

# Leeds Year of Volunteering 2010 Evaluation

## Executive Summary



**For Leeds City Council**

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RESEARCH

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This research has been carried out in compliance with the MRQSA international standard (ISO20:252)

## Executive Summary

- Volunteering can be hugely beneficial. On an individual level, volunteering can give people confidence, promote social inclusion and increase feelings of personal well-being. It can move workless individuals closer to the job market and help individuals excluded from society re-integrate with their communities. It can bring communities closer together, empowering local individuals and increasing the cohesion of local areas. In recognition of all of this, volunteering has become an increasingly important aspect of government policy on both a local and national level. With the Big Society agenda and its aim of encouraging individuals to take an active role in their communities, this looks set to continue.
- Leeds City Council recognises the importance of voluntary activity to the individuals and communities within Leeds. The Year of Volunteering was a city wide programme, running from January 2010 until January 2011, which aimed to increase the level of voluntary activity and opportunities available across the city, promote and celebrate the wide range of voluntary activities available and help organisations deliver a quality volunteering activity.
- Qa Research were asked to undertake an evaluation of the Year of Volunteering. This report highlights the findings of this evaluation, the methods employed to undertake the evaluation and the key conclusions and recommendations which can be made as a result of the findings.
- The evaluation was designed to explore the outputs occurring as a result of the Year of Volunteering, the impact of the year on a range of individuals across the city and identify the key elements of the programme that can be taken forward to increase voluntary opportunities in the future. In addition, the evaluation explored the potential to create a baseline figure of voluntary activity across the city, which can be used to track the levels of volunteering into the future.
- As a result of the broad scope of the Year of Volunteering activities, a mixed methodology approach to undertaking the programme evaluation was most appropriate. The evaluation used the following:
  - In-depth interviews with those involved in the delivery of the Year of Volunteering programme and members of the steering group. A total of 16 individuals took part in the in-depth interviews;
  - An online survey with 130 volunteers and 96 organisations providing volunteer opportunities;
  - A review of monitoring information collected as a result of the Year of Volunteering and information from volunteer databases operating in the city, to investigate the change in voluntary activity and explore the potential for creating a baseline figure of voluntary activity in the city;
  - 3 case studies with organisations which offer volunteer opportunities within the city.

## Key Findings

- The outputs associated with the Year of Volunteering were many and varied, the following is a summative list of the main outputs:
  - The delivery of over 90 events throughout the year designed to promote and celebrate volunteering and provide an opportunity for people to experience volunteering. Many of these events were linked to specific themes of volunteering which changed throughout the year;
  - The launch of the volunteer Kitemark and Toolkit;
  - The promotion of the signed compact regarding the relationship between the public and voluntary sectors in Leeds;
  - The relocation of, and subsequent improvements to, the Volunteer Centre Leeds, allowing the centre to increase its activities in identifying and securing voluntary opportunities for interested individuals;
  - Increasing the accessibility and promotion of initiatives such as the volunteer management network.
- The evidence collected as a result of the online survey and interviews with individuals involved with the programme suggests the Year of Volunteering has been successful in promoting volunteering across the city. However in many cases this awareness of the programme did not translate into involvement in the programme, particularly among smaller voluntary organisations and businesses. Organisations aware of and involved with the volunteer centre were more likely to have been involved in the Year of Volunteering.
- Exploring the change in volunteer opportunities and volunteer details registered on the databases used to match volunteers to opportunities in the city, pointed to a definite increase in the number of individuals interested in volunteering over the Year. The data also highlighted how the growth in demand for volunteering opportunities appears to be outstripping the creation of new voluntary opportunities. This was confirmed by the qualitative interviews, with voluntary organisations feeling they lacked the resources or had no need to increase the number of opportunities provided. Volunteering within the city looks to increasingly become a providers market.
- A majority of those organisations aware of the Year of Volunteering felt the Year had at least a small impact on the quality of volunteer provision within the city, however, only one in ten organisations were aware of the volunteer toolkit and Kitemark. The online surveys found strong evidence that the interviewing and training of volunteers is not being consistently applied across the city. Despite recognising the importance of offering a quality volunteer experience, organisations were concerned about the burden it can place on resources that are already stretched.
- The events that were undertaken have encouraged partnership working between organisations, there was particular evidence to suggest that the “themed” approach to the organisation of events and activities was particularly successful in encouraging organisations to work together, as it provided a banner under which organisations from various sectors could unite. Initiatives such as the volunteers management network provide a continuing opportunity for these partnership relationships to be developed. Promoting and developing these networks should be a priority to build on the links forged as a result of the Year of Volunteering.
- Despite this, there was a challenge reconciling the aims of independent, user led, voluntary organisations with the desire of public sector organisations to achieve the overarching objectives of the Year of Volunteering. There was evidence to suggest the short lead in time to the Year of

Volunteering meant some voluntary organisations felt unable to influence the development of the Year of Volunteering.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** There is a role for the volunteer centre to increase its work with organisations who may be able to offer voluntary opportunities and provide increasing levels of support, guidance and information to organisations looking to expand or create volunteer opportunities.

**Recommendation 2:** The volunteer centre needs to continue to develop partnerships with organisations who may signpost individuals towards voluntary opportunities to maintain the increase in demand for volunteer work.

**Recommendation 3:** The basis of this support should be on demonstrating to organisations the benefits of increasing their voluntary activities and reducing the resourcing burdens on organisations looking to do this (this is particularly important given that many volunteer organisations are expecting or experiencing a reduction in funding). This could involve the development of volunteer “volunteer managers”.

**Recommendation 4:** It is important to have in place mechanisms to continually monitor the levels of volunteering across the city. One possibility would be to explore the feasibility of bringing together the various databases which are used to capture information on the supply and demand of volunteer opportunities across the city.

**Recommendation 5:** A quantitative measure to accurately capture levels of volunteering in Leeds and compare this to previous years needs to be done utilising a representative survey of Leeds residents. To reduce costs, it may be possible to do this by introducing a volunteer question to other city wide surveys.

**Recommendation 6:** The Kitemark needs to be promoted more widely, as an initiative to encourage the provision of “quality” volunteering opportunities.

**Recommendation 7:** Promote the role of the volunteer centre as a focal point for voluntary activity across the City and encourage contact between volunteer organisations and the volunteer centre. Providing signposts to training and encouraging organisations to work together when sourcing training would be beneficial.

**Recommendation 8:** Undertake a greater degree of consultation with volunteer organisations earlier on in the set-up process, this is linked to allowing a greater lead in time to organise the Year of Volunteering. Consultation exercises need not be expensive, they could be set up through existing networks and possibly through a mailout to all those organisations on the databases of voluntary organisations.

**Recommendation 9:** Going forwards, there needs to be a continuation of a sustainable steering group to guide any city wide activity which takes place has a focus on improving partnership working between organisations. The steering group needs involvement from representatives from voluntary sectors **and** businesses.

**Recommendation 10:** A greater level of promotion about the messages relating to volunteering within the Leeds Compact.

**Recommendation 11:** Awareness raising activities need to focus on highlighting the benefits of getting involved in the programme and what volunteer organisations can gain from becoming involved. Their needs to be greater emphasis on providing support to voluntary organisations to deliver a quality volunteer experience, a more ‘how we can work together’ message rather than a ‘what you should be doing’ one.

**Recommendation 12:** Encourage organisations to register and promote opportunities through the Volunteer Centre Leeds. This should be driven by personal contact and partnership working between individuals at the volunteer centre and individuals within voluntary organisations and businesses.

**Recommendation 13:** Directly engage with volunteer organisations and businesses to promote the benefits of increasing the voluntary opportunities available rather than relying on organisations to come to the Volunteer Centre. This would reduce the burden on organisations (particularly smaller organisations) looking to get involved.

**Recommendation 14:** It may also be worthwhile to focus on undertaking promotional events and activities in areas of high footfall for maximum impact.

**Recommendation 15:** The small grants provided as part of the Year of Volunteering were beneficial in encouraging uptake, and there was some qualitative evidence to suggest they facilitated positive outcomes among volunteering organisations. They should be continued.

**Recommendation 16:** A greater emphasis needs to be placed on involving private organisations. Diversifying the access routes into engaging with private organisations should prove beneficial rather than relying on a single point of access.

**Recommendation 17:** Given the link between the volunteer centre and organisations involved in the year, it may be useful to consider methods of promoting links between the volunteer centre and businesses.

**Recommendation 18:** Generate buy in for the toolkit by including examples taken from voluntary organisations across Leeds which demonstrate the value that enacting the policies within the toolkit can have on organisations.

**Recommendation 19:** Provide practical advice on how organisations might be able to work together to share resources when looking to implement the practices suggested in the toolkit.