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Making it **work together**

Measuring the Impact of Volunteering on Social Economy Organisations

An Evaluation Report by Volunteer Development
Scotland

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Background	2
3. The Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit	3
3.1 Stakeholders	3-4
3.2 Stakeholders Benefit	4
3.3 The Matrix	5
3.4 The Toolkit process	6
4. Methodology	7-8
5. Learning from the Project	8
5.1 Organisations' use of the Toolkit	8-9
5.2 To grow SEO's capacity to measure the impact of volunteering in helping it achieve its aims and objectives.	9
5.2.1 A greater understanding of volunteering	9-10
5.2.2 Demonstrating added value	10
5.2.3 The effectiveness of the Toolkit as a tool for achieving this aim (5.2)	10-11
5.2.4 Capacity building of SEOs through the Equal project	11-12
5.3 The learning should empower SEOs to improve and develop effectiveness of volunteering and to develop inclusive volunteering	12
5.3.1 Promotion of volunteering	12
5.3.2 How organisations involve volunteers	13
5.3.3 The management of volunteers	13
5.3.4 Inclusiveness	13-14
5.3.5 Attracting new investment to support and develop Volunteering	14
5.3.6 Building the process of evaluation into working practice	14
5.4 To empower volunteers, users and the wider community to shape the growth and development of SEOs	14
5.4.1 Empowerment of volunteers, users, the community and staff	15-16
5.4.2 Dealing with negative results and unintended outcomes	16
5.4.3 Planning for the future	16
5.5 The Equal Principles	17
5.5.1 Partnership working	17
5.5.2 Innovation	17
5.5.3 Empowerment	17
5.5.4 Equal opportunities	17
5.5.5 Mainstreaming	18
6. Conclusions and Recommendations	18
6.1 To grow SEO's capacity to measure the impact of volunteering in helping it to achieve its organisational aims and objectives.	18
6.2 The learning from the project should empower SEOs to improve and develop the effectiveness of volunteering in their work and to develop inclusive volunteering.	19
6.3 To empower volunteers, users and the wider community to shape the growth and development of SEOs.	19
6.4 Meeting the Equal Principles	19
Appendix – Case Studies of SEOs participating in the project	21-28

1. Introduction

Volunteers play an integral part in supporting the social economy to increase its role in the delivery of innovative, high quality services and in enhancing its contribution to community regeneration and sustainable economic development. Volunteers are a crucial resource to social economy organisations (SEOs) in terms of their effective management, growth of services, development and ultimately their sustainability. SEOs often anecdotally know the impact that volunteering has on their organisation but what has been lacking is a way for SEOs to systematically, consistently and objectively measure this impact.

In 2005 Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) received funding from the Equal European Social Fund Community Initiative to use the Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit (hereafter referred to as the Toolkit) with 12 SEOs. The aims of the project were:

- To grow SEO's capacity to measure the impact of volunteering in helping it to achieve its organisational aims and objectives.
- The learning from the project should empower SEOs to improve and develop the effectiveness of volunteering in their work and to develop inclusive volunteering.
- To empower volunteers, users and the wider community to shape the growth and development of SEOs.

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of this project undertaken by VDS.

2. Background

Until recently there have been no tools with which to measure the impacts that volunteering can have on a range of stakeholders. This has had a negative impact on SEOs':

- ability to gain a greater understanding of how and why volunteering helps it to achieve its aims and objectives;
- effectiveness in collecting evidence to demonstrate the added value volunteering brings to their work, and;
- opportunities to attract new investment to support and develop the effectiveness of the contribution volunteers make to their work.

The Scottish Executive Volunteering Strategy (2004) acknowledges the "value of volunteering to individuals and communities" and that the monitoring and evaluation of volunteering is something which needs to be taken forward. The Strategy aims to "ensure that mechanisms are in place to measure the impact of volunteering on individuals, organisations and communities".

3. The Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit

The Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit was developed in 2004 by the Institute of Volunteering Research (IVR) with input from the London School of Economics, The University of East London and Roehampton University.

The Toolkit presents, for the first time, a pack of methods and instruments which measure and assess the effects of volunteering.

The Toolkit contains clear guidance on how to carry out an impact assessment in a volunteer involving organisation but also contains a complete set of flexible tools with which to tackle the job. The power of the Toolkit lies in its adaptability; tools can be selected from the kit and are easily customised to meet the specific needs of organisations. These include:

- Questionnaires for volunteers, staff, users and local residents
- Focus group guides
- Audit form
- Diary pages for volunteers

The Toolkit was piloted in depth with four organisations, two in the UK and two from Sweden. VDS are the sole providers of the Toolkit in Scotland.

The Toolkit framework identifies a) the main stakeholders that are affected by volunteering, and b) classifies the major ways in which they may be affected.

3.1 Stakeholders

Volunteers are the major focus within the Toolkit. Data can be collated by asking volunteers directly about the impact volunteering has had on them. A variety of research techniques can be used to collect this information.

The **organisation** is represented by the views of staff within it, or maybe by trustees and/or management committee members. The Toolkit enables the opinions of staff to be gathered, in addition the Toolkit provides mechanisms through which staff can collect management data to show the impact of volunteering.

The **users/beneficiaries** are the organisations' clients, the people who receive the services from the volunteers. Exactly who they are will depend on the organisation but could, for example, include teachers and pupils in the case of educational volunteering, or patients and families in the case of hospital volunteering.

The **wider community** is perhaps the hardest group to consider and it will depend on the nature of the organisations' activities. It might include local residents living in the vicinity of the organisation, key individuals in the local community such as the

local police officer or councillor, or organisations and agencies within the community. The wider community may be direct or indirect beneficiaries of the volunteering.

3.2 Stakeholder benefit

The major ways in which stakeholders may be affected by volunteering are grouped into five types of capital:

Physical capital refers to the concrete product or output for example number of trees planted or volume of material recycled.

Human capital relates to the acquisition of skills and personal development.

Economic capital describes the specifically financial and economic effects that result from volunteering for example putting a market value on the work done by volunteers.

Social capital moves beyond concrete outputs and individual development to capture social impacts. It refers to creating a more cohesive community through building relationships, networks and bonds of trust between people. It is not an easy concept to measure, but a number of indicators can capture its essential features.

Cultural capital refers to assets such as a shared sense of cultural and religious identity. Volunteering may reinforce people's sense of their cultural affiliation and enable them to express their faith or ethnic identity with security and confidence.

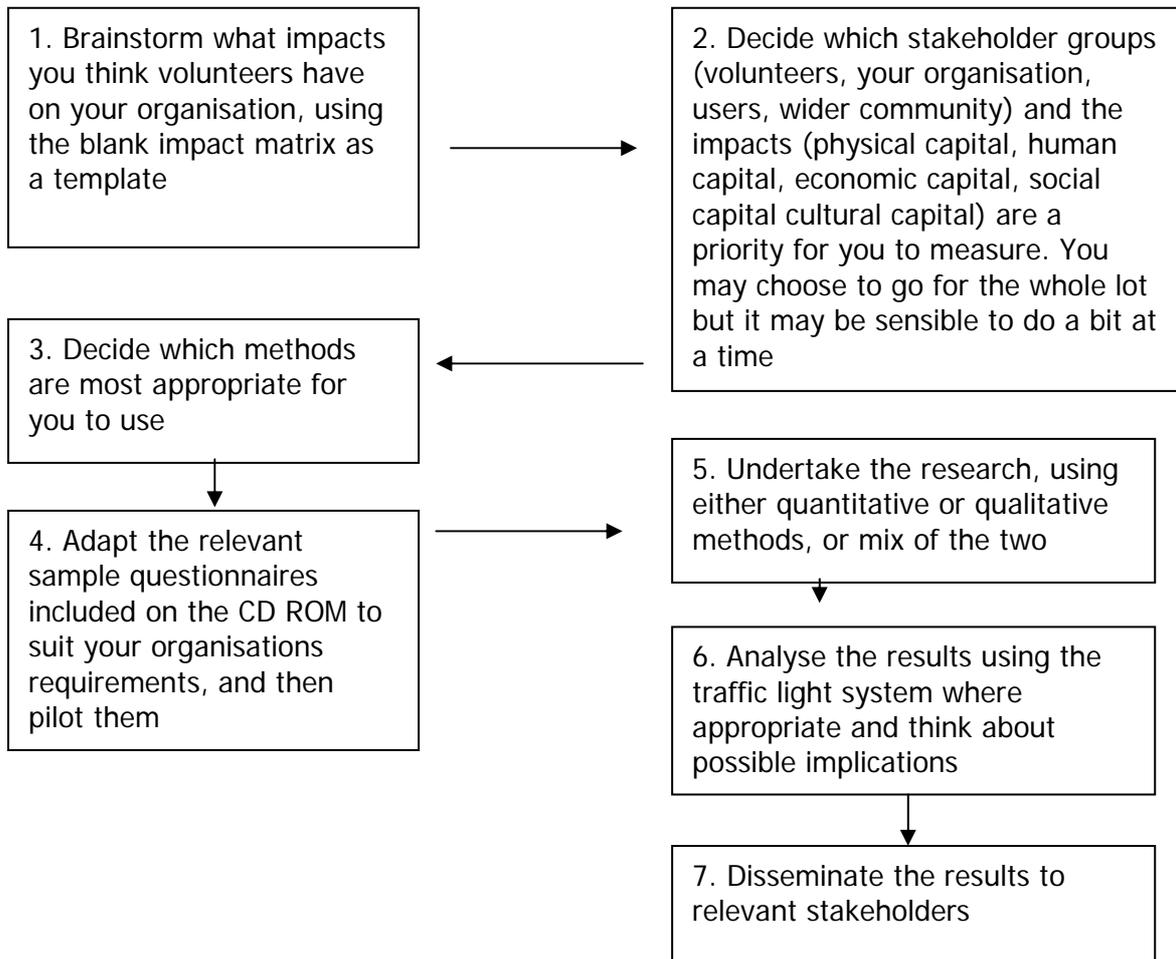
3.3 The Matrix

A matrix for identifying the impacts of volunteering sets out the stakeholder-capital relationships. The matrix below indicates possible impacts in each cell

	Physical Capital	Human Capital	Economic Capital	Social Capital	Cultural Capital
Volunteers	Tangible benefits accruing to volunteers (training courses attended; social events; certificates etc)	Personal development (confidence; self esteem etc); Vocational skills (IT; public speaking; team work etc); Employability	Individual costs of volunteering (expenses; opportunity-costs etc); & individual value (training courses attended)	Increased trust; higher rates of participation in public affairs etc.	Attachment to cultural identity; appreciation and understanding of other cultures
Organisation	Identifiable outputs (number of meals delivered; trees planted etc)	Impact of volunteers on staff development; diversity of workforce	Value of volunteering minus cost of volunteering	Increased status & reputation for organisation in the community; enhanced recruitment & retention of staff & volunteers	Services more reflective of cultural diversity within community
Service Users	Enhanced quantity & quality of services provided	Personal development & skills enhancement of users	Access to services which would otherwise have to be paid for	Increased networks; enhanced trust & participation	Appreciation & understanding of other people's cultures
Wider Community	Enhanced quantity & quality of services provided	Happier communities; better skilled citizens	Enhanced value for money in public services (less truancy; lower crime; increased health)	Increased networks; enhanced trust & participation	Appreciation & understanding of other people's cultures

3.4 The Toolkit process

To undertake a volunteering impact assessment, organisations using this Toolkit undertake the following steps.



4. Methodology

In January 2006 IVR and VDS delivered a one-day training course on the Toolkit for 52 individuals from a mix of SEOs, Volunteer Centres and public sector organisations across Scotland. The aim of this day was to train participants in the use of the Toolkit and to broaden the target audience for the Toolkit.

After the training, 12 SEOs were identified by VDS to participate in the project by using the Toolkit within their organisations. Three SEOs were from the Edinburgh local authority area, six from North Lanarkshire and three from Highland. The final ten SEOs identified were:

- Health in Mind
- The LGBT Centre for Health and Well-Being
- No. 6, Autism Initiatives
- North Lanarkshire Scramble and Quad Bike Club (NLSQBC)
- Glenboig Neighbourhood House
- Airdrie Citizens Advice Bureau
- Castlemilk Timebank
- Beulah Scotland
- LAMH Recycle Ltd
- Inverness and Nairn Transport Forum

In each local authority area a Local Support Partnership was set up, comprising the VDS Project Officer, a Volunteer Centre representative and the lead contact from the participating SEOs. The partnership in Highland included representatives from Volunteer Centre Inverness, Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE), Highlands & Islands Social Enterprise Zone (HISEZ), Highlands & Islands Community Capacity Partnership (HICCP) The main purpose of these partnerships was to support the SEOs in their use of the Toolkit and for the SEOs to exchange ideas and support each other. Individual support for the SEOs was provided by the VDS Project Officer. All participants agreed with the Local Support Partnership how they would use the Toolkit within their organisations.

In August 2006 a questionnaire was sent to all 52 organisations that attended the training day in January. The aim of this survey was to assess how broad a range of organisations across Scotland are using the Toolkit as a result of the training, how useful they are finding the Toolkit for carrying out an impact assessment, and reasons, if any, for not using the Toolkit.

During October and November semi-structured interviews were carried out individually with seven of the participating SEOs. The aim of the interviews was to gather information on:

- the organisations' use of the Toolkit
- how effective the organisations found the Toolkit as a tool for carrying out an impact assessment
- the organisations' learning from using the Toolkit
- how this learning has developed the organisations
- whether the project has met its aims and the principles of Equal.

The data from these interviews were analysed qualitatively using a framework technique. Themes within the data were identified and the data ordered so that themes were clustered.

5. Learning from the Project

The three participating SEOs in Highland were unable to use the Toolkit due to delays in setting up projects or changes in the work of the organisation. Although not a formal interview, a telephone conversation was held with two of the Highland organisations that had been unable to use the Toolkit to discuss the problems they had encountered and their thoughts about the Toolkit. The lead contact from one of the North Lanarkshire SEOs was unfortunately on long-term sick leave from work so was unable to be interviewed; at the time of carrying out interviews the contact was still awaiting questionnaires to be returned and had not analysed any data. The evaluator was unable to contact the lead person from another North Lanarkshire SEO and so no interview was conducted.

The response rate from the postal questionnaire to all those who attended the training was very low; nine (17%) responses were received by VDS. Five of those said they were not carrying out an impact assessment, the remaining four said they were using the Toolkit, however one had not used it yet, another was one of the organisations interviewed as part of this project, and the other two gave no details about their use of the Toolkit. Because of the low number of responses, further analysis of the data is limited.

The following findings from this project are based upon the data collected from interviews with seven participating SEOs.

5.1 Organisations' use of the Toolkit

Each of the organisations interviewed had taken a different approach to using the Toolkit depending on their organisations' needs and the aims for their impact assessment. The uses ranged from carrying out a snapshot impact assessment across all projects in the organisation, to monitoring the expectations of volunteers over time, to carrying out an impact assessment on a specific stakeholder group within the organisation. All the organisations were at different stages of using the Toolkit when the interviews were carried out:

- three had completed the data analysis and had taken forward recommendations;
- one had analysed the data but had not taken this any further;
- two had analysed some of the data but not all of it
- one organisation was still waiting for all the questionnaires to be returned.

Full details of organisations' uses of the Toolkit within this project are appended as case studies.

The findings from the interviews were analysed to assess whether this project met the three aims of the project proposal:

- To grow SEO's capacity to measure the impact of volunteering in helping it achieve its aims and objectives;
- The learning should empower SEOs to improve and develop effectiveness of volunteering and to develop inclusive volunteering;
- To empower volunteers, users and community to shape the growth and development of SEOs.

5.2 To grow SEO's capacity to measure the impact of volunteering in helping it achieve its aims and objectives.

5.2.1 A greater understanding of volunteering

All the participants in the project agreed that they now have a greater understanding of volunteering within their organisation as a result of using the Toolkit. Carrying out an impact assessment has enabled them to learn not only about the impact of volunteering across the whole organisation, but participants also learned why the organisation involves volunteers, and what volunteers and service users gain from the organisation;

"It equips us with a better understanding of what we're delivering to people".

Some organisations felt that by using the matrix in particular they were better able to explain the dynamics of the different stakeholder groups.

In particular, organisations that had analysed their data were able to identify the impacts that volunteering has had on the volunteers themselves. Many of these impacts were around increased confidence and self-esteem, meeting new people, and greater well-being especially in volunteers with experience of mental health difficulties. In addition, some participants reported learning about the impacts that volunteers have on other stakeholder groups: "I found out just how important it was for service users to have someone in their life who wasn't paid to be there". Through the process of using the Toolkit, some organisations had learned about communication processes within their organisations; "So that's a benefit to us in the fact that we're learning new ways and putting into place ways of communicating quickly and effectively". Others had highlighted negative issues especially around the perception of volunteers by staff and communication between volunteers and staff. In both of these cases, the negative issues had been followed up (see section 5.4.2).

The organisations found the impact assessments useful, not only because they discovered unexpected impacts – "I didn't think I had much to learn, that it would just be the expected outcomes" – but also because using the Toolkit meant they had evidence of the impact of volunteering:

“So I kind of feel that I’ve got a solid foundation to move from now whereas before I was just saying ‘volunteers are brilliant’. Now I can say why and show how”.

This was echoed by other interviewees who felt that the findings from using the Toolkit “gave weight to gut feeling” or that it “backed up what I thought about the impact of volunteers”.

5.2.2 Demonstrating added value

Some of the organisations interviewed believed that using the Toolkit gave them “some sort of accountable result” and that it would validate any impact assessment they carried out; in effect that the Toolkit is a Standard for measuring the impact of volunteering.

Two organisations calculated the added economic value of involving volunteers at £60,000 per annum and £85,000 per annum respectively. One organisation described that the advantage of an economic impact assessment is “there’s no opinions related to it, it’s just a fact figure”. However it was also recognised by another organisation that the added value gained from involving volunteers can be demonstrated in different ways depending on the audience. The participant reported that her organisation’s Management Board were particularly interested in the monetary value that volunteering brings but “for the volunteers it’s about being able to present ‘well, here’s the difference you’re making to the service users and here’s the difference it makes for you’”. Being able to demonstrate added value also depends upon the way in which the Toolkit has been used and there was recognition from some organisations that they had used the Toolkit for a different purpose.

Despite the positive evidence that organisations were able to demonstrate added value through their use of the Toolkit, there was also some confusion within a few organisations over the difference between *knowing* anecdotally that their volunteers provide added value and being able to *measure* this by using the Toolkit.

5.2.3 The effectiveness of the Toolkit as a tool for achieving this aim (5.2)

The majority of organisations agreed that the main advantage of the Toolkit was its comprehensiveness and ease of use;

“I liked that it had already been done! It’s not rocket science, it’s common sense”.

Participants particularly liked the matrix and the traffic light system as techniques that led to greater understanding of the impacts of volunteering and simple data analysis respectively. There was appreciation that expertise had gone into the wording and design of questionnaires and this enabled them to carry out a far more professional and objective impact assessment than if they had had to do this themselves.

“... there’s not really room for doubt, it’s very clear, it’s very straight-forward”.

“I think it’s a great way of measuring because it’s got all the vital questions in there you need”.

The participants also felt that the Toolkit was an objective Standard for measuring the impact of volunteers and that this would validate their work. Because of the layout of the Toolkit there would be a recognised structure to their work which would give extra weight to their applications to funders.

Improvements that would increase the effectiveness of the Toolkit were also suggested:

- On a practical level, the inclusiveness of the Toolkit could be improved by changing the colours of text and background used (see section 5.3.4).
- Some of the open-ended questions on the core staff questionnaire were asked in a negative way and participants felt this could bias the information collected.
- There were suggestions that the Toolkit could be adapted by IVR to better meet the needs of different types of organisations. For example, by recognising that volunteering occurs in different age groups “there needs to be freedom of one or two different designs [of questionnaires]” with the different target audiences reflected in the wording and length of the questionnaires.
- One organisation recommended that a simple tool for data analysis, for example a database, be included in the Toolkit as they found the process of tabulating data time-consuming and difficult.

Most of the organisations interviewed reported that the time needed to carry out an impact assessment using the Toolkit was not too onerous; they believed that the Toolkit enabled them to focus their research on their aims which made the process quick. There was also a recognition that although the impact assessment did not take long to carry out, addressing the organisational issues identified could be a much bigger task. The main problem identified by some organisations was not the actual number of days required but the timescale with which this work needed to be carried out for the Equal project; one organisation in particular recognised the difficulty in getting information back from volunteers with low levels of confidence and lack of experience in completing questionnaires, and this has made it difficult to complete the impact assessment within the timescale of the Equal project.

5.2.4 Capacity building of SEOs through the Equal project

The Equal project has provided support to the organisations in their use of the Toolkit both on an individual basis through the VDS Project Officer and by holding peer support sessions through the local support partnerships. The feedback from all organisations on both types of support was unanimously positive; organisations reported that the VDS Project Officer had been critical in supporting them through difficult periods of their impact assessments, particularly at the analysis and reporting stages, and had been constantly available for support and advice. Similarly, the peer

support sessions were valued for the support and ideas that organisations could give each other; this was especially the case with the Edinburgh participants who put a lot of emphasis on the benefits of the exchange of ideas at these sessions. Particular areas where participants gained from support during the project were around time management and help with the language and concepts used in the Toolkit. The training provided at the start of the Equal project enthused participants to carry out an impact assessment and also provided them with a chance to meet other practitioners in the sector. The skills they gained from the training have also impacted on other areas of their work and some have used ideas from the training to carry out separate pieces of research.

Overall participants saw real benefits in carrying out an impact assessment as part of the Equal project rather than using the Toolkit independently. Whilst one organisation said the Toolkit provided them with everything they needed, others admitted that they could not have completed an impact assessment without the support, training and “clarity” provided by the Equal project. This was especially the case with small organisations.

5.3 The learning should empower SEOs to improve and develop effectiveness of volunteering and to develop inclusive volunteering

Participants were asked questions about their learning from the Equal project and how this has influenced different areas of volunteers management in their organisations.

5.3.1 Promotion of volunteering

The training at the start of the Equal project encouraged participants to report their impact assessment findings both internally within their organisations and externally. Participants have recognised the need to promote volunteering either internally or externally or both, depending on the aims of their impact assessment, and have demonstrated how this has been achieved.

Internally, organisations have used their impact assessments to highlight to staff and volunteers what is contributed to the organisation by volunteers. Leaflets based on the data from the impact assessments have also been produced so that volunteers know more about the service they provide and what they gain from volunteering. Overall participants say that using the Toolkit has given them greater confidence to promote volunteering internally:

“Confidence in keeping doing what we’re doing because of the positive findings from the questionnaire”.

Externally, the findings will be used by organisations to promote volunteering as part of the recruitment process. Participants said they would promote the “tangible benefits” of volunteering particularly around meeting new people and building confidence and self-esteem to potential volunteers.

5.3.2 How organisations involve volunteers

The impact assessment has highlighted aspects of the volunteer programmes which do not match the expectations of the volunteers and participants are aware that these areas need to be built into the programmes. Volunteers have used the impact assessments to voice how they would like to be involved, for example “as a group more”. The Equal project itself has also impacted on how organisations involve volunteers; one organisation involved volunteers to interview other volunteers as part of the research process and found this a valuable and empowering use of their time.

5.3.3 The management of volunteers

All of the organisations interviewed agreed that their impact assessment would have an impact on how they manage their volunteers. The importance of making sure that this is not a “stand-alone” system was raised by one participant; because the questionnaires are anonymous, the impact assessment “is not a way for them to be able to raise things that need immediate attention. This is just to kind of get that big picture side of it”. Some of the impacts on the management of volunteers are summarised below:

- outlining the skills involved in volunteers management to the Board
- organising training for all staff involving volunteers
- highlighting the work of volunteers in the organisation
- supporting the application for a Volunteer Co-ordinator position
- improving the education programmes for volunteers

5.3.4 Inclusiveness

Some of the staff in participating organisations were once volunteers for the organisation and the impact assessment has highlighted to the participants that volunteering is an inclusive way into paid employment for some volunteers within their organisation. The Toolkit itself was seen as an accessible way of enabling anyone to carry out an impact assessment, especially through the use of stickers in the traffic light system. However, it was suggested that the choice of colours in the Toolkit are not very accessible to those with a visual impairment. The process of carry out an impact assessment was recognised by participants as being particularly inclusive:

“I think in terms that everyone has an equal say and had equal input. And those who chose to reply – the responses were treated in an equal manner so everyone had an equal say in the development of volunteering based on the assessment”.

However, when asked directly if using the Toolkit has increased equal opportunities within their organisation, there was some confusion between their *perception* that their organisation is already inclusive and being able to *measure* this with the Toolkit; many participants answered that their organisation was already inclusive and

had an equal opportunities policy in place. Despite showing evidence of inclusive practice and an understanding of the inclusiveness of the Toolkit itself, there was little awareness that the Toolkit can be used to improve the inclusiveness of their organisations.

5.3.5 Attracting new investment to support and develop volunteering

There was confidence among the participants that the use of the Toolkit would help with future funding applications. The Toolkit has given organisations “something quantifiable in terms of the impact it’s had on the people that have been involved” and a “nationally-recognised framework” which, it is hoped, will give extra weight to funding applications. One organisation felt that the matrix within the Toolkit will enable funders to see clearly what the benefits of volunteering are to a range of stakeholders and will help the organisation to submit a better application.

For one organisation, the Equal project itself has already attracted investment. The participant met a funder at the training event and has since received funding to support five service users and to carry out an impact assessment using the Toolkit.

5.3.6 Building the process of evaluation into working practice

It is hoped that the learning from the Equal project will extended beyond the life of the project itself and be sustainable. All of the participants interviewed said they planned to carry out an impact assessment using the Toolkit on a regular basis in the future. They saw this assessment as a baseline to which they could compare the impacts that volunteers are having over time. It was also recognised that the impact assessment process could be used to monitor the effect of any interventions the participants make in the management or promotion of volunteers.

5.4 To empower volunteers, users and the wider community to shape the growth and development of SEOs

All of the participants that have analysed the data from their impact assessment have reported that they have met their aims; by doing this, organisations have acknowledged and taken forward the views and opinions of volunteers and service users. The process of carrying out an impact assessment and taking forward the findings has helped to drive internal development within the organisations.

The wider community is a more difficult stakeholder group to access and none of the participants had researched the impact of volunteering on this group at the time of writing this report. One organisation has definite plans to measure the impact on the community in the future, whilst for other participants it did not fit into their current aims of carrying out an impact assessment.

5.4.1 Empowerment of volunteers, users, the community and staff

Many of the organisations thought that using the Toolkit had empowered the volunteers; it has “given people a voice and they have used that voice”. This was especially the case with certain groups of volunteers who lack confidence or have been previously excluded. One organisation used the Toolkit with volunteers that have experience of mental health difficulties and was able to use information on the impact that volunteering has had on them to develop volunteers management within the organisation. Another organisation used questionnaires with volunteers with low confidence and, although the process was time-consuming, the volunteers were supported through their completing the questionnaires; these volunteers have now had an input to the development of the organisation. The process of impact assessment using the Toolkit has also allowed some volunteers to overcome a wariness of questionnaires: “that it’s like being nabbed in the street by somebody and I think we’re proving that it’s not like that”.

Using the Toolkit has also empowered the members of staff that are involved in the Equal project. It has given participants the confidence to carry out an impact assessment, “having the confidence that it’s been designed properly and that you’re going to get the answers, unbiased”, and confidence to keep managing and prompting volunteers well because of the positive findings. Being part of the Equal project has also empowered staff to plan their impact assessment and to focus in on the important findings. One participant found the Equal project empowering because the training event gave them ideas for research techniques which they have since used in other areas of their work. The Equal project has also had impacts on other areas of the organisations; “I think it’s, in turn, empowered the Chief Executive and the Board to know that this is the right direction that they’re taking us into increased volunteering within the organisation”.

Two organisations looked at the impact of volunteering on service users. They report an awareness among the service users that their views and opinions are important and will be used for the development of the organisation; “they are aware... that this evaluation’s been taking place, it’s been taking place for very important reasons...”.

Many participants viewed the adaptability of the questionnaires in the Toolkit as an empowering part of the process. Not only did it enable them to send out an objective, professional questionnaire that was relevant to their organisation, it also empowered the volunteers and service users to be able to complete a relevant questionnaire. The questionnaires were adapted with the particular group in mind, with some organisations changing the language to suit their group and others using a scale of smiley to sad faces for use by a young people user group. Participants found that by making the questionnaire as relevant as possible to their organisation, the volunteer, staff or user group respondents were less likely to answer questions with ‘not applicable’ or ‘not relevant’. Adaptation of the questionnaires can therefore be seen as another way of empowering respondents.

It was suggested by one organisation that the Toolkit could further empower people if it gave more guidance on the use of focus groups and interviews. It was recognised that, whereas most people would feel confident sending out a questionnaire, fewer people would have experience in facilitating a focus group.

5.4.2 Dealing with negative results and unintended outcomes

A minority of the organisations reported any negative findings from the impact assessment and some just perceived negative results as “issues that needed attention” rather than negative. All those that said they found negative results have had the capacity and knowledge to begin to deal with these issues. One organisation had four anonymous questionnaire returns which said that volunteers had no impact on staff development or diversity; this finding prompted the participant to highlight the work of volunteers throughout the organisation.

The majority of the organisations said they had experienced unintended outcomes from the Equal project. One participant has been surprised by the responses to the questionnaire from staff; “I didn’t realise how quickly the volunteers had grown and the staff didn’t know what was going on”. Another had a very low response rate to the questionnaires from one group within the organisation and, through the Equal support, it was decided that this in itself was a useful finding “because it showed where that project was at in terms of where volunteering is ranked in their workload”. These examples show how organisations have been able to use unexpected findings.

The process of using the Toolkit and participating in the Equal project have also produced some unintended outcomes. Carrying out an impact assessment has helped some participants to plan their future work for the organisation, so the Toolkit has also become a planning tool. One organisation hosted an event for volunteers at which the questionnaires were given out; this event led to networking among the volunteers and the establishment of another service group within the organisation.

5.4.3 Planning for the future

The learning from this project has built the capacity of participants to think about how they have used the Toolkit and how they could make better use of the Toolkit in the future. One organisation has identified that their volunteers could have impacts on the surrounding communities and plans to assess the impact of their involvement on this stakeholder group through community councils and various police forces. Other organisations have reported that they would further amend the questionnaires in the future in order to make them more relevant to respondents; “a lot of the returns from people who were not using volunteers were saying ‘oh this isn’t relevant to me’ and that discouraged people from filling it in”.

5.5 The Equal Principles

This project aims to meet the five principles of Equal, namely:

- Partnership working;
- Innovation;
- Empowerment;
- Equal Opportunities, and;
- Mainstreaming.

Some of the principles have already been covered in more detail in previous sections of this report. Where this is the case, a short summary is provided here.

5.5.1 Partnership working

The whole ethos of this project has been founded in partnership working, from the design of the project by the Partnership Body and the support given to organisations through the local support partnerships. Some of the most positive comments in the interviews were regarding the peer support that participants were able to access through the local support partnerships; linking not only the participants but also the VDS Project Officer and a member of staff from the local Volunteer Centre. Participants have gained and given support and advice to each other throughout the project and one organisation even gained funding through a partnership formed at the training event.

Using the Toolkit has also identified the need for greater communication and partnership working within organisations. Examples within this report (section 5.2.1) highlight how communication and understanding between different stakeholder groups have been increased.

5.5.2 Innovation

The Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit is the first comprehensive Toolkit which enables organisations to carry out an impact assessment of volunteering on a range of stakeholder groups. Within this project organisations have attended the training events to learn about the use of the Toolkit and have then designed innovative ways of using the Toolkit unique to their organisations.

5.5.3 Empowerment

Section 5.4.1 of this report has shown that volunteers, staff and service users have been empowered to carry out an impact assessment and to have a say in the development of their organisation.

5.5.4 Equal opportunities

Section 5.3.4 of this report illustrates that organisations have used the Toolkit in an inclusive manner, treating the views of all stakeholders equally and have praised the accessibility of the Toolkit itself.

5.5.5 Mainstreaming

Most of the evidence that using the Toolkit to carry out impact assessments is becoming mainstreamed is centred on funding. At least three of the organisations interviewed have already stated on funding applications that have been accepted that they will use the Toolkit to evaluate the project. These funders are Edinburgh City Council's Key Interventions Fund, Youthlink and the Big Lottery Fund. One of the organisations in Highland that has yet to carry out their impact assessment has agreed with the Big Lottery Fund that they will use the Toolkit to evaluate the project and has been given funding to cover volunteer expenses for this evaluation. Another organisation is using the Toolkit to meet the requirements of their funders (Scottish Natural Heritage and Paths for All) and "they're interested to see what the outcomes are".

The Toolkit is also becoming mainstreamed within the organisations it has been used in; all participants said they are building the process of regular impact assessments into the work of their organisation and others are using the findings from their impact assessments to develop their organisational work plans.

The findings from this evaluation will be reported at a series of three dissemination events in Scotland.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions can be drawn about how this project has met its initial aims and recommendations made about future uses of the Toolkit:

6.1 To grow SEO's capacity to measure the impact of volunteering in helping it to achieve its organisational aims and objectives.

The Equal project has empowered the participants to carry out a professional, robust impact assessment, both through the use of the Toolkit and the valuable support that has been given as part of the project.

Organisations see the Toolkit as a rigorous Standard which has enabled increased recognition, internally and externally, of the benefits of volunteering. They have been able to adapt the Toolkit to focus their impact assessment on meeting their specific aims. Participants have been able to demonstrate the added value of volunteering, although some participants were confused between knowing anecdotally the added value of volunteering and being able to measure this using the Toolkit.

It is recommended that:

- the feedback from participants about the Toolkit, including suggestions for future improvements, is passed by VDS to the IVR.
- future training events include discussion on the use of evidence from impact assessments.

6.2 The learning from the project should empower SEOs to improve and develop the effectiveness of volunteering in their work and to develop inclusive volunteering.

Although there is evidence that the project has led to more inclusive practice within SEOs, there is little awareness of this within some of the organisations themselves.

The project has led to higher standards of volunteers management within participating SEOs because of an increased understanding of volunteering within the organisations.

It is recommended that:

- future training events highlight the concept of impact assessments as a way of being able to increase inclusiveness within organisations and how this can be measured using the Toolkit.

6.3 To empower volunteers, users and the wider community to shape the growth and development of SEOs.

The Toolkit itself has empowered volunteers, service users and staff to have a voice in developing their SEO. Within some volunteer and client groups this has had a significant impact on increased confidence and inclusive practice. The impacts of volunteering on the wider community have not been assessed by organisations in this project; it was recognised that the community is a more difficult stakeholder group to access.

The learning from this project has been intensive for the organisations involved. It has been recognised by the organisations themselves and by the VDS Project Officer that the learning extends beyond the 'false' timescale set by this project. It has been difficult for some organisations to carry out a full impact assessment within this timescale depending on the volunteer or client group they are working with.

The organisations' learning is sustainable; all participants are building the process of impact assessment into the work of their organisations.

It is recommended that:

- the wider community stakeholder group, and ways of accessing it, is discussed in greater depth at future training events.

6.4 Meeting the Equal Principles

This evaluation has provided evidence to show that the outcomes of SEOs using the Toolkit are in line with the five Equal principles. There is strong evidence to suggest that those involved in the project, and their volunteers, have been empowered by this work and that mainstreaming of the Toolkit by several funding bodies has been taking place. The organisations were, however, less able to provide examples of the project has increased equal opportunities for them although there was some evidence to suggest that this had taken place.

It is recommended that:

- some of the organisations that participated in this project be used as case studies to highlight the potential uses and benefits of using the Toolkit.

Appendix – Case Studies of SEOs participating in the project

health in mind

health in mind is a mental health charity working in Edinburgh and the Lothians. The organisation supports the following projects:

A Supported Accommodation service

A Support and Respite service

Beyond Trauma – services for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse

Men in Mind – a project for black and minority ethnic men

South Edinburgh Healthy Living Initiative

The Orchard Centre – day services in Midlothian

An Information Resource Centre

re:discover – a recovery-focused befriending service.

Number of staff

Just over 100 across all services

Number of volunteers

Just over 60 in the organisation. Volunteers are currently involved in three of the services and the other services are currently working towards involving volunteers.

Volunteers Management

There is one part time Volunteer Services Manager (1 day per week) and 4 staff (2 part time) who manage volunteers as part of their wider role within the organisation.

Purpose for which the Toolkit was used

health in mind had different internal and external aims for using the Toolkit. Internally, the Toolkit was used to highlight the work that volunteers are already doing and to have some solid evidence about the impact that volunteering had on the volunteers, many of whom are mental health service users themselves. They also wanted gauge the feeling and knowledge about volunteers in the services who aren't currently using volunteers. Externally, it was felt that using the Toolkit would help health in mind to gain funding for a new volunteer co-ordinator post.

Use of the Toolkit

The information from the training was taken to the health in mind volunteers managers meeting where a matrix for the organisation was completed. It was decided to assess three stakeholder groups (volunteers, staff and service users) because of the timescale of the project. Core questionnaires were sent to the stakeholders and supplementary staff questionnaires were sent to those staff that actively involve volunteers. The traffic light system was used to analyse the data. A report was written which was presented to the Board of Directors and also to the volunteers managers meeting. The volunteers managers decided on the priorities and from those an implementation plan has been developed for this year.

The findings

The information gathered from the volunteers was very powerful, especially those volunteers with a history of mental health difficulties and the impact volunteering has had on their well-being and confidence. Some staff have anxieties about their service involving volunteers in the future and now these specific anxieties will be able to be followed up and resolved. The impact assessment found how important it was for service users to have someone in their life who wasn't paid to be there and how much they appreciate the fact that volunteers give up their time. health in mind also realised how important it is to clarify that people are volunteers. There was a very low response from one service and this illustrates the priority that this service currently gives to volunteers.

The future

The implementation plan includes tasks such as: outlining the skills involved in volunteers management; training for all those staff managing volunteers, and; highlighting the work of volunteers in the organisation. A similar impact assessment will be carried out by health in mind on a yearly basis.

The LGBT Centre for Health and Well-Being

The Centre is part of the Healthy Living Centre Programme, but the only one of its kind dealing with the LGBT community of interest. The main services are: health promotion (for example smoking cessation courses, managing stress); a community development programme (working with people who wish to start groups, providing space for groups); training programmes for community activists or group workers; a training consultancy programme (raising the profile of LGBT service issues in the NHS, public sector and Housing Associations). The volunteer programme is funded separately by the Voluntary Action fund and part of the focus of that funding stream is around targeting non-traditional volunteers and working on issues of social exclusion. As well as giving the volunteer programme some output targets, the funders are also interested on the effect of volunteering on the volunteers.

Number of staff

Six full time

Number of volunteers

32

Volunteers Management

One volunteers manager

Purpose for which the Toolkit was used

The Centre's primary interest in using the Toolkit was around the volunteer experience and people's expectations of volunteering. It was used for monitoring whether the expectations of volunteers were being met over time rather than a snapshot at one particular time.

Use of the Toolkit

When people start volunteering at the Centre they complete an anonymous questionnaire which is based on the core volunteer questionnaire but is instead rephrased into expectations of volunteering. Six months later a follow-up questionnaire (the unadapted core volunteer questionnaire) is completed by the volunteers to assess the impact of volunteering and to find out if volunteers are getting what they expect to before they start. This questionnaire is completed by the volunteer every six months so that the realisation of expectations can be compared over time.

The Findings

Although the data has still to be analysed, the questionnaires that have been completed so far indicate that the Centre is doing well in meeting the expectations of volunteers. These findings are echoing what is being reported through other means of communication; that volunteers are benefiting from their experience.

The Future

The Centre plans to continue to use this format over the lifespan of the programme to get a long-term picture of its development. If there is a change in post-holder for volunteers management, the findings from the impact assessment will provide a structure which can be handed over. Primarily the findings are going to be used for reporting to funders who are aware that the Toolkit is being used for the impact assessment. The information gathered from this work is also being used for the volunteering strand of the organisational work plans.

Number Six, part of Autism Initiatives

Number Six is a project aimed at working with people with high functioning autism and Asperger's Syndrome. The staff at the project work with service users on a range of day-to-day issues, whilst the volunteers deal with the social side of the service.

Number of staff

Six in the Number Six project

Number of volunteers

32

Volunteers Management

The Number Six project has one paid volunteers manager.

Purpose for which the Toolkit was used

Staff attended the training on the use of the Toolkit to find out more about the potential uses of it as an impact assessment tool. It was decided to use the Toolkit firstly as a means of carrying out an evaluation of volunteers in the organisation to "see what people feel is going on", and also to specifically use the matrix to assess the benefits gained from volunteering and apply this to future funding bids.

Use of the Toolkit

The Number Six staff team discussed the matrix and this was then taken to the organisation's Fundraiser to highlight how Number Six benefits from volunteers. Core questionnaires were distributed to all seven members of staff (including the Director) and a sample of seven volunteers. The data was analysed using the traffic light system.

The Findings

Three main issues were identified by this study:

1. the staff did not know which volunteers were carrying what tasks.
2. the volunteers did not understand what staff in the organisation do
3. the organisation as a whole does not know what roles volunteers are undertaking

The Future

In order to overcome the issues identified by the impact assessment, the following measures have been put in place:

1. 'Volunteer boards' have been put up in the office introducing the volunteers and the roles they undertake, which volunteers require training and which need placing in roles. These boards will keep staff informed about the volunteers.
2. Number Six is holding an event for staff and volunteers. Staff will give presentations on what they do and how they have worked with volunteers so far. Volunteers will also inform the staff of work they have been involved with.
3. A report on volunteering was presented to the Number Six steering group so that the organisation as a whole knows what the impact of volunteering is to Number Six.

North Lanarkshire Scramble and Quad Bike Club (NLSQBC)

NLSQBC is a North Lanarkshire Council initiative started at the request of the First Minister and is now a Limited Company. *[info from leaflets]*

Number of staff

One Council officer from North Lanarkshire Council for whom supporting the club is part of his role.

Number of volunteers

230 made up of parents of children who use the club, other adult volunteers, and youth volunteers who are part of the club's Big Brother scheme to help new club members.

Volunteers Management

No paid volunteers manager – the management committee manage the other volunteers.

Purpose for which the Toolkit was used

It is an ambition of the club to become a Centre of Excellence and there was a need to gather information to support this process. It was decided to calculate the economic value that volunteers bring to the club so that “we will be able to tie up the real value of what the club brings to the bigger picture”. The club also wanted to gather data to “get a better understanding of what the members... feel they get from the club”.

Use of the Toolkit

The first use of the Toolkit was to measure the ‘in-kind’ value of volunteering. The club used existing records of hours volunteered to calculate the economic value of volunteering. The club is now in the process of collecting back more than 140 core service user questionnaires from the young people who are club members. The questionnaires were adapted to make them more appropriate for young people by the use of smiley and sad faces for the scales.

The Findings

In the last 12 months the economic value of volunteering to the club is £60,000. At the time of writing this report, questionnaires were still being returned so no data is available on this aspects of the impact assessment.

The Future

The information from the impact assessment will be fed into an annual report both for the club and for the North Lanarkshire Initiative. It will also help to develop the club's education programmes to help the users understand what is being done to support them and the roles that the volunteers have. Some of the data will be incorporated into a new club leaflet for volunteers to show the impact that volunteering has and to encourage citizenship and collective pride in the club.

Glenboig Neighbourhood House

Neighbourhood House started as a community facility which was to be closed down. A voluntary organisation was established in order to keep it open and a youth group and play scheme started. A grant was awarded to Neighbourhood House to develop the store room into a kitchen and café and it is now open seven days a week for many community events and groups.

Number of staff

Three full-time, two part-time and seven sessional workers.

Number of volunteers

15 regular volunteers

Volunteers Management

The overall management of volunteers is the responsibility of one paid member of staff and the management committee.

Purpose for which the Toolkit was used

Glenboig Neighbourhood House used the Toolkit to find out what their volunteers are doing for the organisation, what they're getting out of volunteering, and what their needs are.

Use of the Toolkit

Core volunteer questionnaires were given to all the volunteers. Staff within the organisation helped the volunteers to complete the questionnaires where necessary.

The Findings

At the time of writing this report questionnaires were still being returned to Glenboig Neighbourhood House and no data was yet available.

The Future

Glenboig Neighbourhood House plans to look at the issues being identified by volunteers in the impact assessment to see if volunteers are being given enough support, if they feel valued and if they're getting access to training.

Airdrie Citizens Advice Bureau

The aims of the network of Citizens Advice Bureaux are:

- to ensure that individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, or of the services available to them, or through an inability to express their need effectively, and;
- to exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and services, both locally and nationally.

Number of staff

About 17

Number of volunteers

20

Volunteers Management

One paid volunteers manager with input to volunteer training by some other members of staff.

Purpose for which the Toolkit was used

To find out anonymously how volunteers felt about volunteering for the Bureau and whether they feel valued.

Use of the Toolkit

Volunteers were given a core volunteer questionnaire to take home and complete. The results were analysed and graphs produced from the quantitative findings.

The Findings

On the whole the findings from the questionnaires were all positive although the Bureau admits that the sample was small. They feel that the results are evidence for the work they do to develop their volunteers and make them feel satisfied.

The Future

Airdrie Citizens Advice Bureau has yet to decide how to disseminate and use these findings.

Castlemilk Timebank

The Timebank is a voluntary organisation based in Castlemilk that organises an exchange of skills. These skills may be ironing, washing cupboards, shopping or DIY; “it’s just going back to being neighbourly”.

Number of staff

One and a half

Number of volunteers

In total over 200, although they’re not all exchanging at the same time.

Volunteers Management

The one and a half staff members manage the volunteers

Purpose for which the Toolkit was used

Castlemilk Timebank wanted to use the Toolkit to see how their volunteers are progressing; “what skills they came with, have they developed any new skills, and has their confidence been built”.

Use of the Toolkit

The Timebank invited their volunteers to an event at which the questionnaires were disseminated. Volunteers from another project were drafted in to ask the Timebank volunteers the questions from the questionnaire. Some questionnaires were also completed by phone at a later date. 35 questionnaires were returned in total.

The Findings

Volunteers reported that their self-esteem and confidence had increased as a result of volunteering and they had positive experiences around meeting new people through the project. There were also some volunteers who said they would like to exchange their skills more often.

The Future

Castlemilk Timebank are in the process of applying their findings to funding applications.