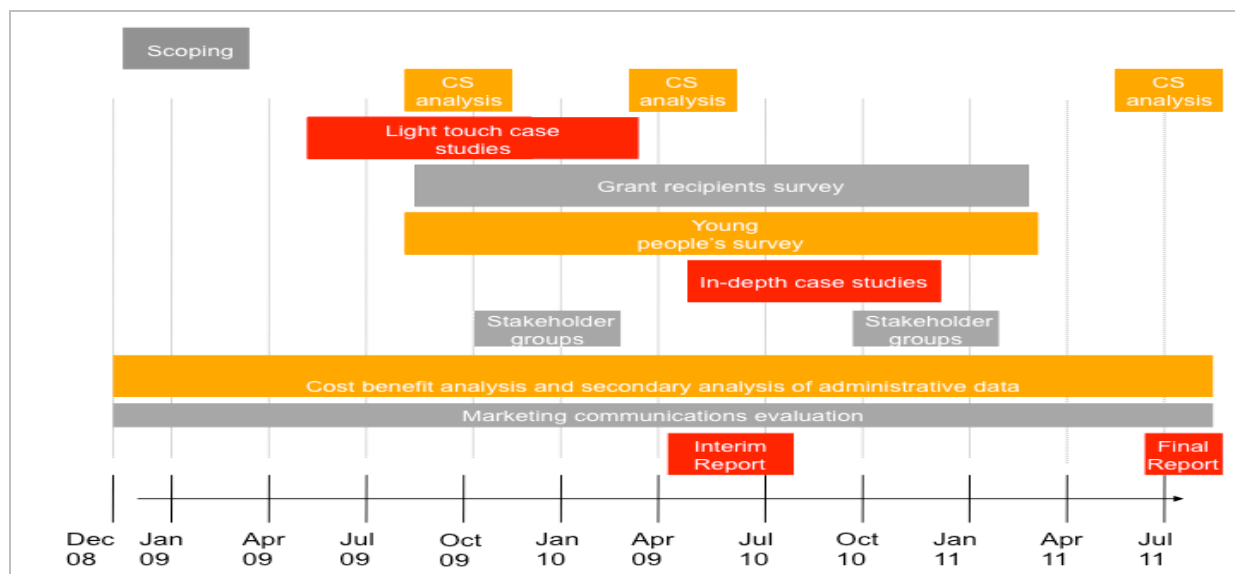
Broad societal trends such as changing demographics, globalisation and technological transformation all have implications for volunteering, how it is perceived and who participates. In 2010, a new Coalition government assumed office, raising the profile of volunteering through the articulation of the Big Society policy agenda – whilst at the same time the country is experiencing the most significant funding cuts for a generation. As such, it is assumed that volunteers may be increasingly relied upon to deliver vital services to those in need.

The most significant short-term socio-economic trend affecting youth volunteering is arguably the economic recession and its aftermath. Within this context, young people have been hit particularly hard, with youth unemployment reaching almost 1 million for 16-24 year olds in the fourth quarter

of 2010, and 75,000 of 18-24 year olds having been out of work for two years or more. Young people are the group most likely to get involved in volunteering to improve their skills and enhance their employability, though other impacts can also be found, as are reported here. In this political, social and economic context, volunteering can be viewed as a potential route to supporting young people's engagement in their communities, enabling them to develop both skills and resilience.

Evaluation of v

v commissioned the independent, formative evaluation of its activities through an OJEC competitive tender process, awarding the contract to a consortia, made up of agencies with relevant expertise to evaluate a large scale volunteering programme, led by NatCen. v worked with the evaluation team to constantly assess and review practice throughout the duration of the evaluation. The evaluation consisted of eight methodological strands, summarised in the diagram below. As part of the cost benefit analysis, a process for collecting monitoring information directly from volunteers online (individual monitoring) was also developed:



This is a multi-method evaluation which has approached the assessment of the impact of v from a range of perspectives using diverse sources of primary data. It has involved a multidisciplinary team from a range of research and academic backgrounds, and a systematic attempt to engage young people actively in the process of evaluation. We are aware of no other evaluation of a single initiative of this kind that is as broad in its scope.

FINDINGS

Quantity and diversity

The Russell Commission report indicated that v should commission a total of 412,160 volunteering opportunities over 5 years. Monitoring data from the v programme indicated that 1.05 million youth volunteering opportunities were created via v, and that by autumn 2010 over 700,000 opportunities had been taken up by young volunteers. 60 per cent of these young volunteers had

volunteered in the previous 12 months. The latest figures to date (June 2011), available from v, cite that 1,094,175 opportunities had now been created and taken up.

The characteristics of the v volunteers are diverse, and similar to those found among the general population of young people in England. This is in contrast to findings from the Citizenship Survey¹ which tends to indicate volunteers are drawn from more affluent, white backgrounds. Therefore reflecting the general population of young people may indicate a shift towards a more balanced mix of young people volunteering within the v programme than is the case within the wider population of young volunteers. This is particularly so with ethnicity. A detailed breakdown of this is provided in the full report. To summarise, from the monitoring information available, the characteristics of the volunteers were as follows:

Summary statistics of v volunteer characteristics from monitoring data

	% of valid responses		% of valid responses
Gender		Disability	
Male	41.8	Learning difficulty	7.4
Female	58.2	Learning disability	3.1
		Long term or life-limiting illness	0.8
Age group		Mental health issues	1.8
Age 16 - 17	22.8	Multiple disabilities	0.6
Age 18 - 19	14.2	None of the above	84.1
Age 20 - 25	62.9	Physical disability	1.5
		Sensory disability	0.6
Ethnicity		Economic Activity	
African	4.1	Employed	16.2
Asian and White	0.8	Self-employed	0.7
Bangladeshi	1.4	NEET	15.9
Black African and White	0.5	In education	62.0
Black, Caribbean and White	1.5	In training	3.3
Caribbean	2.7	None of the above	1.9
Chinese	1.6	Prefer not to say	6.3
Indian	3.8	Target Group	
Irish Traveller	0.0	At risk of exclusion	10.2
Other Asian background	2.2	Homeless	3.5
Other Ethnic Group	1.7	In or leaving care	3.8
Other Traveller	0.0	Lone parent	4.4
Other White background	3.3	Low income	51.0
Other black background	1.2	None of the listed groups	13.9
Other dual heritage	0.5	Offender/Ex-offender	7.0
Pakistani	4.6	Other (not completed)	0.1
Roma	0.1	Other (rural isolation)	0.1
White British	69.0	Refugee/Asylum Seeker	3.1
White Irish	1.0	Young carer	2.9

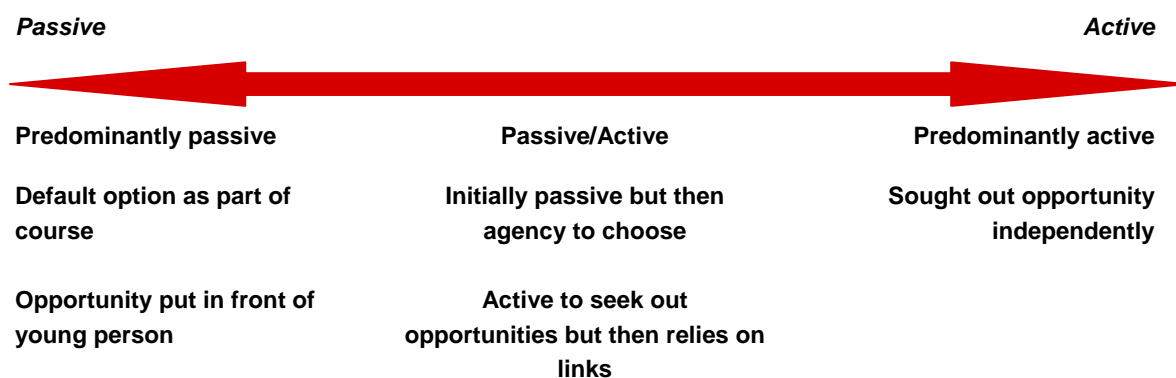
¹ Department for Communities and Local Government, Citizenship Survey, 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009 - 2010.

The experience of v volunteers

The purpose of this section is to provide a rich description of the experiences of young people who have volunteered through the v programme, to better understand the 'volunteer story' behind the monitoring figures presented above. Much of this has come from the in-depth case studies of volunteer projects conducted for the evaluation.

Engaging in volunteering

Young people becoming involved in v volunteering could be understood along a continuum between more active to passive routes into a new opportunity or activity, illustrated in the diagram below:



The passive end of the continuum is characterised by the volunteering opportunity being brought directly to young people already in contact with the volunteer involving organisation. For example they may already have been attending a youth centre every Wednesday and were asked to start to assist with setting up the group rather than just attending, or they may have attended with a friend and taken part in whatever activity was available without initially realising it was volunteering.

At the active end of the continuum, volunteers sought out specific volunteering opportunities, often via a website or volunteer centre. It could involve contact with organisations that were new to them and the volunteers had clear motivations for seeking out the specific type of opportunities that they found.

This understanding of routes into volunteering is important for unpacking the different facilitators of volunteering that occur for different young people, including those who may have less of a propensity to actively seek out volunteering opportunities. Our study shows that the influence of friends, word of mouth, being persuaded, and essentially what may be considered opportunistic volunteering, appeared to be significant for understanding routes in to volunteering, especially for young people who may be less likely to actively seek out opportunities.

The nature of volunteering opportunities

In the box below examples of different types of volunteering opportunities provided via four of the funding schemes are outlined:

mygames: Volunteers on the 2012-inspired Olympic programme had the opportunity to write articles for print and online media published by the host organisation. As part of the role the volunteer compiled case studies of young service users for inclusion in print or online media. There were also opportunities for volunteers to support the promotion of the funded activity and the host organisation more widely by writing articles for local and regional media.

vinvolved project: A vinvolved project provided opportunities for service users in each of its regional centres to form a steering group to shape the direction and delivery of local service provision. Two representatives from each steering group came together three times a year to attend the national steering group event. The purpose of the event was to enable representatives to inform the management and governance of the host organisation. At one national steering group event the representatives worked together to develop a 'how to' resource for running a steering group to be made available to other young people. This involved representatives working together in small groups to identify best practice for running a steering group as well as developing creative and innovative methods for communicating the learning acquired through the v-funded activity to other young people.

Match Fund: A Match Fund project offered opportunities for young people to support the delivery of its provision for young people with disabilities. This included young people who had previously accessed the wheelchair skills training returning as volunteers to provide peer-to-peer support to other young people accessing the training. Volunteers also supported the delivery of campaigning activities undertaken by service users. Volunteering roles included assisting service users to participate in the campaigning activity and supporting service users to develop the skills required to effectively undertake campaigning.

vcashpoint: A vcashpoint grant applicant established a parent and child group in their local area. The group ran for two hours once a week and provided opportunities for play as well as craft activities. The role of the grant applicant and other volunteers was set-up and delivery of the group each week. This included sourcing resources from the local library, opening and closing the venue, preparing refreshments, leading craft activities and supervising children.

These examples illustrate the range and diversity of volunteering opportunities created via the programme. This diversity in the type of volunteering activity in which young people could become involved was reported to be important to them (in the case study interviews) for a number of reasons:

- It was made easier and more attractive for young people if the opportunity involved an activity relevant to them, that they may already undertake, such as swimming or caring for children.
- It was important for those looking for a particular type of experience or accreditation. The fact that some v opportunities enabled young people to be accredited in a way that improved their educational or employment prospects was a factor in participants choosing to volunteer with a specific programme.
- Some v opportunities facilitated the altruistic desire of young people to provide support to certain groups, such as those with addictions. This could be due to personal experiences of themselves or family members.

Barriers to volunteering

In the case study interviews young people alluded to barriers to volunteering. Practical constraints such as lack of time and not wishing to travel long distances or into new areas were identified as key barriers to participation.

For young people involved in full-time volunteering, such as vtalentyear, the financial implications could act as a barrier to participation. Though expenses were available to cover costs incurred as a direct result of volunteering, the expenses available were not always sufficient when volunteers had caring responsibilities, lived independently from parents or had parents with a low income. In these circumstances volunteers were required to contribute to household bills that may not fall within the remit of those directly incurred for volunteering, such as contributing to gas and electricity charges.

As v were constrained by government policy as to the level of payment available, this may point to the need for a policy change if young people in these circumstances are to be able to engage in volunteering, though care would need to be taken to ensure the line between paid work and volunteering is not overly blurred.

Impacts

Young volunteers

Literature on the impacts of volunteering activities for young people tends to identify individual factors, such as skills development or increased confidence. Young people and project staff across the v funding schemes reported similar impacts. Recipients from all funding schemes were surveyed in the grant recipient survey and asked a series of questions assessing their project's impact on their volunteers. Table 1.1 presents the proportion of recipients that said their project had a positive impact on various aspects of the young volunteers that worked on their projects.

Table 1.1 Proportion of recipients saying that their project improved different things amongst young volunteers (grant recipient survey)	
Perceived impact	Total
	%
Their levels of self-confidence	99
Their skill levels	99
Their attitudes towards volunteering	96
Their aspirations	94
Their levels of engagement with the local community	94
The likelihood they will volunteer in the future	93
Their social networks	90
Their chance of getting a job in the future	90
Their chance of entering college, university or further education	88
Their general well being	86
Their awareness of issues in their local area or society in general	84
Other	43
<i>Base</i> ¹	344

¹ Figures exclude people who answered 'Don't know', and so base sizes vary slightly for each question presented in this table. Base sizes shown are the largest from all of the questions.

The statistics illustrate a high proportion of grant recipients reported positive impacts among their volunteers - almost all (99%) of recipients said that their v-funded project had a positive impact on volunteers' levels of self-confidence and on volunteers' skill levels. Ninety-six per cent of recipients said that their project had a positive impact on volunteers' attitudes towards volunteering, and 94 per cent said their project had a positive impact on volunteers' aspirations and on volunteers' levels of engagement with the local community.

Employment skills

Project staff and young people in the case studies also discussed how volunteering supports the development of their transferable employment skills, within a structured working environment. For some young people, their volunteering activities were the first time they had been in a workplace setting or had taken on a role of responsibility, and as a result allowed them to 'behave professionally' (Project staff). In Table 1.2 the different skill developments identified by the young volunteers who returned individual monitoring data is outlined:

Table 1.2 Reported skills development, from individual monitoring data		
<i>Base: all respondents except short-term volunteers</i>	<i>Individual monitoring</i>	
	Those strongly agreeing %	Those agreeing %
Those <i>strongly agreeing</i> and <i>agreeing</i> with views about skills development		
Have got better at communicating with other people	42	49
More able to work as part of a team	38	47
My ability to make decisions has improved	28	50
I feel more able to lead or encourage others	38	46
I have got better at managing my time	25	43
I have developed skills to do a specific job	27	37
I have improved my reading, writing and maths skills	10	17
I have developed my technical skills, such as computer skills	14	25
<i>Base number</i>	1709	1709

Aspirations

Another impact identified by grant recipients was increased aspirations of young people. In the grant recipient survey it was reported by 94 per cent of respondents that their volunteering opportunities had increased young people's aspirations. This was further discussed in the case study interviews with staff and young people. Young peoples' involvement in volunteering provided an environment where they could consider their career direction and be inspired to develop future career paths. They could also come into contact with new 'trusted adults' that could assist them to understand the current opportunities available, or act as role models.

Social impacts

Social and community impacts can be difficult to quantify and measure in a robust way. The impacts may not be immediately apparent when volunteering occurs, for example the impact of clearing a walk-way for residents in a local area will differ markedly if the walk-way is then regularly used or not or leads to facilities. Recipients in the grant recipient survey were asked about their v-funded project's impact on their community. Table 1.3 presents the proportions of recipients that said their projects improved or increased various things in the community.

Table 1.3 Proportion of recipients saying that their project improved /increased different things in the community	
Perceived impact	Total
	%
Access for young people to volunteering opportunities	94
Links between young volunteers and the wider community	91
Awareness of youth volunteering in general	89
The image of young people in the local community	88
Awareness of the project or specific issues it raised	87
Attitudes towards young people in the local community	87
Awareness of your organisation	86
Partnerships between organisations working with young volunteers	73
Relationships between organisations working in your local community	71
Services provided by young people in your local community	64
Services for young people in your local community	59
Has the project had any other kind of impact on the community as a whole?	41
Levels of competition between organisations for young volunteers	33
<i>Base</i>	<i>344</i>

* This question was not asked of v-cashpoint recipients, and so the base for this figure is 271

Ninety-four per cent reported access for young people to volunteer had increased; 91 per cent said the link between young volunteers and the wider community, and 89 per cent said awareness of youth volunteering in general. Amongst those that said their project had an 'other' kind of impact on the community, the most common answer (given by 20% of those giving an 'other' answer) was that their project brought the community together (including bringing specific groups together). Ten per cent said that their project had an environmental impact, while six per cent said that their project increased active citizenship (for example by making volunteers or others more willing to engage with community events or the community more generally), that their project made more opportunities available to young people, and that they engaged previously disengaged young people.

Tangible community impacts were identified, but these particularly focussed on the young people, or attitudes to young people themselves that had changed due to the v-funded projects – that young people would be more likely to volunteer; that young volunteers helped to tackle negative stereotypes and improve attitudes and perceptions amongst adults.

Wider impacts (that could be considered 'social impacts' as they affect a wide cross-section of people and places, not limited to a particular geographical location or group) were also reported, and these are explored below.

Service provision

Volunteers also increased an organisation's capacity to offer new services, or extend and enhance the delivery of existing services which in turn provided a service for the local community. For example, a further education college was able to extend the opening hours of its community lounge with the support of volunteers on the vtalentyear programme.

Intergenerational contact and the image of young people

The grant recipient survey findings showed that 88 per cent of grant recipients thought that the image of young people improved due to their involvement in v volunteering. There was also evidence of intergenerational social impacts, such as young people visiting residential homes or organising tea dances for older people.

Social mixing

Another positive impact identified was that of social mixing among volunteers. Volunteering opportunities which brought together young volunteers from different backgrounds and circumstances helped to engender trust and confidence between groups. They also challenged perceptions about the capabilities, behaviours and attitudes of young people. This was felt to have been particularly important in bringing together groups of young people from different religions, races or cultures, and redressing perceptions of potentially marginalised groups, such as young people with disabilities:

'The activity shows that young disabled people do have something to offer, and they can be involved, and therefore it opens the minds of volunteers, that young people should be given an opportunity to take part in something different' (mygames, project staff)

Post volunteer progression

An important element of understanding the impact of volunteering would be gained by tracking the destinations of young people who participate. However, collecting information on this and attributing this to volunteering is difficult especially if a young person is only volunteering on a part time basis or occasionally. Rather than a 'stepping stone' progression to another activity, volunteering may be part of their day to day life. The evaluation did not have the scope to explicitly track young volunteers over time to explore their progression, but did ask vashpoint recipients (who were volunteers also) information on their circumstances pre and post receiving the vashpoint grant and also asked the young people who provided individual monitoring information on their intended progression.

When asked what their *single main activity* was (or will be) after the end of vashpoint funding, 47 per cent said paid work and 38 per cent said education or study leading to a qualification. Comparatively, when asked what their main activity was *before* receiving vashpoint funding 30

per cent said paid work, 50 per cent said education or study leading to a qualification. Therefore there was an increased proportion in work and education following their v-cashpoint activity.

The individual monitoring figures, from young volunteers, indicated around 15 per cent moved into paid work after volunteering, whilst around one third went to University – this excludes those who were simply *returning* to university. Around eight per cent went on to do further training (including apprenticeships). A high proportion, three quarters, were also currently volunteering.

A future priority for research on volunteering that the evaluation team would recommend is longitudinal research that follows volunteers for months and years after an initial opportunity, so that post volunteering progression and the relationships that can be found between these activities and volunteering, can be better understood.

The v-funded network

In this section the focus shifts to the impact that the v programme had on the funded network of organisations involved in delivering v volunteering opportunities.

Implementation of the programme

The initial set up and implementation of projects was explored throughout the evaluation. There was initially some difficulties reported as projects recruited staff and took on board the different components of their funding scheme. Communication could cause difficulties if the person named as the grant recipient (and therefore the person v communicated with) was in fact not involved in the set up or running of the project, as often this information was not passed on. These issues dissipated over time however, as practices became embedded and v responded to evaluation findings which led to a change in processes.

Collecting monitoring information on volunteers was also found by some project workers to be difficult, as it added an additional administrative burden; v responded to this by changing the monitoring system (the regularity, form design and so on) which was reported by project workers to improve the process. More problematically, project workers could also report being uncomfortable collecting monitoring information as it involved asking young people personal information such as information about their sexual identity, even though this is a legal requirement for service providers. This meant that certain information on the monitoring data came back with a limited number of returns. This indicates the potential challenges of collating monitoring information and the trade-off that may occur between high quality information and administrative burden. However monitoring information is important to collect to be able to indicate equality of opportunity within volunteering, which will only be evidenced if robust monitoring information is collected and processed. Collecting monitoring information is therefore not merely an administrative task but underpins greater understanding and awareness of which young people are accessing volunteering. The individual monitoring system (that collected information directly from volunteers, online) that was introduced by v during the evaluation provides one model of how such information could be collected in the future.

Organisational impacts

In the grant recipient survey, organisations were asked about the impacts that their v-funded project had on their organisation. Unsurprisingly perhaps the most often cited impact related to volunteering capacity. Ninety-four per cent of organisations said that their project increased the number of young people they worked with as volunteers, while 88 per cent said that it increased their capacity to involve volunteers. Amongst those that said the v funding had an 'other' impact on their organisation, the most common answer was that it raised awareness of volunteering (or of youth volunteering). Other answers include that it expanded the funded organisations' activities (for example, by providing more services for young people), that it improved the image of the funded organisations, that it increased the contribution of young people to the funded organisations, that it improved the security or sustainability of organisations, and that it helped to secure other funding.

Distance travelled

As might be expected, the reported impacts on organisations of the v-funded projects varied by the previous experience organisations had with volunteering. For example, organisations with little or no experience of working with volunteers more commonly reported that the v-funded project improved their organisation's procedures for volunteer management (92% gave this answer) than those with a lot of experience in this area (67%). Similarly, those with little or no experience of working with volunteers were more likely to report an increase in the support for volunteers within their organisation (92% compared with 73%), the awareness of volunteering within their organisation (96% compared with 79%) and the way their organisation handles youth volunteering specifically (95% compared with 83%).

Quality

A key aim of v has been to improve the quality of volunteering opportunities in specific relation to the Russell Commission recommendations. The ways in which this has been implemented are explored below.

Reach

Reach is a quality assurance accreditation system, established by Youth Action Network (an independent charity), which was rolled out across v's funded network. v contracted Youth Action Network to turn their existing **Reach** toolkit into an online self-assessment tool, and for their staff to provide tailored capacity building support to the funded network. vinvolved teams and vinvolved projects were expected to gain **Reach Achieved** status. All but two of the grant funded organisations required to obtain **Reach** accreditation as part of their contract with v did so, demonstrating success in driving through this quality assurance initiative by v.

In staff interviews undertaken for the evaluation case studies project staff were asked about **Reach**. **Reach** was perceived to cement quality standards, but could also in some cases be felt to be a burden for organisations, whose main thrust did not involve volunteering. In the grant recipient survey, recipients from vinvolved teams and vinvolved projects were asked what kind of impact the **Reach** quality assurance framework had on their project. Around three-quarters (74%) of recipients thought that the **Reach** framework had a positive impact on their project, while 9 per

cent thought it had some positive and some negative impact, 15 per cent thought it had no impact at all, and 1 per cent thought it had a negative impact.²

Therefore **Reach** was generally positive in impact and is likely to have improved the quality of the volunteering processes and policies in place among the teams and projects charged with implementing it.

Supporting volunteers

Another way that quality may be implemented in youth volunteering is by the nature of the support available for volunteers. In the grant recipient survey organisations were asked how they supported young volunteers. The most common way of supporting young volunteers, by around three-quarters (78%) of organisations, was that each volunteer has a named supervisor, manager, or advisor. Over half of the organisations supported young volunteers through training (59%) and by having a general manager or advisor available (56%). Sixty-nine per cent of organisations said that some of these ways of supporting young volunteers had been *put in place specifically for this project* indicating, perhaps unsurprisingly that more support was made available as a result of the v investment and requirements on quality assurance.

Youth involvement

Another key organisational impact was the extent to which young people were able to become actively involved, or that youth involvement within an organisation improved/increased due to being part of the v-funded network. Organisations funded by v may have already had in place a range of processes for involving young people, or have been youth-led, before they obtained funds from v, however the grant recipient survey still showed that youth involvement had increased over the two waves of the survey, for every type of involvement mentioned, as outlined in Table 1.4

Table 1.4 Proportions of organisations saying that they involved young volunteers in different ways, by wave (grant recipient survey)		
<i>Base: All grant recipients excluding vcashpoint (270)¹</i>		
Questions	Survey wave	
	Wave 1	Wave 2
	%	%
In publicity, promotion or media campaigns for the project	85	93
In developing activities and target groups for the project	86	91
In recruiting volunteers	81	85
As part of any Advisory Group for the project	82	84
In identifying the overall project aims or strategy	73	80
In administration or finance matters	49	55
In any other ways?	31	27
None of these	2	1
<i>Base</i>	266	270

² One per cent of recipients said they had not used the **Reach** framework

The benefits of youth involvement were also discussed by project staff in the case studies, indicating it led to impacts for young people and also the organisation involved:

'We can skill the young people up so they're competent to be involved, genuinely, in the decision making. So that's changing the organisation and changing the young people and giving them opportunities so they build their confidence.'
(involved project staff)

Private sector

Finally, an interesting juncture can be made in examining the relationship that v had with private sector organisations, bringing them into contact with volunteer involving organisations from the voluntary sector. v worked in partnership with private sector organisations in the funded network via the Match Fund programme, which generated additional Match Funded revenue to support youth volunteering programmes.

Generally private sector partners interviewed during the evaluation reported positively on their relationship with v, noting for example good collaborative working, provision of expertise, and that v had a degree of commercialism and professionalism that they required from their partners for effective working:

'At best [v] are proactive, positive, finding solutions and making an effort to bridge the cultural divide between private sector and charity' (Private sector stakeholder interview)

It was also reported that v had improved its relationship with the private sector over time, moving on from being a funder to an active partner, whom the business sector could learn from and work with to enhance the volunteering programmes that they engaged in as part of their corporate social responsibility schemes. It was therefore felt by private sector partners that the relationship with v worked well in the sense that Match Fund did not just double the scale of existing private sector projects, but introduced volunteering elements in ways that seemed to enhance the quality of match funded projects. .

Cost benefit analysis

One strand of the evaluation involved a cost benefit analysis. There are a number of steps to calculating the final costs and benefits of volunteering programmes. Table 1.7 illustrates a calculation based on five areas of individual benefit to volunteers measured as part of the evaluation. The values cited have been based on research by the Social Return On Investment (SROI) network, reflecting opportunity costs or the costs of alternative provision to achieve the same ends.

Monetary values, allowance for how far the outcome was the result of v, or instead might have happened anyway (attribution) is also considered in cost benefit analysis. In the

evaluation it was assumed that only 10 per cent of the changes in labour market status be attributed to **v**, and half of the changes in perceived skills. This is to reflect the fact that many of the young volunteers would have volunteered for only a short amount of their time across the programme, so a 10 per cent attribution rate seemed robust and realistic. Alternative (higher) assumptions quickly result in higher levels of overall benefit being calculated:

Table 1.6 Monetised benefits from v volunteering programmes, for individual volunteers				
Area of change	Proportion	Value	Attribution factor	Total
Moving into work	15%	£4300	0.1	65
Going to University	34%	£9250	0.1	315
Better time management	38%	£853	0.5	162
Better team working	25%	£524	0.5	66
Increased confidence	38%	£150	0.5	29
<i>Total monetised benefits</i>				635
<i>Total costs per opportunity</i>				109
<i>SROI ratio</i>				5.8

With an overall benefit of £635 per volunteering opportunity, and an average cost per opportunity of £109, this gives an SROI ratio of 1 to 5.8 (or just under 6). This overall figure is sensitive to assumptions about the attribution of any changes to **v** - if it was instead assumed that 20 per cent of the movements into paid work or going to university may be attributed to **v**, the SROI ratio increased to 9.7.

This cost benefit analysis has used impacts that have already been given an SROI value, and the calculation leaves out some of the other key changes in measures of social and skills development discussed above, that have less clearly defined monetary values. The grant recipients and young people interviewed reported a range of additional impacts on young volunteers beyond those listed in the cost benefit analysis. This total also does not include wider societal and community benefits and gains accruing to organisations as a result of them supporting volunteering, which again were evidence in the evaluation. Therefore the 1 to 6 SROI should be considered very robust and other, less clearly defined impacts that were also found are not included.

The sector

In this final section the view of the wider stakeholders on the impact of **v** are reflected upon. Two waves of stakeholder interviews were conducted during the evaluation. Though stakeholders could find it difficult to conceptualise the impact **v** has had on the sector, the following key impacts did emerge:

- The professionalisation of youth volunteering
- Volunteering increasingly linked to personal development rather than social impacts
- Youth engagement and empowerment agenda more explicitly linked to youth volunteering

For example, the youth-led ethos was described as a ‘big impact’. There was a sense that **v** has effectively promoted youth-led action and that this overlapped with the youth sector.

However there was less certainty about the impact of **v** on the concept of ‘volunteering’. It was felt that young people are now more focused on employability benefits than before, and **v** has created a more ‘consumer’ version of volunteering. As volunteers become more ‘consumerist’ with a focus on the personal development goals that volunteering could meet, there were concerns reported by stakeholders that important volunteering roles could be left unfilled. This consternation however would depend on the ideological stance held regarding the nature and purpose of volunteering – it could be described by stakeholders as a ‘positive’ as well as ‘negative’ impact that **v** brought a new focus and value to volunteering in terms of ‘personal development’ for young people – especially in the face of high youth unemployment and concerns about youth transitions in the current social and economic context. The professionalisation of volunteering was also arguably the way in which **v** achieved their set objectives to increase the quantity, quality and diversity of youth volunteering.

Concluding summary

In a relatively short period of time **v** funded a large and diverse network of organisations to champion and support the growth of youth volunteering in England. This summary has outlined some key findings in terms of the experience of volunteers, and the impact of the programme on volunteers, the funded network and the sector. These findings have been taken from the formative evaluation of the **v** programme, and are provided in more detail, along with additional findings, in the full report (available at the website below). Evidence gathered throughout the independent formative evaluation demonstrates that this investment enabled over a million volunteering opportunities to be created and filled by young people between 2008 and 2011. Impacts on volunteers reported include increased confidence, work and life skills and aspirations, as well as links to new networks and social mixing.

While young people are at the heart of the **v** programme, the funded network has been the conduit through which **v**’s engagement with young people most often occurred. The impact that being part of the **v**-funded network had on organisations includes enabling them to expand provision, engage with more young people, improve the quality of the volunteering processes and adopt more youth involvement activities.

Due to the end of the **v** funding programme and recent cuts in public sector funding **v** has been unable to sustain its investments in a network of volunteer involving organisations. Looking to the future, **v** intends to continue to champion youth volunteering and youth-led

action, and engage in a range of activities to do so. v will for example deliver aspects of the new National Citizen Service.

v's commitment to undertaking a large scale, formative evaluation of its work, and to share this learning in a open, transparent and collaborative way, is an important step towards ensuring that the voluntary and public sectors in particular, can learn about how to effectively engage young volunteers in their work. Indeed this currently represents the only formative evaluation of its kind in the sector that we are aware of. Research and evaluation exercises can be expensive and in a tight financial climate they may be difficult to justify. One lesson from this evaluation is that with careful attention to the gathering of monitoring data, plus the use of information generated automatically (e.g. through hits on websites), much information can be gathered in an economical way. Cross-referencing against other sources of data (such as national survey information) is also possible. With appropriately-designed procedures for gathering data on the characteristics of volunteers, and of the work that they do, it is possible for voluntary organisations to demonstrate their impact - at least in terms of targeting particular groups of the population, and in terms of demonstrating the value of their activities.

The full report of the evaluation provides a comprehensive outline of the multi-faceted learning and evaluation that has come from both the v programme and v evaluation. With volunteering an integral component of the Big Society ethos, and young people facing a difficult economic and employment context, these lessons are important ones. This study shows that, with appropriate programme design and resources, it is possible to offer a menu of opportunities that draws a more diverse range of participants into volunteering.

Full details of the evaluation methodology and findings, as well as case studies of youth volunteering projects and impacts identified via the formative evaluation, can be found at:

<http://vinspired.com/about-us/research>

www.natcen.ac.uk

The evaluation was completed in June 2011

Afterword



Too often evaluation reports are briefly heralded before being confined to the dusty annals of an organisation's history alongside a collection of Annual Reports from yesteryear. At v, learning has always been an intrinsic part of our DNA and, whilst we will never profess to having all the answers, we are always prepared to learn from our experiences. It is for this reason that I am writing an Afterword for this report, which represents both a reflection on our impact and a valuable reference point for our future.

This report offers significant insight for all and we hope you will take the time to absorb it. The findings are helping us to shape our future activities by building on strong foundations and enhancing areas we can improve. We have learnt a great deal about our impact but more importantly what we need to do to be able to tell an even more persuasive story.

Our (minimum) social return on investment ratio of £5.80 for every £1 invested is robust and compelling and yet it only relates to a fraction of our overall impact. Collectively, we have to improve how we monitor the personal impact of young peoples' volunteering journeys, particularly over the longer term. We need to strengthen the case for the role that volunteering plays in boosting employability and developing key capabilities which help young people succeed and flourish. We must persuade a broad cross section of investors that continued investment in opportunities for young people will aid our communities, help our economic recovery and assist those experiencing the negative and damaging impacts of high youth unemployment. We need to devise and develop new ways of measuring the community impact that these opportunities generate, shifting away from anecdotal stories and towards a more robust and quantifiable evidence base. This is a challenge we all must rise to.

We are proud of our achievements including: creating and filling over one million volunteering opportunities; engaging a diverse range of young people within which no group was under-represented; and improving the quality of their volunteering experience, but of course, there is more to do.

The financial climate is certainly more challenging than at any time in the recent past, but there has never been a more important time to dedicate resources to accurately measuring impact. I can testify that we have learnt as much about how to collect data, as we have from the data that we collected and I can vouch for the power of an iterative evaluation approach in changing our organisation for the better.

As v embarks on delivering its new five year plan, we will build on what we do best: developing the confidence and self-esteem of the young; building their capabilities for work; helping them to turn their passions and cares into enterprises that bring about change for the better; and inspiring them to become fully engaged citizens and leaders of the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Terry Ryall'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Terry Ryall
Chief Executive, v

