

# On the right track

Learning from investment in Prevention  
and Early Intervention in Ireland

**Volunteering**  
Outcomes Report



ON THE  
RIGHT  
TRACK

Produced by



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## Overview of the report

In the current climate, characterised by increasing shifts towards encouraging civic and community participation, coupled with challenging economic circumstances, policy-makers and service providers have been drawn to consider greater involvement of volunteers in child, youth and family-focused programmes. This raises some interesting questions for policy-makers and practitioners about the contribution that volunteers can make to improving outcomes for children and families and how this can be maximised. For example: What has been the experience of child and family services that rely solely or partially on volunteers? What roles have volunteers played, and what have been the challenges and benefits of involving volunteers? Where programmes or services are evidence informed, with defined components of delivery, this may raise further questions about the applicability of volunteers. This report explores the contribution of volunteers in evidenced informed services with families and children, exploring outcomes and identifying learning for policy makers and practitioners.

Seven programmes using volunteering were delivered under the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII). This report synthesises key messages about these evidence-informed programmes which incorporated volunteers into their approach to improve outcomes for children and young people, or which encouraged volunteering behaviours among children and young people. Several of the programmes were new to the island of Ireland and therefore contribute to our understanding of the opportunities and challenges of working with volunteers.

The report highlights the potential for volunteers to be involved in the delivery of evidence-informed programmes that achieve positive outcomes for children, young people and families; it also highlights the potential that volunteering offers children and young people. It draws lessons from these programmes for other organisations that may be interested in recruiting volunteers to support the implementation of their programmes, services or interventions. It also draws on national and international policy and literature to broaden understanding of the potential for volunteers to be involved in prevention and early intervention work.

## Section 1: Background to the report

### The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative

For more than a decade, The Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) has funded a number of initiatives to promote prevention and early intervention for children and young people in Ireland and Northern Ireland. This has involved investing, sometimes jointly with Government, in a number of organisations that have developed and delivered services based on evidence of what works. AP has invested over €127/£105 million in 30 partner agencies and community groups running 52 prevention and early intervention services and programmes across the island of Ireland; these are known as the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII).

### On the Right Track Project

A condition of AP funding required funded organisations to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of their services in improving outcomes for children and young people. The goal was to help the communities in which services operated and to build and disseminate learning so that policy-makers and those who design, deliver and fund services for children and young people could benefit from this experience.

The On the Right Track project, led by the Centre for Effective Services (CES), involved a process of synthesising the collective learning from the projects in the PEII: collating data and information from multiple sources and perspectives, and distilling overarching messages about ‘what works’. The CES website provides further details on each of the innovations, planning reports, implementation reports, evaluation reports and other useful resources.<sup>1</sup>

This report draws on seven evaluation reports of programmes that used volunteering in their approach. Unlike other On the Right Track reports, it does not directly address the findings and implications of the evaluations of these programmes. It seeks to identify what we can learn about the use of volunteers in prevention and early intervention programmes, such as the benefits or challenges of a volunteering approach and the most effective ways to deploy volunteers.

Other CES reports in the On the Right Track project focus on what we have learnt from the initiative about influencing parenting,<sup>2</sup> children’s learning,<sup>3</sup> social inclusivity,<sup>4</sup> children’s health and development,<sup>5</sup> and children’s behaviour.<sup>6</sup> Another CES report examines what the organisations learned about choosing, developing and implementing innovations, and evaluating their outcomes.<sup>7</sup> A CES summary report synthesising the learning from the overall programme is also available; it highlights key messages emerging from the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative and associated recommendations for practice and policy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Centre for Effective Services ([www.effectiveservices.org/work/article/supporting-the-prevention-and-early-intervention-initiative](http://www.effectiveservices.org/work/article/supporting-the-prevention-and-early-intervention-initiative))

<sup>2</sup> Sneddon and Owens (2013)

<sup>3</sup> Sneddon and Harris (2013)

<sup>4</sup> McGuirk and Kehoe, 2013

<sup>5</sup> McAvoy, Purdue, Sneddon and Mac Evilly (2013)

<sup>6</sup> Statham (2013)

<sup>7</sup> Sneddon, Kehoe, Harris, Owens, Sheehan and Mac Evilly (2012)

<sup>8</sup> Rochford, Doherty and Owens (2014)

## Structure of the report

This report summarises key learning points from the PEII on the use of volunteers. It draws on international evidence related to interventions that use volunteering and volunteers to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

Following this introduction (Section 1), the report is organised as follows:

**Section 2** describes the seven programmes covered in this report, setting out the content of the programme and the role of volunteers in its delivery.

**Section 3** provides a brief synopsis of evidence regarding the use of volunteering in programmes or services that aim to improve outcomes for children and young people.

**Section 4** summarises the findings of the individual evaluation reports for each of the programmes incorporating volunteers, and compares these findings with the general literature on the association between outcomes for children and their engagement with volunteers.

**Section 5** discusses the findings, including key issues and common themes that emerge from the evaluation reports, and summarises the overall conclusions and key learning points.

## What is volunteering?

There is no uniform definition of volunteering and there are variations in how volunteering is understood.<sup>9</sup> Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person's own free will, without payment, except for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses.<sup>10</sup> Voluntary work is usually categorised as either '**formal**' (undertaken through, and on behalf of, an organisation) or '**informal**' (undertaken outside of an organisational setting).<sup>11</sup>

The Irish Government, in the White Paper on Voluntary Activity (2004), defines volunteering as:

The commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities, individuals outside the immediate family, the environment and other causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person's own free will, without payment (except for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses).

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Communities defines volunteering as:

The commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment or individuals outside (or in addition to) one's immediate family. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain.<sup>12</sup>

While the definitions have commonality in concept and purpose, there is a reference to both *formal* and *informal* approaches, and duration of commitment, which can be important to the overall impact that

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<sup>9</sup> Angermann and Sittermann (2010)

<sup>10</sup> Caselli and Fonović (2011)

<sup>11</sup> Caselli and Fonović (2011)

<sup>12</sup> Department for Social Development (2012)

volunteers may have. The perspective of volunteering taken in this report is broad, and the programmes discussed here incorporate volunteering in formal and informal ways.

## Volunteering: Facts and figures

Table 1 illustrates data collected within Ireland and Northern Ireland, indicating rates of volunteering reported across a range of national surveys over time:

*Table 1 Volunteering rates in Ireland and Northern Ireland*

	Source	Year	Rates of volunteering
Ireland	National Census Ireland	2006	16.4% of the population aged 15 and over
	The Taskforce on Active Citizenship <sup>13</sup>	2007	23.1% of the population aged 16 and over
	Quarterly National Household Survey <sup>14</sup>	2013	Rate of volunteering for Ireland stood at 28.4%
Northern Ireland	Volunteer Now 'It's All About Time' <sup>15</sup>	2007	21% of respondents involved in <i>formal</i> volunteering and 35% involved in <i>informal</i> volunteering, 12 months prior to the survey
	Understanding Society Survey <sup>16</sup>	2011	15.6% of the population aged 16–74.
	<i>Volunteering in Northern Ireland Research Report. Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey</i> <sup>17</sup>	2016	32% of respondents indicated that they had carried out voluntary work within the past year.

While these studies demonstrate variation in the estimates of the numbers of volunteers in Ireland and Northern Ireland, they also indicate a strong pattern of volunteer contribution, which can potentially benefit children and young people as recipients of volunteer support or as volunteers.

<sup>13</sup> Active Citizenship Taskforce (2007)

<sup>14</sup> Central Statistics Office (2015) *Statistical Release. Quarterly National Household Survey Volunteering and Wellbeing.*

<sup>15</sup> Volunteer Now (2007)

<sup>16</sup> McFall, S. L. and Garrington, C. (Eds.). (2011).

<sup>17</sup> NISRA DSD (2016)



The Council of the European Union<sup>18</sup> lists a number of benefits from voluntary activities, including:

- Opportunities for learning, and generation of new skills and strengths, which increases individuals sense of belonging to the society and can be a catalyst for social change
- Contributions to the growth and strengthening of social capital<sup>19</sup> through development of a positive social network
- Contributions to the development of active citizenship, democracy and social cohesion.

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<sup>18</sup> The Council of the European Union (2011)

<sup>19</sup> Keeley (2009) defines social capital as *'the links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together'*.

## Section 2: Evidence-informed programmes using volunteering

### Introduction

Many of the programmes and services offered through the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII) aimed to improve outcomes for children across several outcome areas, recognising that children's physical, social, emotional and cognitive development are closely intertwined and that a 'whole child' approach can often deliver the best results. Many programmes worked directly with children, others work with their parents, and some combine both child and parent interventions. The three large-scale model PEII projects, which operated in disadvantaged areas of Dublin, address multiple aspects of children's and families' lives through a variety of different programmes and services.

The evaluations that have been drawn on for this report relate to programmes where volunteers were comprehensively involved in the delivery of services to children and/or young people. Most of the programmes used volunteers to deliver evidence-informed services, whereas some programmes used volunteering as the intervention to improve outcomes. The outcomes addressed by the programmes included academic achievement, pro-social behaviour, social competencies, and improving outcomes for the community. This volunteering report draws on evaluations of programmes working with children in school, home, and community settings. Table 2 provides an overview of the seven relevant programmes. A broad perspective on volunteering was taken in this report, in line with the current literature, with volunteering ranging from a highly structured process involving ongoing training, as in the case of the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) programme, to voluntary participation in community fora and committees, as in Tallaght CDI's (Childhood Development Initiative) Community Safety Initiative (CSI).

More detail about each programme and how it was assessed can be found in the original evaluation reports (see <http://www.effectiveservices.org/resources/tag/prevention+&+early+intervention>).

**Table 2. Summary of prevention and early intervention programmes which had a volunteering component**

Organisation	Target group(s)	Service/Programme	Role of the volunteer	Objectives
Barnardos <a href="http://www.barnardos.ie">www.barnardos.ie</a>	Children aged 7–9 (first and second class)	<b>Wizards of Words:</b> In-school intergenerational model. Targets children in first and second class of primary school who are having difficulty with their reading skills.	Trained volunteers aged 55 and over are paired with a child for one-to-one reading sessions for 30 minutes three times a week.	To make improvements in the children’s reading by targeting reading comprehension, reading fluency, vocabulary building, and phonemic awareness; to encourage and promote children’s love of reading; to improve their perceived competence and enjoyment of reading by building their confidence in their ability to read and comprehend books.
Foróige <a href="http://www.foroige.ie">www.foroige.ie</a>	Young people aged 10–18 in schools and in the community	<b>Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland (BBBS):</b> Community-based youth mentoring programme. It targets young people in the community who could benefit from a mentor.	The adult volunteer forms a development-focused ‘friendship’ with the young person through weekly meetings over a period of a year or more. Volunteers receive ongoing support from programme staff.	To establish a supportive relationship with the young person to assist them in their personal and social development. BBBS aims to impact on emotional well-being; enhanced educational outcomes; decreased risk-taking behaviour; improved parental relationships; and improved peer relationships.
		<b>BBBS School-based Programme</b> is a manualised school-based programme. The programme is scheduled for the full academic year under the supervision of a designated school staff member.	An older student volunteer is matched with a young person of the same gender starting secondary school. The student volunteer and young person meet regularly to support the transition from primary school to secondary school.	To support the transition of young people from primary school to secondary school, helping them to feel settled at school. It also aims to have benefits for the mentor, such as personal development, as well as benefits for the school community, by creating a more supportive environment for students.
	Young people aged 15–18	<b>Leadership Development Programme:</b> three modules about leadership are taught by trained Foróige staff and	Volunteers are trained to facilitate modules relating to leadership for young people aged 15–18. They	To develop the skills, inspiration, vision, confidence and action plans to be effective leaders. Furthermore, it aims to empower young people to make a positive

Table 2. Summary of prevention and early intervention programmes which had a volunteering component

Organisation	Target group(s)	Service/Programme	Role of the volunteer	Objectives
		volunteers. This involves completion of a community project resulting in the achievement of a level 6 Certificate awarded by the National University of Ireland, Galway. Delivery mechanisms include a year-long programme and an annual international conference.	do this in pairs of volunteers or in a volunteer staff pairings. Volunteers are also involved with staff in managing and arranging delivery of local courses.	difference to their society through the practice of effective leadership.
	Young people aged 10–18	<b>Citizenship Engagement Programme</b> Locally based community action programme. Young people research the needs of their community, organise practical action in response to this need, evaluate the effectiveness of their work, and reflect on learning.	Volunteers facilitate young people to work through the programme cycle of awareness, action and evaluation. They prepare young people to enter Foróige’s Youth Citizenship Awards. They have access to training and resources to support the programme.	To enable young people to make a positive difference in their community; impact on young people’s life skills, such as connection to their community, social conscience, confidence and social competence which are deemed to be predictors of civic engagement.
Business in the Community <a href="http://www.bitc.org.uk/northernireland">www.bitc.org.uk/northernireland</a>	Children aged 8–10	<b>Time to Read</b> In-school volunteer mentoring programme for children at the key Stage 2 primary school level, focused on supporting literacy. Many businesses enable their staff to volunteer one hour per week to support two children on a one-to-one basis.	Volunteers are paired with a child/children for one-to-one, in-school, reading sessions.	To impact on children’s self-esteem, reading ability, aspirations and expectations for the future, and enjoyment of education. Also aims to impact on inspiring, challenging, engaging and supporting business in continually improving its positive impact on society.
Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative <a href="http://www.twcdi.ie">www.twcdi.ie</a>	Residents and agencies	<b>Community Safety Initiative</b> Community engagement approach to improve safety in the	Volunteers receive training and play a role in	To improve safety and promote pro-social behaviour across Tallaght West; to improve community awareness and

Table 2. Summary of prevention and early intervention programmes which had a volunteering component

Organisation	Target group(s)	Service/Programme	Role of the volunteer	Objectives
	working in the community	area. Brings residents, Gardaí, Local Authority and other stakeholders together to develop and implement community safety activities.	improving safety in their area.	participation in local activities and services; and to encourage wide community engagement in maintaining a safe environment.
	The whole community	<b>Restorative Practice Programme</b> and supports A Community and Interagency Management Committee oversaw the development of a Restorative Practice (RP) training programme and supports for a wide range of stakeholders working with children and families to adopt a restorative approach.	Volunteers receive training to become Restorative Practice (RP) facilitators and trainers and take the lead in supporting the use of restorative practices in their area.	The Restorative Practice Programme had specific targets for the number of adults and young people to be trained as facilitators and RP trainers, and for the establishment of a forum for sharing learning and enabling reflective practice.

## Characteristics of the PEII volunteer programmes

The seven programmes included in this report represent a diversity of approaches to volunteering, ranging from participating in community forums to participating in a weekly programme aimed at supporting young people's transition towards adulthood.

The programmes were delivered to children across a wide age range, from primary school age to late adolescence; they included programmes designed for those who were already exhibiting difficulties and programmes for particular target groups (often described as targeted interventions). They were open to all members of the community in a particular geographical area (described as universal interventions).

Six of the seven programmes were delivered in Ireland and one in Northern Ireland (Business in the Community's Time to Read programme). They included a mix of evidence-based interventions that have been widely used and have been shown to be effective outside of Ireland, such as Foróige's Big Brothers Big Sisters Programme; programmes adapted from internationally tested approaches, such as Barnardos Wizard of Words; and programmes that have been developed locally, drawing on evidence of 'what works', and sometimes incorporating aspects of existing programmes, such as CDI's Community Safety Initiative.

In Foróige's **Big Brothers Big Sisters Programme (BBBS)**, volunteer mentors are paired with a young person and are supported by paid case workers located in local youth facilities. Volunteers tend to be older adults from the local community or college students.

The implementation of the BBBS programme in Ireland required all staff and volunteers to adhere to stringent standards and procedures which include the safeguarding of young people through careful recruitment of volunteers. This was undertaken to filter out those who lacked the capacity to form a caring bond with young people; those who may cause harm; or those who were considered as unlikely to honour their time commitments. Mentors were expected to meet their mentees on a weekly basis for a period one to two hours, over the course of a year. Mentees were expected to want to participate and to demonstrate a need for the service. The BBBS manual set out the procedures governing all aspects of the programme, including assessment of young people and volunteers, training for volunteers, making a match, match supervision, match closure and record keeping. Supervision of matches was an important aspect of the programme and involved project officers making contact with the young person, mentor and parent on a frequent basis.

In Foróige's **Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based programme** volunteer student mentors are paired with younger students. In the case of the programme which is reviewed in this report, mentors were required to apply, to have parental consent and to have a reference from a teacher. Mentors were expected to meet their mentees for at least 40 minutes a week during term time, over a period of one academic year. Mentors received three hours of training, covering communication and listening, teamwork, characteristics of a good mentor, logistics of the programme, confidentiality and child protection. BBBS facilitated one-to-one matching of candidates, provided supervision and evaluation, and the programme was manualised in order to aid fidelity. A recognition event was held at the end of

the school year to acknowledge the contribution of both mentors and mentees and to award certificates of participation.

Foróige's **Youth Leadership Programme** is a manualised three-module, 80-hour youth leadership programme. In the case of the programme which is reviewed in this report, it was offered to young people aged 15–18 years, and comprised facilitated youth leadership content, individual reflection, self-directed learning, team research and a community action project. The three modules led to a Foundation Certificate in Youth Leadership and Community Action awarded by the National University of Ireland, Galway. The programme was delivered by Foróige staff and volunteers who underwent a two-day training course to facilitate the programme with young people aged 15–18 years. The programme was delivered using two mechanisms: the first was a one-year programme which was facilitated once a week for between 1 and 1.5 hours and covered all three modules; the second mechanism was an international conference which took place over a period of one week and covered either module one or module two of the programme.

Foróige's **Citizenship Programme** aims to facilitate young people to become actively involved in the development of their own communities. In the programme which is reviewed in this report, it supported volunteering through adult volunteers who helped to deliver the programme and young people who volunteered in their community. It was delivered through Foróige youth clubs and projects throughout Ireland, and participation was voluntary. The programme required young people to explore their community's needs, to look at and implement creative ways of meeting one or more of these needs, and to find out whether their efforts had made an impact. The programme was based on the belief that each young person can make a difference to the world around them and to the lives of others. Projects were exhibited at annual regional conferences and 10 projects were selected for showcasing at a national event. More recently, increased funding has led to manualisation of the programme as well as an increase in resources and the levels of volunteering.

Business in the Community's **Time to Read** programme is an in-school volunteer mentoring programme for children at key stage 2 primary school level for children aged 8–10, focused on supporting literacy in socially deprived areas. In this programme, employers were invited to become members of Business in the Community and were encouraged to support Time to Read as part of their corporate social responsibility strategy. The programme aimed to make a positive impact on self-esteem, reading ability, aspirations and expectations for the future, and enjoyment of learning. The mentoring support of volunteers from local businesses aimed to complement the work of the teacher, with the emphasis being on children discovering the enjoyment of reading and improving their reading fluency. Mentors underwent safeguarding checks, were trained by Business in the Community's Education Team, and were supported by Literacy Coordinators in schools and the (then) Education and Library Boards. Each volunteer committed to spending one hour each week during term time working on a one-to-one basis with two children from key stage 2 classes (Primary 5) in a primary school. Time to Read continues as a

flagship Business in the Community programme, with 60 companies and 85 schools involved in the initiative.<sup>20</sup>

The Barnardos **Wizards of Words (WoW)** programme is a school-based inter-generational programme, which pairs a child with a trained volunteer aged 55+ for one-to-one reading sessions. WoW adopts a balanced literacy approach, combining the most effective strategies from two primary instructional approaches to teaching children reading, namely Whole Language and Phonics. This approach corresponds with current Department of Education and Skills (DES) reading initiatives and English curriculum expectations. In the case of the programme which is reviewed in this report, volunteers are recruited and trained by Barnardos project leaders. The programme is mainly targeted at disadvantaged areas, and teachers choose children in first and second class in primary school who are experiencing delays in reading but do not need formal reading interventions. Volunteer mentors complete a registration form outlining their interest in applying. Potential candidates are then invited to attend an interview. The next stage in the recruitment process involves undergoing Garda vetting and reference checks. Volunteers attend an initial three-day training course and a further two days' training during the school year. Volunteers are expected to commit to up to three weekly sessions, each of 30 minutes duration, over a period of one academic year. Children can also read with more than one volunteer. Project leaders read with the children on a regular basis, so as to ensure that progress is being made. They observe volunteer reading sessions, monitor the children's reading records, provide feedback to volunteers, record and report on each child's progress to the school staff, and liaise with schools to ensure a good working relationship.

The CDI **Community Safety Initiative** supported local residents' interactions with statutory agencies and promoted collaborative responses to addressing local safety issues, with the aim of improving people's perceptions of safety, improving neighbour relations and promoting a safe and healthy environment for children and families (CDI, 2008b). The overall aims of the initiative were to improve safety and promote pro-social behaviour across Tallaght West; to improve community awareness and participation in local activities and services; and to encourage wide community engagement in maintaining a safe environment. Specifically, the initiative aimed to:

- Improve safety and promote pro-social behaviour across Tallaght West
- Improve community awareness and participation in local activities and services
- Encourage wide community engagement in maintaining a safe environment.

CDI also delivered a Restorative Practice (RP) Programme, an intervention that emphasises dialogue, respect and empowerment, and is delivered to a range of stakeholders in Tallaght West.

The seven initiatives reviewed in this report differed in a number of ways. Namely, they varied in the extent to which they utilised volunteers in a *formal* or *informal* manner, the *outcomes* they were seeking to achieve, or whether the programmes in which they were involved were evidence *based* or evidence *informed*.

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In the next section, the international evidence on the role of volunteers in child and family services is examined. Section 4 then summarises what the evaluations have found about the role of volunteers. It also summarises learning on the management and implementation of the volunteering programmes. This discussion is divided into three strands according to the varying aims of the programmes included in this report:

- Formal programmes in which volunteers assist in the implementation of specific programmes to promote positive outcomes for children
- Formal programmes that encourage volunteering or related behaviours and attitudes in children and young people
- Programmes that aim to engage the members of the community on an unpaid basis to promote better outcomes in the community.

This is followed in Section 5 by a discussion on the learning, including common themes and key issues that emerge from the evaluation reports.

## Section 3: The role and impact of volunteering on children, young people and their families

Having considered the role of volunteering in PEII programmes, this section of the report briefly examines international evidence on volunteering, as it related to the role and impact of volunteers on services and programmes for children, young people and their families.

CES looked at:

- Evidence of *programmes using volunteers* in their delivery and whether there were positive impacts for children, young people or families
- Evidence of impacts that *volunteers* bring to work with children, young people, families, and communities
- Whether the evidence indicates if the volunteering contribution can be identified from other known factors (programme design, fidelity, and frequency of service) as an effective component in achieving outcomes
- The key messages that can be deduced about volunteering programmes from the literature.

The methodology for undertaking the review of the literature is outlined in Appendix A. The CES search found a small number of evaluations and reports that provided evidence of the use of volunteers in evidence-based and evidence-informed child and family programmes.

### What the literature tells us

In some cases it is possible to have a significant impact on outcomes for children, young people and their families in programmes that use volunteers. However, there is limited deeper study of the components of volunteering that work. A small number of studies indicate that empathy and 'peer'/non-professional engagement may enable better relationship building with children, young people or families, and therefore provide better opportunities to deliver programmes.<sup>21</sup>

- A small number of studies indicate that volunteer programmes provide positive value for money.
- Some studies focused on the importance of paying attention to implementation when using volunteers.
- Other studies focused on the challenges of using volunteering.

### The impact of programmes using volunteers

This section examines the evidence of the impact of child and young people's *programmes using volunteers*, and it includes some high-quality studies and research into programmes that used volunteers to address improvements in areas such as child safety, mental health and behaviour. A randomised controlled trial (RCT), with 245 participants, in an Australian primary school-based child

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<sup>21</sup> Hermans et al (2013); Wallace (2014)

protection programme, **'Learn to BE SAFE with Emmy'**, using mainly volunteer deliverers, was conducted by Dale et al.<sup>22</sup> Results recorded immediately and six months after delivery indicated that participants used the programme's safety strategies. A systematic review<sup>23</sup> examined 10 studies of initiatives to reduce substance misuse in young people; one of these initiatives was volunteer delivered and nine were professionally delivered. The review found that while most interventions did not reduce substance misuse, Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS), which is volunteer delivered, reported significant effects on reducing substance use up to four months post-intervention.

A range of quasi-experimental studies of the volunteer-based Home Start programme was reviewed for this report. Quasi-experimental studies<sup>24</sup> (van Aar,<sup>25</sup> Hermanns,<sup>26</sup> Dekovic,<sup>27</sup> Asscher<sup>28</sup>) generally rely on small total participant numbers (from 112 to a total of 141 participants). Findings indicate improved outcomes for mothers, parents and children. For example, a 10-year follow-up study<sup>29</sup> (N=141) of Home Start indicated that maternal competence and parenting behaviour were sustained and child behaviour was also sustained, or further improved, 10 years after participants had completed the programme.

An evaluation<sup>30</sup> of the Scottish Volunteers in Child Protection (ViCP) project assessed the impact and value of matching community volunteers with families at risk of neglect or serious harm. Results indicated that the level of safeguarding concern for the families decreased after the ViCP intervention, with 87% of the families tracked during the intervention moving to lower levels of safeguarding concern. Family functioning was described as improved, as were parenting skills. In particular, it was noted that there was greater engagement with external agencies such as health services and the child's school. Children's scores on the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) improved throughout the intervention, suggesting an improvement in child well-being, behaviour and peer relations. The evidence base also indicates that the benefits of volunteering are cross-cultural, with a large-scale RCT<sup>31</sup> assessing the impact of volunteer-led women's groups and counselling in Malawi showing improved breastfeeding and infant mortality rates.

A number of studies focused on the role of volunteers in improving children's learning. A meta-analysis (Ritter, 2009<sup>32</sup>) of 969 studies aimed to examine whether volunteer tutoring interventions were a potentially effective strategy for improving academic skills for young students. Results indicated that volunteer tutoring programmes improved written and oral language as well as overall reading measures by approximately one-third of a standard deviation. Research conducted as part of the Europe-wide INCLUD-ED<sup>33</sup> project also indicated positive outcomes for student learning processes. Volunteer

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<sup>22</sup> Dale et al (2016)

<sup>23</sup> Melendez et al (2016)

<sup>24</sup> White and Sabarwal (2014) Quasi-experimental studies test causal hypotheses by comparing a test group with a non-random comparison group

<sup>25</sup> van Aar et al (2015)

<sup>26</sup> Hermanns et al (2013)

<sup>27</sup> Dekovic et al (2010) '

<sup>28</sup> Asscher, Dekovic, Prinzie and Hermanns (2008)

<sup>29</sup> van Aar et al (2015)

<sup>30</sup> Akister and O'Brien (2012)

<sup>31</sup> Lewycka et al (2013)

<sup>32</sup> Ritter et al (2009)

<sup>33</sup> Valls and Kyriakides (2013)

participation in interactive groups was shown to be effective in three case studies in schools in Spain. Researchers found that volunteers directly influenced student behaviour and class climate, while teachers interviewed noted positive impacts for students with special needs and minority children, particularly when the volunteers shared their heritage.

These studies suggest that programmes using volunteers can have a positive impact on children, young people and families.

### **The impact of volunteers**

CES also examined the evidence of the *direct* role of volunteers and their impact on children, young people and families. A relatively small number of studies have explored the volunteer role and have indicated that volunteers can be effective and can make a positive contribution. However, the evidence does not always clearly convey the specific benefits that volunteers bring to the overall impact of programmes. One key aspect across these studies is the role of the volunteer in creating engagement with families and children. A meta-analysis of 35 studies by Nievar et al<sup>34</sup> compared professional and volunteer or paraprofessional home visiting programmes. Findings indicate that cultural competence may be key to effectively engaging parents, whereas certain combinations of education and authority may create some stigma. Therefore, the authors note that volunteer paraprofessionals from the community may be well positioned to carry out home visiting programmes, as may some health professionals, provided that the volunteers are not directly involved with child protection services.

An independent evaluation<sup>35</sup> of the impact of Action for Children volunteers in its children's centres suggests that volunteers contributed to a number of key outcomes for children and their families. Volunteers provided extra capacity and an informal reassuring presence, helping to destigmatise the service and widening participation of families using children's centres. The authors also suggested that higher education of professional home visiting providers could, in some circumstances, have a negative effect on the success of programmes, due to some providers' capacity to relate to some families.<sup>36</sup>

A report from the All Party Parliamentary Sure Start Group (2013),<sup>37</sup> derived from the National Children's Centre's Census, indicated that volunteers enable relationship building, as they are highly effective at taking the message of the Children's Centre and its services out to the community, particularly to traditionally 'hard-to-reach' groups such as Travellers. Volunteers were able to use their experience and knowledge of the local area to help shape Sure Start services. Volunteers also freed up Sure Start staff to work on more targeted services.

Volunteers will not have an impact in all circumstances. A cluster RCT<sup>38</sup> of the impact of a home visiting programme for new mothers suffering from depression, which used volunteers to deliver the programme, indicated that the programme had no discernible impact on the mothers' depression rates.

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<sup>34</sup> Nievar et al (2010)

<sup>35</sup> Brodie and Jackson (2012)

<sup>36</sup> Brodie and Jackson (2012)

<sup>37</sup> All Party Parliamentary Sure Start Group. (2013)

<sup>38</sup> Barnes, Senior and MacPherson (2009)

Studies of volunteering in education by Miller and Connolly (2013) and Fives et al (2013) also found volunteers to have some benefit, but this was limited primarily to social outcomes rather than intellectual gains.

These studies suggest that volunteers can:

- Engage and communicate in a non-threatening manner
- Provide the communities' perspective on service design
- Widen participation, particularly of hard-to-reach groups
- Deliver some aspects of the service, although not more advanced clinical or educational components.

### **Benefits for young people who participate in volunteering**

Young people have also been seen to benefit from participating in volunteering. For example, a review conducted by Moore and Allen (1996) found that volunteering is related to improvements in both the academic and social arenas, including reduced rates of course failure, suspension from school, and school dropout, and improvement in reading grades. A more recent overview (youthmusic.org, 2011<sup>39</sup>) highlights the benefits that young volunteers can gain in terms of employability skills, their own personal development, the social capital they may gain, and an increased connection to their communities. The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT)<sup>40</sup> ran three RCTs and one pre-/post-comparison in 72 schools to compare the outcomes for young people who took part in initiatives supported by the Youth Social Action Fund with the outcomes of young people who did not. Across the three programmes it was found that social action consistently improved young people's levels of empathy and their sense of community involvement. The evidence indicated that young people who take part in social action initiatives, such as volunteering, can develop the skills needed for life and work in the process.

### **Financial and sustainability benefits of volunteers**

A small number of studies described the potential of volunteers to offer value for money or to support mainstream services in times of funding cuts. Many reports also acknowledge the importance of volunteering infrastructure and training,<sup>41</sup> which requires resourcing. Wallace et al<sup>42</sup> indicated that the volunteer service Canadian WrapAround benefited from volunteers in times of funding reductions. The authors noted:

“Volunteer-based initiatives could offer a high-quality WrapAround experience to children, youth, and adults with complex needs and their families, even when budgets for social services have been reduced”.

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<sup>39</sup> Youthmusic (2011)

<sup>40</sup> Kirkman, Sanders, Emanuel and Larkin (2016)

<sup>41</sup> Wallace et al (2014)

<sup>42</sup> Wallace, Debicki, Vander Vennen and de Visch Eybergen (2014)

The evaluation<sup>43</sup> of volunteering at Action for Children Children’s Centres indicated that data for assessing the full economic contribution were not always available, but that it was possible to estimate the net economic value of volunteer involvement in children’s centres (the value – less the cost of volunteering) per year to Action for Children of over £400,000. Lewycka et al,<sup>44</sup> in a large cluster trial in Malawi, reported that the cost of volunteer peer counsellors was US\$33 per year of life lost (PYL) averted. The intervention also included women’s groups that were run by professionals; the cost of women’s groups was US\$114 PYL averted. However, the women’s groups had no additional significant effect when run in conjunction with volunteer peer counselling. The All Party Sure Start Group Report<sup>45</sup> indicated that volunteers supported the sustainability of mainstream services, stating that volunteers were ‘being increasingly deployed to support and deliver open access services, allowing paid and more highly qualified family support workers to spend more time with families who were identified as more vulnerable, or in need of more targeted intervention or support’. They also reported some cost reduction and increased service, through the use of volunteers.

There is some indication that volunteers can allow for service cost reduction or deployment of professional staff into more specialist areas. However, several reports underline the importance of training and support for volunteers and for staff who support volunteers.

### **Challenges in volunteering**

While the benefits of involving volunteers in the delivery of programmes have been well documented, a number of barriers and challenges have also been described. The Council of the European Union<sup>46</sup> has identified barriers, such as lack of recognition and variable conditions for volunteers, as well as lack of accessible information on voluntary activities and their value and importance for individuals and society.

#### **Organisational challenges**

From the perspective of organisations that use volunteers as part of their service delivery, Arvidson et al (2010)<sup>47</sup> point out that ‘although volunteers are unpaid they are not free’. They outline a number of considerations that organisations must take into account when recruiting volunteers, including:

- In using volunteers, organisations are likely to incur spending on recruitment, training and management.
- The presence of volunteers may also jeopardise the motivation of paid staff (Brudney, 1993);
- In not having a paid contractual obligation, volunteers may be more difficult to manage effectively.

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<sup>43</sup> Brodie and Jackson (2012)

<sup>44</sup> Lewycka et al (2013)

<sup>45</sup> All Party Parliamentary Sure Start Group (2013)

<sup>46</sup> The Council of the European Union (2011)

<sup>47</sup> Arvidson, Lyon, McKay and Moro (2010)

A National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) OPM evaluation<sup>48</sup> found that organisations experienced challenges in establishing and maintaining boundaries and confidentiality between paid staff and volunteers. The evaluation also found there was a pressure on time spent supporting volunteers to achieve their induction and in providing ongoing monitoring. It was reported that volunteers were found to have shifting and competing priorities, with occasional loss of volunteers to employment. Lack of childcare also emerged as one of the factors influencing the ability to volunteer.

Additionally, McKee<sup>49</sup> has identified ‘non-volunteer volunteers’, a group who volunteer out of a sense of obligation (e.g. parents volunteering so that their child can have access to a club who may not feel fully committed to the service).

The Anglia Ruskin<sup>50</sup> evaluators note that critical to the success of the scheme evaluated was the competence of the organisation to effectively manage the volunteers and the interface with the relevant professionals. Therefore, although volunteers have the potential to be an extremely useful resource, organisations should consider issues around planning and deploying volunteers. Training and ongoing support are key to the successful use of volunteers.

## Implementing volunteer programmes to improve outcomes for children and young people

Given that some services using volunteers have been shown to benefit children and families as well as volunteers, volunteering may be an effective proposition to promote better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

However, a number of issues have been identified for organisations to consider when implementing volunteer led services, by researchers such as Grossman and Farano (1999)<sup>51</sup>, and organisations such as Volunteer Ireland<sup>52</sup> and Volunteer Now<sup>53</sup>. These include the process of safeguarding children and families, as well as recruiting, training and managing volunteers.

### Recruiting and safeguarding

A successful volunteering programme incorporates consideration of selection of volunteers. Volunteers for particular programmes should be screened or shortlisted according to the tasks they will be required to engage in, with a particular emphasis on the issues of safety, skills and commitment.<sup>54</sup>

- *Safety*: The safety of those receiving the services is paramount, particularly in the case of volunteers working with children and vulnerable young people. Thus, volunteers are typically required to provide references and are subject to vetting. Programmes such as BBBS go further

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<sup>48</sup> Brodie and Jackson (2012)

<sup>49</sup> McKee (2008)

<sup>50</sup> Akister and O’Brien (2012)

<sup>51</sup> Grossman and Furano (1999)

<sup>52</sup> Volunteer Ireland ([www.volunteer.ie/?gclid=CKqptNaf380CFRIUGwodN8gFog](http://www.volunteer.ie/?gclid=CKqptNaf380CFRIUGwodN8gFog))

<sup>53</sup> Volunteer Now (<http://www.volunteernow.co.uk/>)

<sup>54</sup> Grossman and Furano (1999)

than just an absence of criminal convictions and ensure that the volunteer has appropriate attitudes and values to benefit the child or young person.

- *Commitment:* Training and supervising a volunteer who leaves a programme soon after starting can be viewed as a waste of time and resources and can have serious consequences for the intended outcomes of the programme. For example, numerous studies of mentoring programmes such as the BBBS programme have found that youths who were in matches that terminated within the first three months had significantly lower levels of global self-worth and perceived scholastic competence than the randomly selected control group of youths who did not receive a mentor.<sup>55</sup> This means that selecting a mentor who can honour their time commitment can be extremely important. However, not all volunteering initiatives require such ongoing, sustained engagement.

### **Training and skills**

The literature suggests that existing volunteer skills<sup>56</sup> and the provision of training at the beginning, or preferably on an ongoing basis, is necessary in order for volunteering to work. A study of 82 mentoring matches through Big Brothers Big Sisters by Morrow and Styles<sup>57</sup> (1995) found that mentors who received good orientation and training (including information about the young person, youth development principles, expectations about the mentoring activities, and lessons from the experiences of other mentors) are more likely to form satisfying 'developmental relationships'. McClanahan (1998) found that volunteers who received more hours of formal training at the beginning of the relationship succeeded in increasing the length of the both the youth's and the volunteer's involvement in the programme and also increased the youth's engagement in other activities promoted by the programme.

### **Management and support**

Investing in Volunteers (IiV) is a quality standard for organisations that involve volunteers in their work. The IiV was developed by the UK Volunteering Forum, which comprises the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), Volunteer Now, Volunteer Scotland (VS), the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), and Volunteer Ireland. The IiV recommends that 'there is an expressed commitment to the involvement of volunteers, and recognition throughout the organisation that volunteering is a two-way process which benefits volunteers and the organisation.'<sup>58</sup> The organisation's role in maintaining a successful partnership therefore involves managing and supporting volunteers across a range of areas and issues. The following outlines some issues relevant to effectively managing volunteers:

- *Well-defined tasks:* Volunteer jobs should be designed carefully to provide volunteers with meaningful work and to provide both volunteers and paid staff with an understanding of how the volunteers' contributions help achieve the mission of the organisation.

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<sup>55</sup> Grossman and Rhodes (2002)

<sup>56</sup> Scott (2006)

<sup>57</sup> Morrow and Styles (1995)

<sup>58</sup> NCVO, Volunteer Development Scotland, WCVA and Volunteer Now (1998)



- *Support and supervision:* Access to either professional staff or experienced volunteers can help volunteers deal with challenges that might otherwise lead to frustration or departure. Research suggests that ongoing supervision is the most important programme element in achieving a high rate of interaction among mentoring pairs (Furano et al, 1992).
- *Communication:* Volunteers require notice of when and where they are needed or not needed. Frustration arises in cases where volunteers arrive at an appointed time and are unable to do the work they were expecting to engage in. Equally, frustration can result if a volunteer does not arrive when they are expected. This can be particularly challenging in the school system where the volunteer is already an outsider, and special arrangements have been made to integrate them into the school setting.
- *Rewarding experience:* Volunteers should find the experience of volunteering rewarding. This means that the tasks they are given should be meaningful, and they should feel that their contribution is recognised and valued. The *It's All About Time*<sup>59</sup> report found that two-thirds of formal volunteers (66%) felt that their efforts were appreciated by the organisation they volunteered with. Almost three-quarters (74%) of formal volunteers got the greatest level of satisfaction from seeing the results of their contribution. Enjoyment rated very highly on the scale of what was important to individuals who volunteer for an organisation. The *Tipping the Balance Report*<sup>60</sup> (2002) indicated that the most important benefits of volunteering were seeing results, doing good, meeting people and enjoyment.
- *Safe working environment:* Volunteers should have a safe and secure working environment, where they should be made aware of key organisational procedures around complaints.

These findings mirror those from a systematic review commissioned by the Department of Internal Affairs in New Zealand,<sup>61</sup> which found that the key factors for encouraging and supporting volunteers are:

- Seeing the involvement of volunteers as a series of stages – from non-volunteer to committed volunteer. This helps organisations understand the process of managing volunteers.
- At a national level: understanding that the motivations and barriers to participation vary and that volunteering should be a fulfilling experience.
- At an organisational level: adopting elements of good volunteer management practice, including support and communication, insurance coverage, written policies and procedures, recruitment and screening, orientation and training for volunteers, risk management and recognition of volunteers. At the same time, recognising that each organisation will have specific needs in this respect.

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<sup>59</sup> Volunteer Development Agency (2007)

<sup>60</sup> Volunteer Ireland (2002)

<sup>61</sup> Smith and Cordery (2010)

- Investing time and money into volunteering infrastructure, including a manager of volunteers; targeted recruitment, carefully matching volunteers to roles, responding to enquiries and maintaining a positive organisational image and culture.
- Investing in induction and relevant ongoing training that is accessible; ensuring that staff and stakeholders are also trained in working with volunteers; and adopting practices to retain volunteers, but also recognising that personal, organisational and contextual factors contribute to volunteers staying with as well as leaving the organisation.

This section indicates that there is evidence that programmes involving volunteers can have a positive impact on children, young people and families. It is not always clear how the use of volunteers has contributed to impact, but some studies suggest that the benefits may include an empathetic relationship, opportunities for better community engagement and the freeing up of staff to focus on more complex work.

This section also demonstrates that there are a number of key considerations to be made by organisations when choosing to utilise volunteers in their service. Research and practice examples demonstrate that the implementation of volunteering needs to be carried out systematically. Volunteers need to be selected carefully; they need to be trained, supported and recognised adequately in order to sustain impact within any given initiative. They enjoy their role and are more engaged when they receive induction, ongoing training and support. Organisations need to consider their responsibilities, including the time and resources to engage volunteers and train staff to work with them. The distinctions and boundaries between staff and volunteer roles should be defined. There are also important considerations for volunteers and organisations with regard to clarifying and meeting expectations, especially in relation to the skills and volunteering commitment expected.

### **Case study: The ISPCC**

The Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) provided investment in volunteering through the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC). This provides a further example of issues in relation to volunteer selection, deployment and support, which contrasts with the volunteering undertaken through the PEII.

The ISPCC is a charity that advocates for children's rights and provides services for children in need. The ISPCC received a significant grant to support the development of the ISPCC National Volunteer Network. This funding was provided for a period of four years (2010–2014) and has yielded a number of learning points for effective utilisation of volunteer workers within the voluntary sector. Despite the challenges of using volunteers, which are highlighted above, this project demonstrates a number of key practice examples for overcoming these barriers.

The ISPCC found that there were a number of key elements to be considered when recruiting volunteer staff:

- A skill-based selection process of new volunteers to ensure 'best fit' became the policy for each volunteering role.

- Having experienced volunteers in group information meetings and training was positive for both the volunteer themselves and for the recruitment of new volunteers.
- Welcome interviews also allowed open conversations about commitment from the outset, which was important for encouraging retention.
- Data tracking showed that there were key times for recruiting volunteers, and being aware of these times was important for ensuring that all stakeholders worked effectively.
- The ISPCC has a very strong media presence, which also helped with recruitment.

Volunteering activity and retention was also encouraged in a number of ways:

- Recognition of the work of volunteers. This was implemented through an annual conference with 'Volunteer of the Year Awards' as well as ongoing contact with volunteers via text messages and email.
- Actively acknowledging, informing, encouraging and motivating the volunteer's potential, particularly in areas such as advocacy and fundraising
- Professional development of volunteers through workshops and seminars
- Activities for volunteers needed to be empowering, confidence building and motivating.
- Flexibility in the role. This was implemented by allowing volunteers to take up different roles, such as fundraising, which required a lesser commitment when higher levels of commitment were no longer viable.

The use of a website:

- Helped to create a source of resources for volunteers with regard to services, advocacy, and fundraising, as well as providing up-to-date statistics and training. It also enabled the ISPCC to have a closer relationship with its volunteers.
- Volunteers found the "Ask the Expert" section very useful for gaining information on topics such as child protection. Additionally, the website provided regular updates on changes in policy and legislation as well as issues impacting on children and young people.
- The online database created awareness of different volunteer roles, events and campaigns in the society and the ISPCC in the media. It showed which volunteers were on leave, how many had trained in a year and how many had left, highlighting particular times of the year when significant changes occurred.

Building a relationship and rapport with volunteers, services and schools was also shown to be important. For example, consultation with volunteers at all stages of development was found to improve both the volunteer experience and the recruitment process itself. This was aided by a group

interview and information meeting at the outset. Involving volunteers in decision-making was also key. A volunteer-led approach was developed; as a result, volunteers were able to voice their preferences in relation to governance, upskilling and service development, and these suggestions were subsequently acted upon to ensure volunteer satisfaction. Consulting with volunteers was found to be particularly important whenever significant changes were being made, as volunteers needed to understand these changes and the impact they would have on their role. Furthermore, creating the role of an advocacy and volunteer coordinator helped to ensure that the aims and objectives of the project were met, assisted coordination of local level activity and allowed for it to be linked to national advocacy policy.

## Section 4: Learning about volunteering from the PEII

### Introduction

This section of the report describes the evaluation of the seven PEII programmes and considers:

- What can be learnt about the role and skills of the volunteer in the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative?
- What can be learnt about management and implementation of volunteering?

It highlights learning points about volunteering gleaned from these evaluation reports, such as how volunteers may have contributed to the delivery of the programme, where this is reported. This section complements existing CES Outcomes reports in the *On the Right Track* series, which are available via the CES website: [www.effectiveservices.org](http://www.effectiveservices.org)

### How programmes were evaluated

Three of the programmes (**Big Brothers Big Sisters**, **Wizards of Words**, **Time to Read**) used an RCT design, where one group of children was randomly allocated to participate in the programme and another acted as a control group (often a 'waiting list control', and therefore received the service later, once comparisons with the original participants had been made).

Most evaluations also collected other information about the programme, for example, from non-standardised questionnaires, interviews, and the extant literature base. This provided a useful adjunct to the scores on standardised measures. It should be noted that researchers adopted various approaches to the identification and assessment of volunteering and its contribution to programme goals. Indeed, two evaluation reports were silent on specific volunteering contributions, whereas five evaluation reports referred to volunteering to varying degrees.

### Formal programmes using volunteer mentors

The four programmes included in this report were formal programmes in which volunteers were recruited as mentors to encourage better outcomes for children and young people. They were: **Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS)**; **BBBS School-based Programme**; **Time to Read** and **Wizards of Words**. This section discusses the outcomes of each of these interventions in turn.

#### Foróige's **Big Brothers Big Sisters**

This programme was evaluated using a large-scale, mixed-methods study, conducted over a period of two years. There were three components in the overall study:

- An RCT study of the impact of the BBBS mentoring programme on the development of youth in the community over a two-year period
- A review of programme implementation
- A qualitative assessment of match processes and the perspectives of stakeholders.

The study sample comprised 164 young people who were referred to the BBBS programme in the West of Ireland in 2007. Young people in the study sample were randomly assigned to receive either the volunteer mentoring intervention plus regular youth activities or the regular youth activities alone, thereby ensuring that all study participants received a service. In order to avoid any ethical issues, young people in the control group were placed on a waiting list and could, if they still wished, receive the intervention when the study finished.

### **What can be learnt about the role and skills of the volunteer in BBBS?**

BBBS is a manualised programme, which is underpinned by a relationship between a young person and the volunteer mentor. Several positive aspects of the volunteer mentor role were identified in the RCT evaluation of BBBS. As follows:

- Young people matched with a volunteer mentor had consistently higher levels of hope or optimism across the study period than young people without a volunteer mentor. It was reported that matched young people received a range of support, including concrete benefits (such as widened social networks) and emotional support.
- The intervention was successful in improving young people's sense of being supported by parents, siblings, friends and other adults. There was some evidence that young people with a volunteer mentor had more positive relationships with other people and felt more accepted by their peers.
- Young people matched with a volunteer mentor were seen to like school better and to show greater intent to finish school and college than those not matched with a volunteer mentor, with mentors reported to encourage young people to 'get on' in education.
- Although not statistically significant, there were promising indications from the data that young people matched with a volunteer mentor were less likely to have initiated alcohol use or smoking cannabis than those not mentored.

Further analysis in a follow-up study also found promising findings in relation to education and perceived sibling support for young people matched with a volunteer mentor.

### **What can be learnt about management and implementation of volunteering in Big Brothers Big Sisters?**

The evaluation report indicates that BBBS was implemented to a very high standard and can be considered an example of best practice in service provision for young people. However, there were challenges and lessons learnt that are worth noting. The programme encountered challenges in recruiting male volunteers. As there is a requirement for same gender matching, this meant normal intake to the programme was two-thirds female and one-third male. Delays in the processing of vetting clearance resulted in volunteers having to wait for long periods before being matched. There was a perceived risk that volunteers would be lost to other voluntary organisations with less stringent procedures.

Commitment and duration appeared to be a success factor, with mentoring matches who met regularly (for a minimum of 12 months) and had the closest bond reported to have stronger positive outcomes. Mentors found it easier to offer advice once the relationship was better established and where advice could be given in the course of a normal conversation. The evidence suggests that the closer the mentor-mentee relationship, the more seamlessly all these forms of support could be transmitted, thus reflecting the consensus in the mentoring literature on the importance of relationship quality (Keller, 2005; Rhodes, 2005).

Respondents highlighted how programme practices such as training and regular supervision enabled matches to overcome problems and also helped to build the efficacy of mentors. Comprehensive assessment and monitoring, and frequency of meetings were also found to be important. The report recommended that mentoring programmes should provide appropriate supports to ensure that adult volunteers spend time with young people on a regular basis and in ways that foster close emotional bonds – including training, ongoing staff supervision, programme events and monitoring procedures to ensure regular contact between mentors and young people.

### ***Big Brothers Big Sisters School-based Programme***

A qualitative evaluation of the BBBS School-based Programme was conducted; this evaluation focused on describing and assessing the programme model, obtaining the perspectives of participants and stakeholders on the programme and its impact, in order to inform the design of future research into the programme. Schools chosen for evaluation were those that demonstrated compliance with the programme model.

### **What can be learnt about the role and skills of the volunteer in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Programme?**

A number of perceived benefits of the programme for mentees and volunteer mentors were reported including:

- Mentees reported feeling more safe and secure in their new environment, more confident, and more familiar with the school surroundings. They included mentees with no siblings, mentees from rural areas or those perceived as more vulnerable.
- Participants also reported that the programme was enjoyable and fun.
- Mentees who had access to role models for advice and experience, increased their self-esteem and had a better connection to the school in general.
- Mentors reported feeling a sense of reward from helping a younger student, becoming more confident, taking more responsibility, developing networks, maturity and listening skills. The experience was also reported to be valuable for career progression and to be particularly of benefit to mentors who were not recognised for their academic ability.
- School staff reported benefits for mentors, including enhanced leadership and associated skills such as empathising, taking action and communicating. Students were reported to be more likely to report incidents in the school that were of concern to them, and they had a heightened sense of social awareness.

### **What can be learnt about management and implementation of volunteering in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Programme?**

The evaluation demonstrated that training and supervision offered to mentors helped them to overcome problems more easily and to gain feelings of efficacy in their role.

There were, however, a number of factors which were found to 'moderate' the impact of the initiative. Frequency of contact was reported as a challenge, along with ensuring that matches met as often as required. A loss of momentum was reported when there was a long gap between meetings, with better planning and timetabling suggested in order to assist further programmes. There were targeting issues in some schools. For example, in some schools all first year students were encouraged to participate, whereas in others the initiative was targeted at those indicated as needing support.

### ***Business in the Community Time to Read Programme***

The Business in the Community Time to Read Programme was evaluated using an RCT undertaken between September 2006 and June 2008 in 50 primary schools in Northern Ireland. Children were considered eligible to take part in the evaluation if they scored below average in a standardised reading test and had not been formally assessed as having a special educational need. A total of 734 children from 50 schools across Northern Ireland took part in the evaluation. Participants were randomly assigned to a group, resulting in 360 children receiving the intervention and 374 being allocated to the control group. The children in the intervention group took part in the Time to Read Programme for between one and two academic years and the children in the control group did not take part in the programme. Children in both groups were tested on four outcomes before the intervention began and again every four months over the following two years. Qualitative interviews and focus groups were also conducted with the programme developers, principals, teachers, mentors and pupils specifically to explore issues relating to the delivery of the Time to Read Programme. A follow-up RCT was undertaken to further examine the longer-term impact of the programme on literacy and other associated outcomes.

### **What can be learnt about the role and skills of the volunteer in the Time to Read Programme?**

There was a strong perception among school principals, teachers and volunteer mentors that Time to Read had a positive impact on pupils in relation to their confidence as readers; enjoyment of reading; skills in reading; and their appreciation of the world of work. These perceptions were confirmed by the children, who overwhelmingly reported that they found Time to Read to be a positive and enjoyable experience and that they looked forward to the visits from their volunteer mentors.

The evidence from the RCT indicated that Time to Read had a positive effect in terms of increasing the children's future aspirations. However, the researchers were unable to find quantitative evidence that the programme had any effect in relation to the three remaining outcomes, which were general levels of self-esteem, enjoyment of education and reading skills. Key findings arising from this were that the Time



to Read programme is effective in improving particular core foundation skills, such as decoding and reading fluency, that children need in order to become good readers. The follow-up trial also found evidence of the continuing positive effect of Time to Read in improved aspirations for the future. The findings suggest that the programme worked effectively for both boys and girls, and also for those with varying initial reading abilities. Teachers in particular valued volunteers as role models for children and the additional reading resources provided by companies.

### **What can be learnt about management and implementation of volunteering in the Time to Read Programme?**

The frequency of volunteer matches was highlighted, with evidence indicating that the number of sessions provided impacted on particular outcomes. Children who received more mentoring sessions reported greater enjoyment of reading and better reading fluency than children who received fewer mentoring sessions.

Support processes were important. Once Time to Read volunteers were vetted, they were trained by Business in the Community's Education Team and were supported by the Literacy Coordinators from the (then) Education and Library Boards. Business in the Community staff met with the volunteers on two occasions each year to review progress.

Findings from the qualitative interviews and focus groups suggested that Time to Read was seen as cost-effective and was well regarded. Recommendations from the evaluation indicate:

- More comprehensive initial training for volunteers
- Better opportunities for volunteers to share good practice
- Effective support for volunteers is essential in order to maintain commitment and to promote quality and effective practice.

### ***Barnardos Wizards of Words (WoW)***

The Wizards of Words programme evaluation combined an RCT outcomes study, and a process study of programme implementation. A comprehensive set of outcome measures for volunteer mentors, teachers and children was put in place. Of the seven programmes evaluated, this report focused most comprehensively on the role of volunteers in the delivery of the Wizards of Words Programme.

### **What can be learnt about the role and skills of the volunteer in the Wizards of Words Programme?**

The findings suggest that the Wizards of Words (WOW) programme was associated with positive outcomes for the children participating, with statistically significant gains on word recognition and phonemic awareness, and gains approaching statistical significance on phonic knowledge and enjoyment of reading and perceived competence. The greatest gains were made by children with 'below average' reading levels, and intervention group children made significantly greater gains in moving out of the 'below average' group than did children in the control group. In addition, by the Time 2 data collection, the mean score of the intervention group was higher than the mean score of the control group on six of the eight measures used.

A key motivator for volunteers was the quality and meaning of their participation. When volunteers were asked to rate the change in their child's reading ability, this was predictive of scores on an established standardised measure of reading accuracy, suggesting that volunteers were aware of the impact that the programme was having on the children they were mentoring and that this awareness was a predictor of the success of the programme. The positive impact of the individual attention offered by the volunteers was viewed as invaluable by school principals.

### **What can be learnt about management and implementation of volunteering in the Wizards of Words Programme?**

The children's experience of the programme was positively associated with programme impacts, whereas the children's relationship with the volunteers was not. The process study findings can help explain this difference between 'experience' and 'relationship' as predictors of outcomes. Initially, the Wizards of Words Programme was designed to create a one-to-one relationship between a specific child and a volunteer. However, as many volunteers were not available to deliver three sessions per week, it was necessary to 'pair' children with more than one volunteer. In addition, the reading session itself was highly structured and focused on reading-related tasks, with little time for informal conversation. However, the relationship that was built up over time between the volunteers and the project leaders also had a very positive impact on the running of the programme. Male volunteers were specifically mentioned as a welcome resource in schools where the majority of staff were female. In addition, the inter-generational dimension of the programmes was perceived as key to its success.

The report indicated that, if regular classroom teaching on its own does not succeed in removing children from the risk of reading failure, volunteer reading programmes may be a cost-effective method of achieving positive outcomes for children. The programme was provided free of charge to the schools, and the use of volunteers minimised costs to Barnardos. Enormous effort was required to operationalise the programme, including the recruitment of volunteers. However, the programme appealed to volunteers and there was a very low volunteer attrition rate. Changes to volunteer training and programme delivery led to more positive outcomes for children and vindicated the confidence in volunteers to deliver more complex material. Nevertheless, the programme could have benefited from the operation of a 'substitute' system of stand-in volunteers so as to keep dosage high in the event of volunteer absenteeism, but this would have involved significant extra administrative work and resources.

Volunteers also reported positive outcomes for themselves. For example, volunteers reported developing a sense of purpose as a result of the programme. The level of support and friendship that developed among the volunteers was reported to act as a protective factor for the volunteer's positive well-being. Additional reported outcomes for volunteers included feeling as though they had made a contribution to the welfare of others and to society.

Other important aspects of the model also emerged from the research. The structure of the model was reported to be well assimilated within the school system and staff were very satisfied with the organisational aspects of the initiative. The programme was well run, and factors contributing to

successful organisation included the support of volunteers, the volunteers' commitment to the programme, their enthusiasm, their interest in reading, their maturity, and their love of working with children. Furthermore, the programme targeted children who were viewed as 'middle children' by school staff. This group comprised struggling readers who were experiencing delays in reading but were not eligible for formal reading interventions.

### **Programmes utilising children and young people as volunteers to improve outcomes**

Two programmes included in this report aimed to encourage positive outcomes associated with volunteering in the young people. They were Foróige's **Youth Leadership Programme** and **Citizenship Programme**. These programmes were delivered by both Foróige staff members and volunteers. (Foróige's **BBBS School-based Programme** also promotes volunteering among young people, and findings related to that programme are discussed in the preceding section.)

#### ***Foróige's Youth Leadership Programme***

This programme evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, including a quasi-experimental component, with one group of young people receiving the Foróige Leadership for Life intervention and a comparison group who did not. The qualitative strand of the research involved carrying out interviews at three time points with young people considered to be at high and low risk of well-being issues, in addition to conducting focus groups with programme facilitators.

#### **What can be learnt about the role and skills of the volunteer in Youth Leadership Programme?**

The research revealed a number of important findings. The Youth Leadership Programme appears to have a positive effect on leadership skills over time. The young people involved in the Youth Leadership Programme demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in decision-making, critical thinking, life skills, empathy, communication skills, goal setting and community involvement. Furthermore, the young people involved in the programme demonstrated statistically significant increases in all measures of resilience when compared with the comparison group. They also appeared to have improved social support and emotional support from siblings.

The study found that the gender of the participant was a moderator for associated outcomes. This is because males involved in the research demonstrated enhanced well-being when compared with females, whereas females demonstrated enhanced empathy and resilience when compared with males. Furthermore, the level of risk that a young person was associated with at the beginning also influenced the impact of the programmes. While self-perception as a leader improved for both high- and low-risk young people over time, the high-risk group improved the most. There was also evidence that high-risk adolescents need additional longer-term involvement to sustain social support increases, as they had returned to baseline by the end of the 18 months.

Interviews with the low- and high-risk young people identified the following benefits resulting from involvement in the Youth Leadership Programme:

- The low-risk group reported receiving more friendship support, adult support, sibling support and esteem support than their high-risk counterparts.
- The high-risk group appeared to receive more emotional support and this may be congruent with the fact that these young people were experiencing more traumatic life experiences in the form of family deaths and depression, and as such may have required more emotional support.
- Young people in the high-risk group were exposed to more situations requiring resilience – for example, death, family separation, depression and chronic shyness. These young people described being better able to overcome challenges and access supports to help them deal with these situations after their involvement in the Youth Leadership Programme.
- In terms of skills development the young people highlighted that they had improved in areas such as leadership skills, communication skills, team work, conflict resolution and problem-solving, social skills, sense of achievement and self-belief, empathy, self-awareness, self-control, confidence, public speaking and assertiveness.
- Young people involved in the programme felt that they had more opportunities to engage as a leader and that they could see opportunities in their communities to use their skills.
- Persistence and motivation were also qualities that the young people felt they had developed over the course of the programme.

Focus groups reported that the Youth Leadership Programme contributed to:

- Improvements in communication skills, presentation skills, reflective skills, research skills, team work, confidence and self-awareness for the young people involved
- Enhanced support networks, including additional friends and ability to access other supports as well as opportunities for facilitators to build relationships with the young people
- Enhanced opportunities for community involvement, including positive recognition and appreciation for the young people's involvement and contribution.

### **What can be learnt about management and implementation of volunteering as part of the Youth Leadership Programme?**

This report shared few lessons about the management and implementation of volunteering. However, sustainability is a key issue which emerges in the face of cutbacks. The report also indicates that programmes which demonstrate outcomes also need suitably qualified volunteers to implement the programme, in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

### ***Foróige's Citizenship Programme***

This programme was evaluated using qualitative and quantitative methods. Survey measures included measures of positive youth development (Lerner, et al, 2005), and three sub-measures of civic engagement collated by Flanagan, Syvertsen and Stout (2007).

### **What can be learnt about the role and skills of the volunteer in the Citizenship Programme?**

Findings of the evaluation reported several positive, and one negative finding. As follows:

- Young people who had previously participated in a Citizenship Programme rated themselves as more likely to get involved in a community issue in the future than those who had not previously participated in such a programme; they also showed a higher perceived competence to take action.
- Participants in a Citizenship Programme at any time scored higher on civic competence than a comparison group from Foróige.
- Significant differences were observed on the civic competence measure for young people who had participated more than once in a Citizenship Programme, when compared with others.
- There were no significant differences in levels of positive youth development between the Citizenship Programme participants and non-participants and a negative outcome on the Positive Youth Development Scale for young people who had undertaken a citizenship project in the previous eight to nine months.

### **What can be learnt about management and implementation of volunteering in the Citizenship Programme?**

The evaluation indicated that Foróige had taken an active role in supporting adult volunteers to facilitate the programme effectively through the provision of resources, staff support and training in the programme manual.

### **Programmes that engage the local community to promote better outcomes in their area**

Two of the initiatives included in this report engaged members of the local community to promote better outcomes in the community. These were CDI's **Community Safety Initiative (CSI)**, within which the Safe and Healthy Place Initiative was developed, and the **Restorative Practice Programme**.

A three-year evaluation (2008–2011) of the CSI was conducted by the Child and Family Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway. Qualitative data were sourced through an investigation and analysis of key documents generated by the CSI, a structured observation of CSI structures and processes, and semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups with key services and community stakeholders. Quantitative data were sourced through three surveys conducted in the CSI target communities during 2010 and 2011; these surveys secured responses from 291 residents.

The CSI anticipated intermediate and longer-term outcomes over the three-year period. Progress had been made in achieving some of the intermediate outcomes, in terms of mobilising community capacity around safety, improving perceptions of safety and the physical fabric of the area, and involving children and young people in safety-related activities. The implementation of the CSI contributed to an elevated community and service agency focus regarding many of the factors that negatively affect the quality of life of many children and families in Tallaght West. From November 2008, a collaboration between community and statutory services had been the approach, following active representation from crime prevention and public safety agencies, children and youth services, and other local support services under the broad goal of improving community safety. Implemented initiatives included a range of community engagement activities and events in three target areas initially demonstrating (in 2009 and

2010) the potential of community and service agency collaboration to positively impact community engagement in these areas. Research carried out in 2010 indicated improvement in the well-being and perceptions of safety of a number of individual residents who participated in implementing the CSI in their areas. In addition, the research findings suggested that interagency partnership on the Safe and Healthy Place (SHP) Committee successfully influenced statutory planning and decision-making, and therefore helped to progress several important social, infrastructural, physical and environmental improvements on the MacUilliam Estate in Tallaght West during 2010 and 2011. There were also some early-stage positive signs of involvement of a small number of local children and young people in various CSI- and SHP-sponsored events, activities and structures during 2009 and 2010.

The overall conclusion of the report is that the CSI had not improved community safety to any significant level in Tallaght West in terms of meeting its long-term goals. While changes were reported, these were not at the population level. Core research evidence gathered from a diversity of stakeholders working in services and living in the community of Tallaght West through a range of data collection methods (observation, documentary research, interviews, focus groups and community surveys) consistently reported significant challenges in implementing the CSI. Such challenges included low community representation in the CSI, the lack of an agreed implementation framework and an insufficient level of tangible progress over the course of three years, all of which weakened the capacity of the initiative to achieve its long-term safety goals during the implementation period (2008–2011). In addition, decreasing service agency commitment and difficulties in building cooperative relationships between some stakeholders were identified as limiting the implementation of the CSI. Thus, the capacity of the initiative to enhance local safety in Tallaght West was impeded during the evaluation period.

However, two noteworthy developments occurred in the implementation of the CSI in 2010 and 2011, which may aid the achievement of the initiative's longer-term goals. First, the development of a Restorative Practice Programme involving a range of service/professional and voluntary resident stakeholders. Second, the assignment of RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) staff to the CSI Community Engagement Team potentially may have led to enhanced collaboration in addressing safety issues in Tallaght West through partnership working and relationship-building with key stakeholders in the Local Authority, the educational sector, the community and voluntary sector, and also with residents. The evaluation of the CSI during the period of assignment of the RAPID Co-ordinators (in which 86 residents were randomly surveyed) found some improvements in perceptions of safety among residents of one pilot site, and also found that the working model used on this site had been mainstreamed into the practice of relevant Local Authority staff.

CDI initiated the **Restorative Practice Programme** in Tallaght West in 2010, and the independent evaluation of the Programme focused on the first two years of implementation. The Restorative Practice (RP) Programme was aimed at young people, residents and professionals working in Tallaght West. This training encompassed three levels: Phase 1, awareness-raising; Phase 2, facilitation skills training; and Phase 3, training for trainers. Quantitative data were collected from surveys completed prior to and after training. At the pre-training stage, the sample size was 75; at the post-training stage, the sample size was 130. The methods used to collect qualitative data included individual/group interviews and observations. Participants included 11 members of the Management Committee and 9 who had

completed Phase 3 training. External stakeholders who participated in data collection included representatives from the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) and the All-Ireland Restorative Practice Strategic Forum, a structure established by CDI to support collaborative planning at a national level.

The findings demonstrate some positive impacts of the RP Programme for the management of conflict in Tallaght West. The RP Programme was well delivered by CDI. In the main, progress was made towards the attainment of targets for recruitment, the programme was well organised and was delivered with fidelity. It was well received by participants, and participants could see its value. While conflict was most frequently experienced in work/school and in the home, people believed their capacity to cope with conflict was poorest in the community and in an interagency setting, and this was where they needed support. The evaluations also reported areas for improvement, such as recruitment of more residents to the programme and measures to better include non-professionals.

The programme had a positive impact on the use of RP, which in turn impacted on behaviour and skills, in particular in work and at school, but also in the home. There were improvements in people's ability to deal with conflict in work/school, in the home, in the community and in interagency settings. However, RP skills were not used as frequently in the neighbourhood/community and in an interagency setting. Although RP skills were used less frequently here, the programme continued to have a positive impact on the capacity to manage conflicts and to find solutions to conflict in these settings. There was an increase in the percentage of those who rated themselves 'moderately high' or 'high' for managing conflict in work/school (from 49% to 61%), in the home (from 38% to 48%), in the community (from 16% to 35%) and in interagency settings (from 9% to 37%). In addition, after taking part in training, the percentage of those who experienced conflict everyday decreased with respect to conflict in the workplace (from 60% to 37%), in the home (from 10% to 5%) and in the community (from 3% to 2%).

The programme also had a positive impact on interagency collaboration and the development of a shared approach to conflict management at an interagency level. There was an increase in the percentage who 'strongly agreed' that their service had well-established links with other organisations that deliver front-line services (from 12% to 46%), that their service regularly referred their service users to other services (from 8% to 36%), that their service trains front-line staff to work directly with front-line staff in other organisations (from 3% to 16%), that their service worked with other organisations to integrate services (from 9% to 33%) and that their service shares information about service users (with the latter's consent) with other organisations (from 7% to 28%).

## Section 5: Learning about the potential of volunteering

### Introduction

This section of the report examines the learning from the literature and from the programme evaluations, which was summarised in previous sections. Key issues and common themes are addressed in order to ascertain best practice for involving volunteers, and how child and community outcomes can be influenced within this process. The summary of these evaluation reports demonstrates some learning about the role of volunteers, as well as the management and implementation of volunteering initiatives.

### Key messages

The literature on evidence-informed programmes indicates that programmes implemented in whole or in part by volunteers can achieve positive outcomes for children, young people and parents. However, not all volunteer-delivered programmes reviewed had positive effects. As it is not possible to separate the effects of volunteers from other programme factors such as programme design, dosage or implementation, it is difficult to reach conclusions on the impact of volunteering on outcomes for service users. Despite this limitation, the following key messages emerge from the literature:

- Positive outcomes have been found in health and education programmes that use volunteers, and also in initiatives that involve young people as volunteers.
- The literature suggests that the management, training and vetting of volunteers, as well as effective programme implementation, are crucial to achieving better outcomes.
- Some evidence has shown limited variation in outcomes achieved between volunteer-delivered and professionally delivered programmes.
- Volunteers can provide empathy with service users, build community links and engage hard-to-reach groups in services.
- While volunteering requires resourcing, for example in areas such as recruitment, management and ongoing training, using volunteers can save costs and free up staff to focus on more complex child and family work.
- Involving young people as volunteers may be beneficial to their social and emotional development.

The findings from the seven PEII evaluation reports are varied due to the design of the various initiatives, the methodologies used for evaluation, and the measurements used to ascertain progress on outcomes. However, there are a number of key issues and common themes within these reports which can inform future utilisation of volunteers as a means of influencing child development.

### Structure and planning volunteering

One of the key issues arising from the literature and the seven evaluation reports is the importance of both structure and planning around the use of volunteers. This is demonstrated in both the successes



and shortcomings of PEII programmes and initiatives. For example, the implementation of the BBBS programme required all staff and volunteers to adhere to stringent standards and procedures which included the initial safeguarding of young people through careful recruitment of volunteers. This reaped a number of benefits for these initiatives. Volunteers showed efficacy in their role, with a strong understanding of what was required of them.

### **Training and skilling volunteers**

The literature and reports from volunteering infrastructure bodies stress the importance of clarifying skills and providing induction and training. Most of the PEII programmes provided training and ongoing supervision of volunteers, which was often cited by evaluators as important to the delivery and impact of the programme. The training was reported to lead to upskilling of the volunteers, which helped to improve outcomes for the young people they were working alongside. These positive outcomes were demonstrated in the positive influence that the programmes and initiatives had on the development of the children and young people involved, such as increased pro-social behaviour, increased confidence and improved reading skills.

### **Volunteer recruitment and retention**

While PEII organisations enjoyed the benefit of volunteers, some also reported challenges with aspects of recruitment. This included recruiting male volunteers or securing the long-term commitment to a programme. Some practices for managing retention were identified, such as induction, training and ongoing support. A potential 'substitute' pool of volunteers was also suggested, although this would not be appropriate in all programmes.

### **Volunteering role**

The literature and experience of the PEII reflected a variety of volunteering roles. Some services relied directly on the volunteer's capacity to engage with the community or form a strong relationship with individual mentees. There were indications that volunteers were assisting with universal services, to free up professionals to focus on more targeted services. Some programmes were less specific about the role or function of volunteers. Clarifying the volunteer's role is crucial in setting expectations, formulating skills required, maintaining commitment, and achieving outcomes.

### **Safeguarding**

Programmes generally followed good practice in safeguarding children and young people by vetting volunteers, although some services reported concern that delays in achieving vetting may lead to volunteer attrition. However, as indicated above, several services went beyond vetting requirements to ensure that volunteers had values and attitudes that were in line with the aims of services, in order to ensure that the volunteer was benefiting the child or young person they were supporting. Ongoing volunteering behaviours also contributed to safeguarding including, for example, the management of sensitive and confidential service user information.

## Communication

The importance of communication was reported in the literature and also in the programme evaluations. A number of complexities in relation to communication need to be considered and addressed, in order to balance inclusion for volunteers with safeguarding and organisational protocols. These include:

- Agreements for the managing of sensitive and confidential information which volunteers may have
- Managing communication boundaries between paid staff and volunteers
- Providing communication and knowledge about the service and how the volunteer can be involved.

## Conclusion

The seven PEII programme evaluations make an important contribution to the evidence on the role of volunteering in Ireland and Northern Ireland, particularly in the deployment of volunteers in evidence-informed programmes. It is important to note that programmes and interventions using volunteers did demonstrate positive outcomes for children and young people. This aligns with a growing body of international literature on volunteering which indicates that, within a context of an established evidence base, there can be a positive impact and several benefits to incorporating volunteers into service delivery models.

Commissioners, funders and organisations will be interested to note that, in particular circumstances, it is possible to use volunteers to deliver evidence-informed programmes. This may include services where rigorous training and structured support is available or where community engagement is required. Organisations should consider whether there is a role for volunteers in their service because there are perceived benefits, including better engagement, community links, cost reduction and better use of staff time. However, the literature and learning from the PEII programme evaluations indicate that volunteering needs to be managed in line with good practice. The roles and expectations of volunteers are important considerations for organisations when using volunteers. The various elements of good practice require resourcing; consequently, while volunteers are unpaid, the service is not free of charge.

## Issues for services, funders and commissioners to consider

### Volunteers

There are a number of benefits to incorporating volunteers into service delivery models which should be considered alongside the outcomes of the service and resources available. Services should give consideration to the potential benefits volunteers can bring to enhanced service delivery; they should also consider whether they have the organisational capacity and resources to involve volunteers.

## **Role**

Commissioners and service providers should consider what role they want volunteers to play. Evidence suggests that volunteers can play a number of different roles including:

- Delivery of a structured or evidence-based programme
- Development of a key relationship with a child or young person
- Empathetic outreach, home visiting or engagement
- Working alongside professionals in the delivery of non-clinical aspects, to free up professionals' time.

It is important to be clear about the volunteer's role and its implications for the selection and development of the volunteer and the service.

## **Structure**

The involvement of volunteers requires a well-planned process of recruitment, vetting, induction, training and support. There are many aspects to consider, including the volunteer role and skills profile, and the training needs of staff who will manage volunteers. The management of relationships and boundaries between staff and volunteers needs to be considered. Organisations that wish to involve volunteers should follow best practice in these areas, so as to improve the likelihood of providing a safe service and better outcomes for children, young people and families.

## **Costs**

Some evidence suggests that volunteers can enable service costs to reduce, or enable targeting of resources to areas of greater need. However, volunteering requires resourcing, and organisations should develop a budget which includes staff time and costs for items such as recruitment, vetting, management, ongoing supervision, training, volunteer expenses, volunteer recognition and contingencies. Policy-makers and service managers should consider costs when they are developing or assessing volunteer programmes. While volunteers give freely of their time, it is recommended that they receive out-of-pocket expenses and are recognised for their contribution.

## **Commitment**

Services should consider what type of voluntary commitment they require and how they will support long-term commitments, where these are required. Where programmes are predicated on a longer-term commitment, consideration should be given to how ready and committed the volunteer is, how volunteering can be sustained and what back-up arrangements (such as substitutes) can be put in place to mitigate any drop-off. Finally, services should manage the expectations of volunteers by being clear about the various stages of recruitment, vetting, induction and training.

## Appendix A: Literature Review Methodology

The strategy for sourcing relevant articles and reports for this review was chosen to maximise the likelihood of identifying material that would be useful in the context of reviewing the link between volunteering and improved outcomes for children, families and communities.

The following combination of methods was used to identify material for inclusion in the review:

- Searches of bibliographic databases (EBSCOhost, Emerald, ProQuest, Wiley Online Library, *Science Direct* journals, Springer Journals online, HeinOnline, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Peragamon Press, Elsevier, and Clinical Psychology Press) and internet search engines
- Browsing of relevant Government, agency and research centre websites in Ireland and the UK.

Given the scope of the review, a range of search terms was used. These included volunteer, volunteering, children, families, young people, outcomes, intervention and evaluation. The names of the seven relevant programmes included in the PEII were also used as search terms.

Material was only considered if published in English in 2008 or later, and if relevant to the Ireland and Northern Ireland context. Where possible, information was sourced from published research studies, reviews or large-scale evaluations that had been peer reviewed.

The quality of the published research was considered prior to inclusion in the evidence review. Research with poor study design and a lack of full reporting on methodology was excluded. Due to the difficulties of conducting research that can demonstrate impact on service user outcomes, many studies were found to have not focused on, or extrapolated, results specifically related to volunteering.

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