

VOLUNTEERING MATTERS



Our five-year strategy:

2025-2030

**We believe volunteering
is an act of optimism.**

**A quiet rebellion against
the idea that one person
can't make a difference.**

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Creating stronger communities through the power of volunteering



Our distinctive approach

Since 1962, we've used our influence to champion volunteering as a powerful tool to build a thriving, resilient society. Our projects are co-created with the people and communities we work alongside: an approach that encourages our participants to become future volunteers and leaders, not just beneficiaries.

We understand the pressures of day-to-day life and create flexible, inclusive opportunities for people at all stages of life. And beyond delivering projects on the ground, we use our voice to shape policy and practice – ensuring volunteering stays recognised, supported and sustainable for generations to come.

Volunteering Matters is a nationwide charity that exists to create stronger communities through the power of volunteering. We work with local partners to develop impactful programmes that support individuals and communities across the UK.

We work with **12,000+ volunteers** across **85+ programmes**, to enable a better life for more than **115,000 people**.

When communities lead we all move forward



Our five-year strategy:

2025-2030

This document outlines
our direction and plans for the next five years.

It contains **two sections:**

1. Where we are, and where we're headed

This section provides context to the world of volunteering.
It outlines our goals for the next five years and sets out
an approach that will guide everything we do.

2. Our strategic plan

This section details how we'll achieve our five-year goals.

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Where we are, and where we're headed



The Value of Volunteering

Volunteering changes lives for the better

Everyone benefits through volunteering

Volunteering is a powerful force for change

Volunteering has no limits

Volunteering changes lives:

of those who give their time and support and those who receive as a result.

It's a two-way transaction where everyone gains – volunteers, organisations and the community – and these mutual benefits promote sustainability, equity and shared growth.

Volunteering reduces isolation, improves mental and physical health, breaks down barriers and fosters inclusion.

And it's not just a charitable act:

it strengthens democracy, encourages social mobility and responds to systemic inequalities.

People who choose to volunteer their time to help others do so for many reasons. We have the commitment, and the investment, needed to dismantle the barriers that prevent everyone from getting involved.

Volunteering Matters

1. Our Origins

Pioneered inclusion: First charity to actively involve people from disadvantaged backgrounds

2. Growth and Influence

Built national reach and credibility through media (e.g. Reports Action), youth and older adult programmes

Introduced Citizen Education into schools

1960s: Founded by Alec and Mora Dickson as CSV

1970s–90s

Early innovation in education, community and media partnerships

Launched impactful social enterprises and volunteer programmes targeting unemployment, care, and isolation

Inspired models that were adopted nationally and internationally (e.g. Summer of Service)



Timeline

3. Evolving with Communities

Family support volunteering, Grandmentors, and child protection programmes

Citizenship embedded in national curriculum

2000s–2010s

Growth of enterprise and partnerships

Rebranded from CSV to Volunteering Matters in 2015

4. Leading Today

COVID response: volunteers supporting NHS, communities and neighbours

Delivery of the #iwill movement in partnership with UK Youth

2020s

Co-founding Vision for Volunteering (2022)

Influencing community-based change, equity and participation



Our promise to volunteers

We're always looking for new ways for you to make a difference. We unite people from different generations and backgrounds so you can learn from one another and create change. We promise to train, support and value you, so you feel confident in the value of your volunteering. And we promise to listen to your views and experiences – using the things that matter to you to drive action.





Our unique role in civil society

One organisation's beneficiary is another's volunteer.

Volunteering Matters occupies a unique space in civil society – fostering volunteering across all ages to create meaningful change. As a national organisation with deep local roots, we combine the reach and influence of a large charity with the trust and responsiveness of community-based work.

Our Vision - The change we want to see

Connected, inclusive communities where everyone can thrive through the transformative power of volunteering, in all its forms.

By 2030, we want to have influenced:

- A reduction in loneliness, isolation and social fragmentation.
- Improved mental and physical health through community connection and support.
- Dismantling barriers to opportunities, especially for people who are under-served and excluded.
- Communities leading change, not just receiving support.
- Sustainable, long-term funding models based on trust and equity.
- A shift to mutual, inclusive volunteering, where everyone has something to give and gain.
- The way governments listen to communities, using evidence and data provided by them.
- Participants recognised as contributors and future changemakers – not just beneficiaries.



Our five areas of change



Combat loneliness

No one should feel alone.



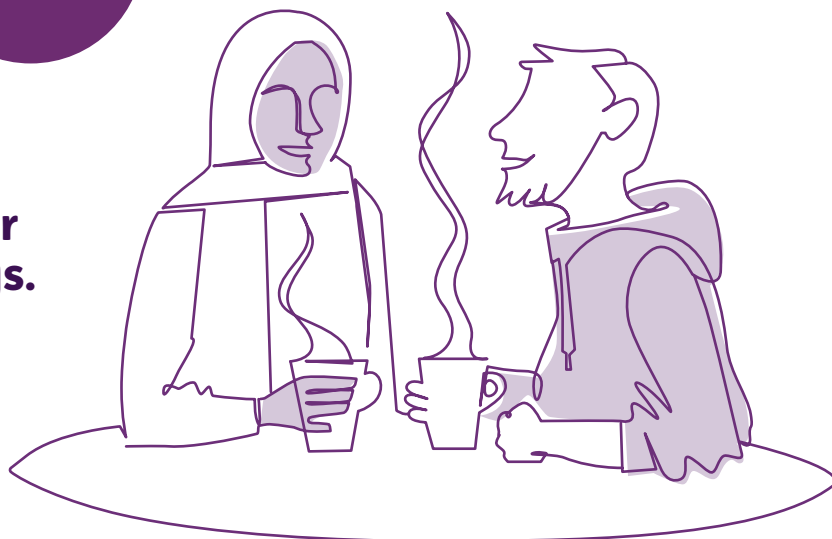
Why this is important?

Many people experience profound isolation from time to time. Volunteering builds bonds and creates belonging.

Link to our goals

- Volunteering as core social infrastructure
- Community- led social action

Invest in volunteering to bring individuals and communities together and the mutuality it brings.



Improve health and wellbeing

*Better health and wellbeing
starts with community.*

Why this is important?

Volunteers improve wellbeing:
not just for themselves, but for the people
and communities they support.

Link to our goals

- Volunteering as core social infrastructure
- Community- led social action



**Invest in the people and
places that are making
change happen, to create
a healthier society.**

Break down barriers

*Talent is everywhere.
Opportunity must be, too.*

Why this is important?

Many people develop the confidence and skills that open doors to future opportunities, including becoming volunteers themselves.

Link to our goals

- Equity and access in volunteering
- Fairer and more sustainable funding for communities



Support volunteering:
unlock potential, drive
inclusion and create a
more equitable world.

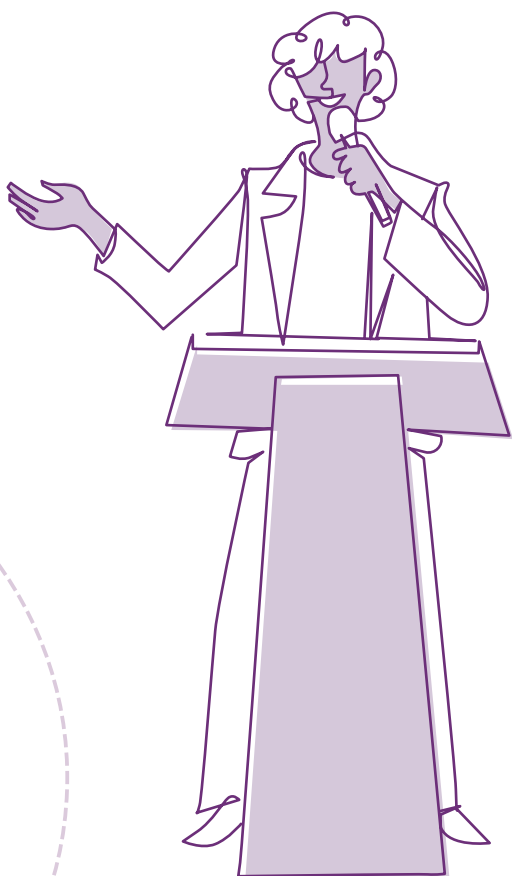
Equip and enable communities

Communities know best.



Why this is important?

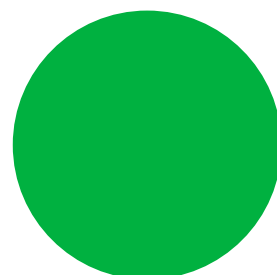
Community members often hold the clearest insight into what's needed. We collaborate with, not for, our communities.



Link to our goals

- Equity and access in volunteering
- Fairer and more sustainable funding for communities
- Community- led social action

Back local community leadership initiatives.
Invest in change.



Create social cohesion

Together, not divided.

Why this is important?

Volunteering connects and unites people.
Many people who've been supported through volunteering go on to volunteer themselves – supporting others and building solidarity.

Link to our goals

- Volunteering as core social infrastructure
- Community- led social action
- Equity and access in volunteering
- Fairer and more sustainable funding for communities



If we believe answers come from communities, we need to invest in and grow from within. Volunteer or support us.



**Every act of
volunteering has the
power to transform lives**



The Volunteering Ecosystem

There's no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to volunteering. People come to it with different motivations, life experiences and levels of confidence – and their engagement often fluctuates and changes over time.

Our ecosystem of volunteering recognises this. It identifies the diverse ways in which people contribute to society – from one-off community clean-ups to intergenerational friendships, or leading campaigns for systemic change.

Every approach is valuable. Together they represent a dynamic ecosystem of social action that reflects and respects people's lives, skills and passions.

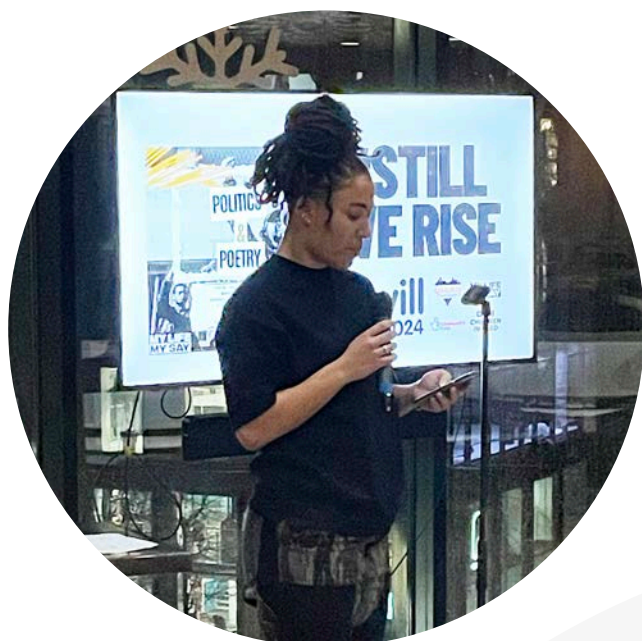
This understanding is rooted in our vision: that everyone, everywhere should have the chance to drive positive change in their community.

The ecosystem shows the different ways in which projects support people to:

- take their first steps into volunteering
- build confidence, skills and connection
- play a sustained and relational role in the lives of others
- take on leadership and advocacy roles
- influence systems and decision-making structures



By recognising this full spectrum of engagement we're creating various pathways into volunteering, unlocking the untapped potential in our communities and driving sustainable change. It's an approach that ensures our programmes are people-led, equity-focused and transformational – not just transactional.



No one stage of the process is better than any other.

Each represents a valid and valuable form of contribution, and volunteers should be supported wherever they are in the ecosystem. And because volunteers can enter, pause and re-enter the ecosystem at different stages of their lives, our programmes will continue to be designed to accommodate flexibility and change.

We'll continue to design pathways and feedback loops that allow volunteers to progress as they grow in confidence, skills or ambition – but also to take a break or come back to volunteering without judgement.



The five elements of the volunteering ecosystem

Definition:

Simple ways of volunteering. Great for trying volunteering as a new hobby, or fitting it in around life.

Flexible and

volunt

Definition:

Volunteers using their voice to shape decisions and help change the bigger picture.

Key features:

Often long-term, cross-sector roles, helping to make volunteering and public services better and fairer.

Changing systems



Definition:

Volunteers helping to lead projects or speak up on behalf of others.

Key features:

Local leaders, organisers, co-designers. Using insight and lived experience to shape our work.

Leading and organising



**Key features:**

Low commitment, no fuss, quick and easy to get involved. Helps people connect and build confidence.

**Definition:**

Volunteering based on human connection and trust. Relationship volunteering is about showing up and caring over time.

Key features:

Regular, warm and supportive. Helps people feel included and less alone. Often informal but powerful - helping people connect and build confidence.

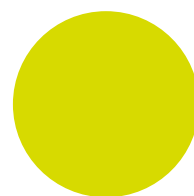
**Definition:**

Volunteers using their lived or professional experience to support others in a focused way.

Key features:

Trained or guided roles with a clear goal. Great for sharing skills or life experience.





The challenges we face

**Our goals reflect the current context of life in the UK.
We've recognised the following challenges in our
strategic plans.**

Time poverty and the pressures of daily life

Many potential volunteers face increasing demands on their time – juggling work, family, caring responsibilities or health challenges. Even when they're willing to help, people can't always commit regularly or for long durations.

The cost of living

Individuals: Rising living costs have forced many people to prioritise paid work or other income-generating activities over volunteering. Out-of-pocket expenses – such as transport, childcare or digital access – can also stop people getting involved.

Organisations: Rising costs for staffing, premises, safeguarding and volunteer support strain budgets. Many charities face flat or declining income – even while demand for their services grows.

Both challenges stem from economic pressures. One affects people's time and ability to volunteer; the other prevents organisations from providing sustained involvement in community schemes they would otherwise be more able to support.

Unfortunately, the people who are most likely to benefit from volunteering – through connection, skills, confidence and wellbeing – are often the least likely to have access to it. And barriers linked to income, time, disability or discrimination compound the problem. For this reason, inclusion will drive our actions over the next five years.

We are proactively targeting and opening up volunteering opportunities and support for the people who are most often excluded – ensuring everyone has the chance to contribute, benefit and lead.

Our goals for the next five years

Our strategic goals will help us focus on the things that are important to us and bring our purpose and vision to life.



From 2025 to 2030, we'll campaign to help shape **a more equitable, sustainable and impactful volunteering landscape**, focusing on four areas that reflect both urgent need and long-term opportunity.

Volunteering as core social infrastructure

From easing pressure on health and care systems to improving wellbeing and strengthening community life, volunteering delivers preventative, cost-effective solutions. We'll campaign for governments to recognise – and resource – volunteering as vital social infrastructure, not an optional.

We'll develop volunteer-led initiatives rooted in the needs, priorities and strengths of local communities, focusing on the five areas of change outlined on page 13.



We'll grow initiatives like Home from Hospital, Good Neighbours Schemes, Grandmentors and Welcome Friends, which demonstrate how tailored, volunteer-driven support can transform lives and create stronger, fairer communities.

We'll use research, data and evidence to measure the impact of our projects on both individuals and communities, to ensure our work delivers tangible, lasting change.

Equity and access in volunteering

We're committed to ensuring volunteering is inclusive, representative and accessible to all. Everyone should have the chance to volunteer – but too many people face barriers due to poverty, discrimination, caring responsibilities or systemic exclusion.

We'll campaign to remove those barriers and promote flexible, inclusive volunteering opportunities that appeal to a wider, more diverse audience. We'll address digital and financial exclusion, remove practical barriers to participation and ensure under-represented groups are both heard and included through volunteering.

We'll do this by reforming and strengthening our recruitment, induction, training and support, so that working with Volunteering Matters is welcoming and inclusive to a broad cross-section of society. We'll develop opportunities for people who don't usually volunteer, to build confidence and unlock potential.



New projects will be co-produced with communities, driven by local need and focused on widening participation, particularly within groups who are all too often excluded. We'll grow programmes like Match and Mentor – which encourages adults with learning disabilities to play an active role in their community – helping us get closer to our vision of a fairer, more inclusive society.

Community-led social action

We'll champion the unique power of community-led volunteering to build stronger, more connected communities. Based on what we've learnt from our successful youth-led #iwill and adult-led RSVP models, we'll create towns and cities of social action, where everyone – young and old – plays a part in shaping a fairer, more connected society.

Our programmes demonstrate how uniting people of all ages around a shared purpose creates lasting social impact – from supporting care-experienced young people to helping older adults thrive.

We'll influence policy and funding to better support intergenerational social action as a powerful tool to tackle loneliness, disconnection and inequality.



Fairer and more sustainable funding for communities

Long-term investment in communities is key to delivering the sustainable change that government, communities and society want to see. We'll advocate for long-term, fair and flexible funding that enables volunteer-led programmes to thrive, rather than short-term, transactional funding that undermines impact, inclusion and innovation.

Lasting change requires investment in what works, and trust in the communities driving it. We'll focus on shaping funding models that support the people and organisations driving local change.

We'll form long-term partnerships with local government, major donors, trusts and foundations, and corporate organisations (many of which have similar motivations to us) – always putting communities at the heart of our planning.

Our campaigning will call on funders to adopt models that reflect real-world costs, support preventative work, and prioritise community leadership and collaboration. Funding systems should enable organisations to plan ahead, respond to local needs and work across boundaries to deliver shared outcomes.

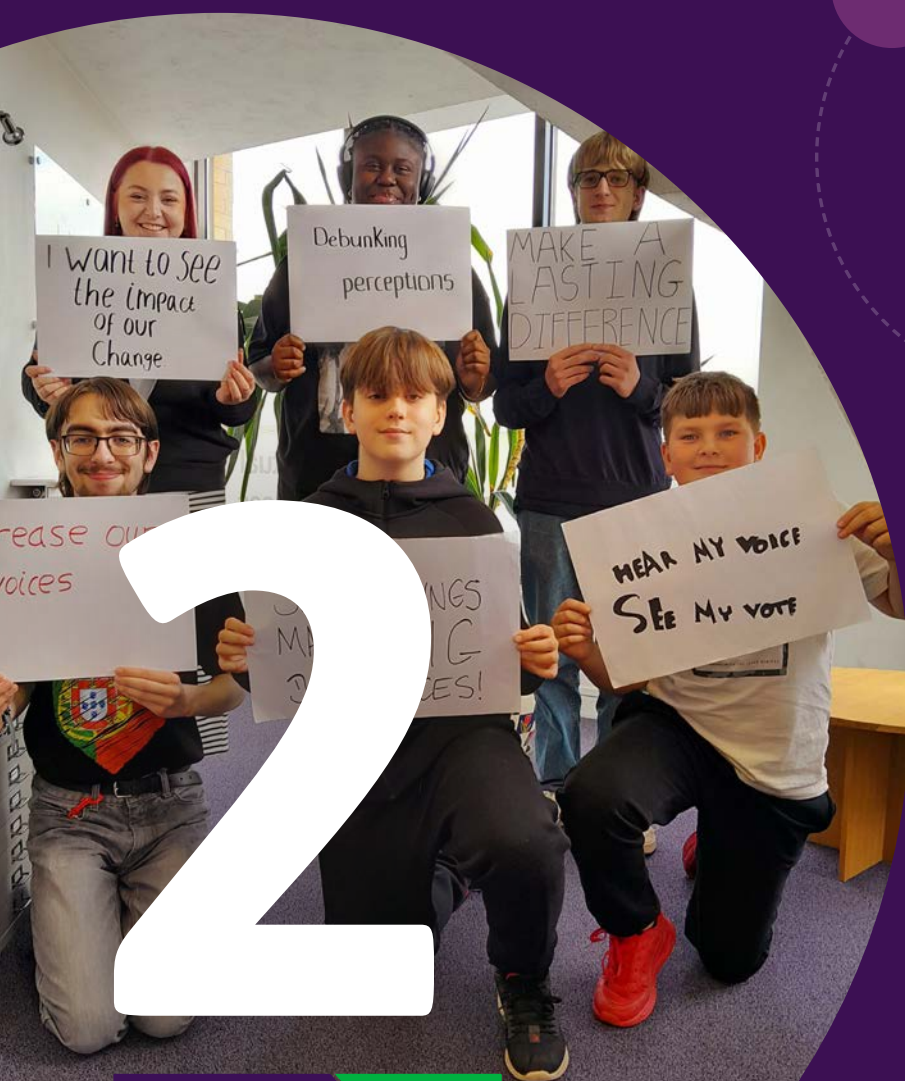
Our strategic priorities are grounded in what we deliver every day, and in the belief that a fairer, more connected society is only achievable when everyone can participate.

Over the next five years...

we'll use our programmes, partnerships and voice to make that vision a reality. The following section outlines the investment and approaches we'll use to do it.



Our strategic plan



Delivering on our goals: investment

Delivering on our five-year plan means investing in the systems, relationships and infrastructure that make achieving our goals both possible and sustainable.

Evolving and improving our projects

Why it matters:

Communities' needs and priorities are changing – and so are government agendas. By adapting our projects to respond to shifting priorities we can make sure our work stays relevant, effective and aligned with changing needs.

We will:

Work more closely with government and partners, invest in impact analysis to understand the cost benefit of volunteering, and test new ways of working with communities so we can do more of what works.

Strategic partnerships

Why it matters:

We can't transform volunteering alone. Strong partnerships with local organisations, national networks, public bodies and funders will help us get there.

We will:

Continue to build purposeful, values-led partnerships

- both locally and nationally
- to collaborate, share power and scale impact.



Digital infrastructure and inclusion

Why it matters:

Technology should enable volunteering – not create new barriers. Investment in inclusive, user-friendly systems will help us encourage more people to get involved, more easily.

We will:

Invest in inclusive digital tools – and use existing tools more effectively – to make volunteering more accessible, connected and responsive to people's needs.

Workforce capacity and culture

Why it matters:

Volunteers can't succeed without the support of our team. Achieving our goals requires a confident, values-led workforce with the tools, mindset and support needed to adapt and lead.

We will:

Support our staff through training, wellbeing and an inclusive working culture that reflects our values and encourages innovation.

Brand and communications alignment

Why it matters:

Strategic communications help us tell the right story. They attract supporters, reinforce shared values, and elevate the role of volunteers in creating better societies.

We will:

Invest in storytelling, brand development and sector influence to amplify the voice and value of volunteering.

Policy influence

Why it matters:

Policy shapes the conditions for volunteering. We need to be at the table to ensure our approach – and the voice of our volunteers – influences national direction.

We will:

Strengthen our voice in national policy conversations, linked to our areas of change, ensuring our learning and the voice of the volunteers we work with influence the decisions that affect our communities.

By recognising this full spectrum of engagement we're creating various pathways into volunteering, unlocking the untapped potential in our communities and driving sustainable change.

Delivering on our goals: approach

Achieving our goals requires a systematic approach aligned with our values: empowering, inclusive, compassionate, positive and straightforward.

Evidence-based practice

Why it matters:

Good decisions are grounded in good data. Robust evidence helps us understand what works, for whom and why. It helps us learn and improve, and strengthens our case to funders, partners and policymakers.

We will:

Build a culture of learning and reflection by embedding evidence-based decision-making into all aspects of our work – from programme design to evaluation, funding and communications.



New CRM and impact measurement systems

Why it matters:

To work smarter, we need better tools. Our new CRM and outcome tracking systems will help us understand volunteer journeys, measure change and respond quickly to what we learn.

We will:

Invest in and launch a new CRM and effective impact measurement tools to track volunteer engagement, outcomes and project performance to ensure everything we do is informed by data and supports our goals.

Volunteer voice

Why it matters:

Volunteers aren't just contributors – they're co-creators. To be truly inclusive, our systems must reflect the things that matter to them, by incorporating volunteer feedback at every level.

We will:

Create effective feedback loops, engagement panels and storytelling channels that reflect volunteer voices throughout our strategy, programmes and partnerships.



Financial resilience and diversification

Why it matters:

A sustainable future requires a stable financial foundation. Diversifying our income ensures we're not over-reliant on any single stream, and that we can reinvest in what matters.

We will:

Improve forecasting, cost control and income diversification to strengthen our financial resilience and keep us on track - ensuring our resources are in line with our strategic priorities.



Get in touch

The Levy Centre
18-24 Lower Clapton Road
London, E5 0PD

020 3780 5870
info@volunteermatters.org.uk

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