



# ENGAGING OLDER PEOPLE OF ASIAN ORIGIN

FINDINGS FROM  
VOLUNTEERING  
MATTERS' RETIRED AND  
SENIOR VOLUNTEERING  
PROGRAMME (RSVP)  
IN COVENTRY

**VOLUNTEERING** **MATTERS**  
FOR OLDER PEOPLE

INSPIRING PEOPLE,  
CHANGING COMMUNITIES

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August 2015

# INTRODUCTION

**Volunteering Matters develops and delivers high impact volunteer-led solutions to some of the most difficult challenges facing individuals and their communities today.**

Founded in 1962 (known as Community Service Volunteers until 2015) we know, through years of successful work, that by investing in people through the power of volunteering we can make a tangible difference; improving health and wellbeing, building stronger more cohesive communities and achieving lasting results.

We believe that everyone can play a role in their community and should have the chance to participate; we build projects and programmes to reflect this. We focus on the needs of four distinct communities; older and retired people, disabled people, vulnerable families and young people.

Since 2000, our Retired and Senior Volunteering Programme (RSVP) in Coventry has been delivering a project tackling isolation and improving wellbeing amongst older people in Coventry through volunteer-led activity. In November 2012, the project was awarded a further three years' funding from the Big Lottery Fund's

Reaching Community Programme, to support older volunteers to design and deliver activities that meet the needs of older people within their communities.

Part of this project involved working specifically with older people within the Asian community to overcome barriers to volunteer participation and to increase their engagement in the wider community. Research carried out prior to setting up the project had highlighted the isolation experienced by many older people from Asian backgrounds as well as the impact that volunteering could have in enabling them to feel more confident using English. As a result, the project aimed to recruit older volunteers who were then supported to set up and run activities that would benefit other older people or would involve older people as volunteers.

This report was produced by Charities Evaluation Services and focuses on the work done by the project within the Asian community. It is based on data collected by Volunteering Matters as well as on interviews carried out with Asian volunteer group leaders, volunteers and beneficiaries.



# SECTION 1

## HOW THE PROJECT ENGAGED OLDER PEOPLE OF ASIAN ORIGIN IN VOLUNTEERING



**For the past six years RSVP Coventry has sought to actively engage members of the Asian community in order to break down barriers to volunteering. The project won further support and funding from the Big Lottery Fund in 2012 based in part on work done within the Asian community since the project became citywide in February 2009.**

During this time it has been instrumental in the development of projects within the Asian community to the point where it has been recognised for its contribution to community cohesion (2011) and also received a commendation for good practice in partnership-working (also 2011) as part of The Coventry Compact Awards.

Over the past three years it has continued to engage members of the Asian community in a variety of ways – such as through information stands at relevant community events, by visiting local Asian groups and by being involved in events in local temples. Forging links with the leaders of Mosques, Temples, Community Centres and the Multi Faith Forum was also important – as well as drawing on support from current RSVP Volunteers within the Asian community, as this enabled the project to work in partnership right from the beginning to identify potential volunteers. As such, RSVP

### EXAMPLE 1:

RSVP Coventry was able to provide training and support to EKTA Unity (formally Shanti Bhavan) a group for Asian women that has been running for more than 20 years. The group had originally been run by staff and due to funding cuts had become volunteer-led. Committee members joined RSVP Coventry and benefited from access to peer support at organisers meetings, training courses, the opportunity to promote their group in a film about volunteering and introductions to individuals with new skills to help current volunteers. For example, RSVP Coventry was able to link a woman to the group who was able to teach knitters to read knitting patterns.

### EXAMPLE 2:

RSVP Coventry was approached by a member of the Asian community asking for some support in setting up a knitting group in their own home. They had been attending another knitting group run by an RSVP Coventry volunteer and decided they would like to have a go themselves. They already had some friends who were interested and what started as a few friends getting together to knit quickly grew to the point where the group could no longer fit into a room in someone's house. As a result of support from RSVP Coventry, the group was able to move to the Tesco Community Space at the Ricoh Arena where it still meets and recently celebrated its fifth birthday.



**“SINCE I’VE BEEN THERE  
I FEEL MUCH BETTER,  
I GO OUT... IT GIVES ME  
A BIT OF EXERCISE.”**

Coventry has been able to support new groups which are just setting up and to encourage new activities by existing groups.

One of RSVP Coventry’s strengths lies in the fact that it has identified volunteer organisers from within local Asian communities to set up and run groups. Not only does this mean that RSVP Coventry don’t have to provide someone external to translate for members of the groups or to support the group members, but it also results in a healthier, more informal relationship between RSVP Coventry and the groups. The organisers themselves tend to have a good grasp of English and can liaise between the group members and RSVP Coventry. As a result the groups develop confidence and the volunteers are better able to take the lead.

RSVP Coventry has also provided training and offered many opportunities for volunteers from all communities to link with the larger network of volunteers in the area by inviting them to take part in all RSVP Coventry activities.

Current Asian volunteers have been pro-active in spreading the word within their local communities and organisers themselves have attended local events (including Diwali, world mental health day, Eid etc.) to publicise their groups and in some cases to recruit more members.



# SECTION 2

## THE DIFFERENCE THE PROJECT HAS MADE



The project had a number of aims which focused on enabling older people of Asian origin to be more engaged in the community. In particular it wanted to enable older people of Asian origin to:

- ▶ become more involved in volunteering
- ▶ have more opportunities to speak English through volunteering
- ▶ take on group leadership roles
- ▶ feel more involved in the wider community through their own efforts.

In this chapter we look at each of these aims in turn, and show how the programme went about addressing them, using feedback from surveys with beneficiaries, volunteers and volunteer organisers.

### 2.1 Older people of Asian origin are more involved in volunteering

Over the course of the project, the number of older people of Asian origin who are involved in volunteering has grown so that by the end of the project there were a total of 104 volunteers from Asian communities involved in the project and engaged in a range of activities.

In addition RSVP Coventry has links with, or has helped to set up, eight knitting groups of which six are run by organisers from the Asian community. The majority of these volunteers have also been involved in various activities in addition to their knitting groups, some of which include film making, picnics in the park, selling poppies to raise money for the British Legion, Operation Christmas Child, and training in First Aid, IT and Community Leadership Development.

RSVP Coventry also benefited from having a younger Muslim volunteer supporting the project for twelve months. Her insight was extremely helpful and she was able, among other things, to encourage other Asian women to get involved in activities which would benefit the project as a whole, such as processing application forms, getting involved with organisation campaigns such as the national Make a Difference Day and being involved with the project evaluation.



**“I’VE GAINED CONFIDENCE TO OPEN ANOTHER GROUP AND ATTRACT MORE 70+ LADIES.”**

The project has also worked with older Asian volunteers as community champions, who introduced the project to helpful people within the community and made suggestions about how and when to run certain activities in order to encourage people to attend.

In addition, 226 people from Asian backgrounds have been involved in the groups led by RSVP volunteer organisers with the majority of these attending weekly sessions.

## **2.2 Older people of Asian origin speak English in their volunteering role**

By the end of the project, four of the seven Asian volunteer organisers reported that English was the main language spoken in their groups. In addition, many older people of Asian origin reported that they had gained confidence in speaking English<sup>1</sup>. Comments included:

**“Now I feel happy I can talk to people. I can learn things from them.”**

1: 100% of sample of Asian beneficiaries (n = 19) reported that their English had improved. 100% of sample of older volunteers of Asian origin (n = 51) felt their English had improved.

**“I like to come to the group because I can learn some English words.”**

## **2.3 Older people of Asian origin are more willing to lead groups**

In year one, seven people of Asian origin were involved as volunteer organisers with the project; four of these were already organising groups when the project started and three people joined in year one. By the end of the project, this had grown to a total of eleven people of Asian origin who were involved as volunteer organisers.

In addition, a further eleven people were involved as co-organisers, group representatives, and committee members who helped to support the project’s activities.

Asian volunteers have acted as community champions and enabled the project to strengthen its links with the Asian community by attending network events such as training and meetings or taking part in activities such as film making, campaigning and project evaluation. Volunteer organisers have also take up opportunities to promote their projects such as appearing on a Sikh News programme on TV.

Many of these people described how taking on this role had given them more confidence.

## 2.4 Older people of Asian origin feel more involved in the wider community

Feedback from beneficiaries, volunteers and volunteer organisers of Asian origin revealed that the vast majority felt more involved in the community as a result of participating in the project. In particular, amongst the 19 beneficiaries who completed feedback forms at the end of the project, 100% had made new friends and 100% said they were socialising more often. Some described how attending groups run by Asian volunteers had helped them to feel more connected to the wider community around them:

**“I feel happy as we laugh and talk. I learn what’s going on in the society and the world at large.”**

**“By coming to the group there is news and views about what’s going on around the world.”**

Other people said they had benefited from the social contact with other members of the group:

**“Coming to the group is a day out for me as I’m housebound. I love to meet my friends in the group.”**

**“I am very happy when I come here. I’ve got new friends.”**

Equally, attending groups enabled older Asian people to take part in other community activities:

**“By coming to the group I get to know about festivals and trips, arts and crafts.”**

**“Coming to the group there is a trip arranged from time to time, otherwise I cannot go on my own.”**



All the volunteers of Asian origin who completed feedback forms at the end of the project also said they had made new friends and felt more involved in the community as a result of participating in the project.<sup>2</sup> One person commented:

**“I am passing on my knitting and sewing skills to other people which makes me feel I am giving something to the community where I live.”**

Others described the way in which coming together with other people enabled them to share their problems with others:

**“I can talk to other people and about my problems and also laugh and exercise with the group.”**

**“It gives opportunity to mix with other people, laugh and talk. It helps relieve stress by talking to others.”**

2: 51 volunteers of Asian origin completed feedback forms at the end of the project.

**“I feel more relaxed by talking to others.”**

**“I feel lighter when I come out as I can talk to others about my problems.”**

Many simply enjoyed making new friends and doing things together:

**“I look forward to coming to the centre. We all enjoy and are happy.”**

**“I enjoy myself, meeting people and learning new things from each other.”**

In addition, all seven of the volunteer leaders of Asian origin who responded to the survey said they felt they were more involved in their community as a result of the project.

One person said:

**“It has enabled us to become more socially connected.”**



## **2.5 Older people of Asian origin have better mental and physical health**

Feedback from beneficiaries, volunteers and volunteer organisers of Asian origin suggests that their involvement in the project had been beneficial to their mental and physical health. In particular, beneficiaries reported that:

- ▶ 100% had become more physically active
- ▶ 100% felt better about themselves
- ▶ 100% felt more positive about life.

For example, they described how attending groups led by Asian volunteers was important to them:

**“I like to come to the group. We have a little exercise in the group which keeps me active.”**

**“I feel much better and happy when I come to the group.”**

**“When I come to the group I’m learning new things and feel better for coming.”**

**“Coming to the group I am much wiser because of the information shared which I would not know sitting at home.”**

Some commented on the way in which it had benefited their health:

**“By coming to the group I’m more aware about my health as we have various local services come to the group.”**

**“Since I’ve been there I feel much better, I go out, it’s five minutes to walk there, I can’t walk too much... it gives me a bit of exercise, I feel much better since I’ve been there.”**

**“You’ve got a reason to go out and get fresh air, and have some exercise, meet other people. Your mind is in happiness, this is helping a lot.”**

In addition, volunteers of Asian origin reported that:

- ▶ 100% had learnt new skills
- ▶ 100% felt more confident
- ▶ 100% felt better about themselves
- ▶ 98% had become more physically active
- ▶ 98% felt more positive about life
- ▶ 100% had gained a sense of achievement.

Many described how volunteering gave them a sense of satisfaction from helping others:

**“I feel happy for helping others.”**

**“As a volunteer knitter I feel that I help others less fortunate than myself, it is a mental satisfaction.”**

**“I am very happy to come here. I show to the girls how to do yoga.”**

For others, volunteering had helped them feel better about themselves:

**“I feel positive about myself, gained friendship; can hug and smile.”**

**“I feel happy and stress-free as we help others and also learn new things.”**

**“I feel more confident to speak with my new friends.”**

Finally, amongst the seven volunteer organisers of Asian origin who gave feedback at the end of the project:

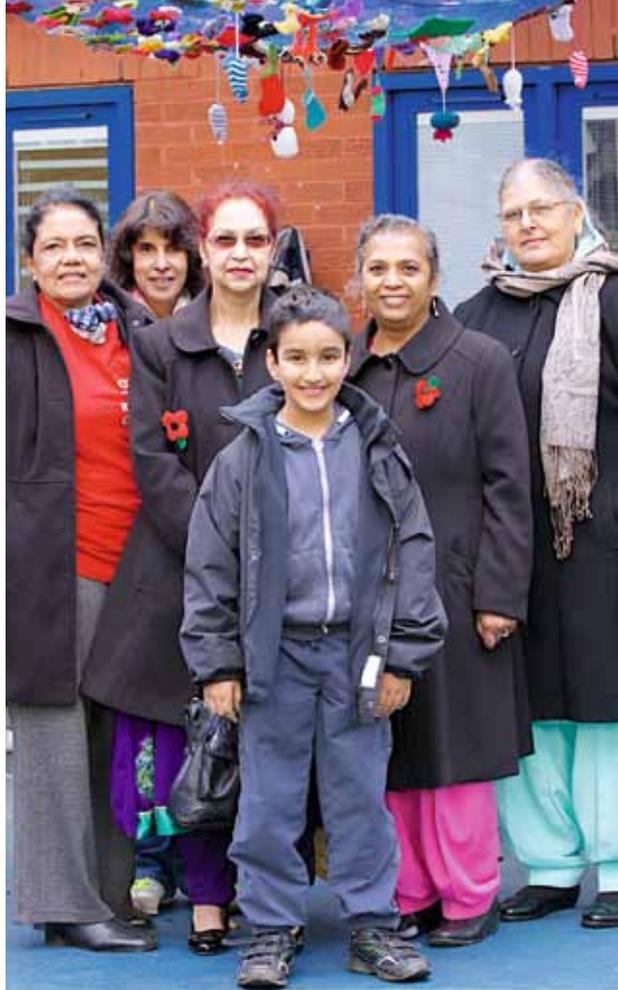
- ▶ 5 out of 7 felt better about themselves
- ▶ 6 out of 7 had learnt new skills
- ▶ all 7 felt more confident
- ▶ all 7 felt proud of their achievements
- ▶ all 7 felt more positive about life.

In particular, they talked about the sense of fulfilment they gained from their role:

**“It gives me a pleasure that I can contribute some of my time to our community.”**

**“Not only does it give me something positive to focus on, but it is nice to know that we are making a difference to premature babies/other charities occasionally.”**

**“I am doing a good job to help people in need.”**



For some people, their involvement in the project had been life-changing:

**“You feel active. You get dressed and go somewhere. Otherwise you sit at home and do nothing. So now we have an excuse to go out and do things for other people who need help. It makes you happy. You talk to everyone. I learn from them, they learn from me. It changed my life.”**

**“My life is changed because I’ve got lots of friends. We like to keep up with each other. We talk with each other and we don’t feel lonely. In here, I love myself and I love the ladies.”**

**“Since I’ve been there, I’ve been feeling so happy. When I’m sitting at home I’ve got nothing to do, I don’t want to do anything, I just lie down, I don’t like to watch television. But since I’ve started going out I’m much happier.”**

**“Coming to the group has made such a tremendous difference. I feel myself now. Because I lost myself altogether right from the beginning from childhood, I’d been a very independent person. But losing my husband, packing up my work, I was lost altogether. I didn’t know what to do with myself, who to ask, where to go. I don’t think twice now. I can go anywhere I like. I can go on holiday. I can go shopping. Whatever I feel like, I can do now.”**

**“I feel satisfied as I can see the smiles on the volunteers’ faces when I take them on outings and to lunch. Also I feel proud when they thank me for any assistance I give them and my advice helps them to relieve their problems and stress.”**

## SECTION 3

# CASE STUDY



**This case study shows in detail how support from RSVP Coventry has enabled one group to flourish.**

The Aao Miloh group has been running for four years, is open to everyone aged 50+ but has a core group of 18–20 mainly Asian women aged 60+ who attend every week. The aim of the group is to ensure that the group members feel less isolated and feel better in themselves. The group does this by promoting better mental and physical health via group activities including charity work and group members are encouraged to leave their problems at home and to develop a positive attitude towards life.

In order to support community venues to remain sustainable and to improve community cohesion the group applied to the community development fund for an amount of rent to ensure the group continues to run in the church hall. This has enabled them to continue to build good relationships with other groups in the building. For example, the group has knitted Easter chicks with chocolate eggs for the children from the Woodside nursery which meets in the same building and has been able to donate a small amount by giving small hand knitted items for the nursery to sell. This has been reciprocated by the nursery inviting group members to watch Christmas plays and other events thereby building a relationship between the groups.

They have also been building relationships with other groups which meet in the church hall so that part of the group is also growing and encouraging community cohesion across the South West of the city. The longer the Aao Miloh group stays viable the more offshoot activities it is hoped will develop.

Being part of the group has enabled its members to grow in confidence. So much so that in October 2013 one of its members started a new group for women in the Styvechale area of Coventry.

This new group Trinjen, (which means togetherness) was initially made up largely of existing Aao Miloh members but aimed to encourage more local people to join and was successful in recruiting five new members over the past two years. The group aims to provide similar activities to Aao Miloh but has a particular focus on arts and crafts activities. The organiser has had guidance and support from her peers as well as from RSVP Coventry.

Over the last two year, the group has continued to meet at the church and is now responsible for paying its own rent and has raising funding locally with help from the City Council's Community Development Team.

The volunteer organiser has undertaken various training opportunities including leadership and fundraising courses arranged by RSVP Coventry and provided by Voluntary Action Coventry.

# SECTION 4

## LEARNING AND NEXT STEPS



A focus group was held with a group of Asian volunteers, professionals and other interested parties to discuss some of the issues associated with engaging people of Asian origin in the community through volunteering. Extra support in the form of a development worker for one day a week was also seconded in to help build capacity by recruiting more volunteer organisers towards the middle of the second year.

Between them the group and the worker identified a number of aspects of the project's delivery which had worked well, such as:

- ▶ Forging links with the leaders of mosques, temples, community Centres and the Multi Faith Forum.
- ▶ Using Volunteer Champions from the Asian community to promote the project.
- ▶ Describing activities as social groups or get-togethers rather than as volunteering as some people were reluctant to become involved in volunteering.

**“You’ve got a reason to go out and get fresh air, and have some exercise, meet other people. Your mind is in happiness, this is helping a lot.”**

In terms of the barriers to volunteering in Asian communities, they highlighted issues around:

- ▶ People having time to get involved.
- ▶ Need for childcare.
- ▶ Transport issues.
- ▶ Lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities.
- ▶ Confidence speaking English.
- ▶ Difficulties engaging men in volunteering.
- ▶ Cultural attitudes to volunteering which is mainly organised through temples and mosques rather than in the community.

As a result, they identified a number of learning points which had emerged from the project.

These included:

- ▶ Holding a specific showcase event at the Ramgarhia Temple.
- ▶ Taking opportunities to exhibit Asian women's skills and talents.
- ▶ Using community venues – such as the Tesco community room.
- ▶ Involving volunteers to act as interpreters and to promote project activities.
- ▶ Producing literature / publicity materials in a range of languages.
- ▶ Engaging sixth form or college students from Asian backgrounds to help with recruitment within their communities.

# SECTION 5

## CONCLUSION

Over the last three years, the RSVP Coventry project has enabled older people of Asian origin to become more involved in the community through volunteering. In particular, it has recruited over 100 volunteers from Asian communities and engaged them in a range of activities. It has also enabled older people from Asian backgrounds to take on leadership roles through running groups, representing the project or helping with promotion and evaluation. Not only that, but over 200 people from Asian backgrounds have been involved in the groups led by RSVP volunteer organisers.

**“My life is changed because I’ve got lots of friends. We like to keep up with each other. We talk with each other and we don’t feel lonely. In here, I love myself and I love the ladies.”**

The feedback from Asian beneficiaries, volunteers and volunteer organisers has shown that their involvement in the project has developed their skills and confidence, particularly in speaking English, and has helped them to feel more connected to the wider community. It has also improved their mental health by enabling them to feel more positive about life and gain a sense of achievement from their volunteering. This is particularly important for older people from Asian backgrounds amongst whom there are high levels of social isolation, poor mental health and a lack of confidence, motivation and activity. Volunteering therefore plays an important role in enabling older Asian people to come together to share their skills and interests.

The RSVP project has provided valuable opportunities for older people of Asian origin to develop new ways of connecting to others through engaging them in activities that interest them and which help them feel they are part of the outside world and have a purpose. At the same time, it has provided support to the groups themselves, particularly in terms of developing the skills, confidence and motivation of Asian volunteer organisers, which means these groups can continue to make Coventry a better place in which to grow old.

# APPENDICES

## Profile of BENEFICIARIES who completed the survey

Gender	N°	%
Female	14	74%
Not known	5	26%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100%</b>

Age	N°	%
50-59	1	5%
60-69	7	37%
70-79	7	37%
80+	1	5%
Not known	3	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100%</b>

English first language	N°	%
No	19	100%

Ethnic origin	N°	%
Asian British	15	79%
Indian	4	21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Profile of VOLUNTEERS who completed the survey

Gender	N°	%
Female	36	72%
Not known	14	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Age	N°	%
Under 50	5	10%
50-59	5	10%
60-69	27	54%
70-79	10	20%
80+	1	2%
Unknown	2	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Profile of VOLUNTEERS who completed the survey *continued*

English first language	N°	%
No	29	58%
Yes	1	2%
Unknown	20	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Ethnic origin	N°	%
Asian British	43	86%
Indian	6	12%
Pakistani	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Profile of VOLUNTEER ORGANISERS who completed the survey

Gender	N°	%
Female	7	72%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>

Age	N°	%
60-69	3	43%
70-79	4	57%
80+	0	0%
Unknown	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>

Ethnic origin	N°	%
Asian British	6	86%
Indian	1	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>

Outcomes for BENEFICIARIES	N°	%
More confident	19	100%
English has improved	19	100%
Made new friends	19	100%
Socialise more often	19	100%
More physically active	19	100%
Felt better about themselves	19	100%
More positive about life	19	100%

Outcomes for VOLUNTEERS	N°	%
English had improved	51	100%
Made new friends	51	100%
More involved in the community	51	100%
Learnt new skills	51	100%
More confident	51	100%
Felt better about themselves	51	100%
More physically active	50	98%
More positive about life	50	98%
Sense of achievement	51	100%

Outcomes for VOLUNTEER ORGANISERS	N°	%
More involved in the community	7	100%
Learnt new skills	6	100%
Felt more confident	7	100%
Felt better about themselves	5	100%
More positive about life	7	98%
Sense of achievement	7	100%

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We believe that everyone can play a role in their community and should have the chance to participate; we build projects and programmes to reflect this. We focus on the needs of four distinct communities; older and retired people, disabled people, vulnerable families and young people.

We engage over 35,000 volunteers every year, and currently have 150 active programmes across the UK. Our programmes recognise and reflect the different level of commitment that volunteers can give – our opportunities therefore range from full-time (35 hours a week), to part-time (a few hours a week or month) and employee volunteering.

More than 15,000 people over the age of 50 volunteer with us across the UK. Many lead their own projects through the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP) – running sports clubs, employability skills workshops, befriending and patient driving schemes, knitting groups and much more.

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