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Evaluation of Volunteering Wales Grants and Youth Led Grants Executive Summary

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List of abbreviations

CVC	County Voluntary Councils
VWG	Volunteering Wales Grants
WCVA	Wales Council for Voluntary Action
YLG	Youth Led Grants

Executive summary

Introduction

Volunteering Wales Grants (VWGs) and Youth Led Grants (YLGs) are administered by WCVA on behalf of the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government funds the two schemes with the main aim being to increase volunteering activity across Wales.

The principal purpose of this evaluation, undertaken from November 2017 - January 2018, was to assess the impact of the two schemes as they operated during the 2017/18 financial year. The intention was also to collect some feedback on the administration of the schemes.

The main method for collecting data for the evidence was an online/telephone survey of:

Cohort	No. of responses
Volunteers participating in any of the VWG projects and the YLG supported activities (incl. the youth panel members themselves)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 119 responses¹ • 55 different projects represented
Grant recipient organisations that had benefited from VWG funding for volunteering projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22 responses • representing one grant recipient organisation each
CVC representatives working with youth panels in implementing the YLG scheme activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 responses • good cross-section of CVCs throughout Wales

This was complemented by participant observation at a Volunteering Wales Youth Meeting in November 2017. However, the limited resources available to undertake the evaluation meant it was not possible to complete more extensive consultations with stakeholders.

The limitations of the evaluation are important to note. A complete data set on the volunteers involved in the individual funded projects would have required the use of a random or tailored sampling approach to ensure that different cohorts and objectives for the two grant schemes could adequately be taken into account. However, this option was not available and, as a result, a self-selection approach to sampling proved to be the only option.² A potential self-selection bias therefore needs to be kept in mind in considering the findings.

¹ A sample of roughly 4% of the total number of volunteers supported by the two schemes.

² Those who did take part in the survey volunteered to do so (they wanted to take part), meaning that we cannot be sure that the responses are representative of the population as a whole (i.e. all volunteers supported by the schemes).

Key findings: overall performance

The findings of the survey suggest that both grant schemes are performing well in terms of benefits and outcomes achieved. With 80% of survey respondents reporting that they had not volunteered with a similar project before, the expectation of attracting new volunteers has clearly been met. The results also suggest that the projects and activities supported by the two schemes have indeed created new volunteering opportunities in the priority thematic areas defined for the two grant schemes.

Key findings: benefits for individual volunteers

The survey findings suggest that individuals have derived considerable benefits from their volunteering activities through increased personal and skills development and improved wellbeing. The evidence also suggests that the volunteering experiences have met volunteers' expectations.

Table A: How important were the following aspects for you to get involved in the current project?

	Very Important	Important	Neither Important or Unimportant	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
To improve things/ help people	82%	18%	0%	0%	0%
The cause was really important to me	72%	20%	5%	3%	0%
To learn new skills	53%	35%	9%	2%	1%
To use my existing skills	50%	46%	4%	0%	0%
To support my community	48%	43%	6%	2%	1%
To receive training/ get a recognised qualification	38%	24%	20%	14%	3%
To improve my confidence	37%	36%	13%	14%	0%
To meet people/ make friends	35%	42%	19%	3%	0%
To improve my employment prospects	31%	27%	12%	22%	8%
I had the spare time to do it	30%	50%	14%	5%	1%
To improve my physical health	21%	23%	31%	26%	0%
It was connected with the needs of my family/friends	11%	19%	29%	31%	11%
My friends/ family were already involved	8%	14%	35%	32%	11%

Base: n=119

Table B: How has volunteering with this project made a difference to you?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel that I am able to make a difference	64%	31%	3%	2%	0%
I have acquired new skills	64%	28%	7%	1%	1%
I feel more confident	49%	36%	13%	1%	1%
I feel more positive about my local area	46%	37%	14%	3%	0%
I have a better understanding of what I am good at	45%	42%	11%	3%	0%
I have found new friends	43%	36%	15%	5%	0%
I feel more able to influence what's happening in my community	42%	35%	19%	5%	0%
I find it easier to mix with different people	37%	38%	22%	3%	0%
I am more likely to find a (new) job or get onto the course I want to	26%	31%	28%	9%	5%

Base: n=119

The evidence also supports the view that the volunteering experiences enabled by the two schemes have led to more positive views about volunteering. In addition to respondents reporting the intention to continue volunteering themselves – in other words having formed a habit of volunteering – a strong majority of respondents also indicated that they would tell others about the benefits of volunteering. Through volunteers disseminating information about positive experiences and encouraging others to volunteer, the schemes clearly make a contribution to raising the status and improving the image of volunteering.

Key findings: benefits for organisations

The research suggests that the grant funding has created capacity in the respective voluntary sector organisations to strengthen their work with volunteers and generate benefits for individuals and communities. While dedicated staff training was not a prominent feature of many projects, organisations confirmed that being able to support dedicated staff roles for volunteer management was of considerable benefit and that they had learned how to attract different kinds of volunteers and how to support volunteers with particular needs.

It is important to note respondents' comments that the organisational capacity to guarantee sustainable volunteer management and support depends on ongoing funding being secured. Organisations that had benefited from VWG funding confirmed that it had created a legacy in the form of a reliable cohort of volunteers and more positive perceptions of volunteering generally. However, the additional capacity supported by the funding would not necessarily be reliably embedded in organisations through just one year of funding.

Regarding the final longer-term goals for the YLG, the research results suggest that as a result of the funding made available through the scheme the CVCs themselves now feel more capable of reaching and communicating with young people, including being able to reach more diverse groups of young people.

For the YLG scheme as well, however, the feedback obtained clearly indicates that the activities supported require ongoing funding. Regular light touch but reliable support for youth panels is essential in allowing young people to succeed.

Effective use of the YLG scheme depends to a large extent on the capacity of CVCs to provide adequate support; the role of Youth Volunteering Advisors is key in this respect. Similarly, the YLG cannot operate in a stand-alone fashion and needs to be part of a continued effort to create a holistic system to support youth volunteering (e.g. visioning and networking activities with young people, development of effective social media tools).

Key findings: conditions for grant effectiveness

Notwithstanding a number of possible adjustments (to reporting deadlines for instance), in general terms the research suggests high satisfaction levels with regard to the processes adopted for the management of the two schemes.

The feedback obtained through the survey, the scoping interviews and the participatory observation at the Youth Volunteering Network meeting confirm that the two grant schemes are perceived as well embedded in the infrastructure for volunteering in Wales. In a highly competitive funding environment, the two grants constitute a key building block in enabling diverse volunteering experiences in Wales.

The evidence appears to demonstrate that grant recipient organisations have opted to use the funding to strengthen their direct volunteer-facing capacity and support the specific activities that volunteers are getting involved with. As a result, outcomes in terms of strengthening the underlying organisational capacity (e.g. staff training, policies) seem to be less prominent. This would suggest that the grant schemes are dependent on voluntary sector organisations including the CVCs' youth support capacity, securing their overall financial sustainability and core capacity from elsewhere.

Recommendations for WCVA

- *Recommendation 1:* Ensure that awareness-raising is maintained as a key method of attracting volunteers and use the evidence regarding the benefits achieved to further raise the status and improve the image of volunteering by highlighting in particular:
 - The personal and skills development gains and improved wellbeing for individual volunteers;
 - The sense of empowerment through collective action; and
 - The citizenship effect, in particular for the young people involved in the Youth Panels.

- *Recommendation 2:* Continue to work with voluntary sector organisations to ensure that a thorough understanding of the volunteer journey and different types of formal and informal support are made available as part of volunteering projects.
- *Recommendation 3:* Continue to work with voluntary sector organisations to ensure that the organisational capacity to use grant funding is nurtured in a wide range of organisations and that the underlying financial viability and resources to sustain the core capabilities required to deliver volunteering-based activities (e.g. dedicated staff roles, staff training, governance and management systems) are met from other funding sources.
- *Recommendation 4:* Continue to work with youth volunteering networks and organisations to guarantee that the benefits from youth volunteering are maximised and interfaced effectively with the wider volunteering infrastructure in Wales.
- *Recommendation 5:* Continue to strengthen routes into volunteering and continue to work with the Welsh Government and third sector partners to maintain the necessary soft infrastructure (e.g. Volunteering Centres, social media presence, informal links into communities, CVC Youth Volunteering Advisors).
- *Recommendation 6:* Continue to work towards strengthening effective linkages with relevant public-sector organisations and agencies (e.g. job centre, schools) to ensure that volunteering experiences and benefits are integrated with other provision designed to deliver wellbeing in Wales.
- *Recommendation 7:* Review and adjust the reporting deadlines for the two grant schemes.

Recommendations for the Welsh Government

- *Recommendation 1:* Retain a policy focus on volunteering as an effective way of contributing to a range of wellbeing goals for Welsh citizens and Welsh communities.
- *Recommendation 2:* Continue the two grant schemes and explore opportunities to lengthen the funding cycle beyond the current annual grants.
- *Recommendation 3:* Continue to work with WCVA and other third sector partners to strengthen the evidence base regarding barriers to volunteering.
- *Recommendation 4:* Work with WCVA and other third sector partners to gain a more complete understanding of the linkages between volunteering and the availability of innovative public services in different thematic areas (e.g. care, environment, education, mental health).

