



# Breaking Down Barriers to Age-Friendly and Inclusive Volunteering

a charity toolkit to support over 50s  
into volunteering through social get  
togethers



**Kent Coast Volunteering**  
Connecting Communities In  
Dover, Thanet, Folkestone & Hythe

 **Centre for  
Ageing Better**

 Department for  
Digital, Culture,  
Media & Sport

 **COMMUNITY  
FUND**

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# Downloadable resources

## [ZIP download of all resources](#)

## [Guide to putting on a one-off social get together](#)

## [Session plans – 3 sessions](#)

- [Session 1 plan template](#)
- [Session 2 plan template](#)
- [Session 3 plan template](#)

## [Invitations](#)

- [Christmas](#)
- [New year new you](#)
- [Generic](#)

## [Posters](#)

- [Christmas](#)
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- [Generic](#)

## [Themed activities](#)

### [Micro-volunteering activity instructions](#)

- [Bird feeder instructions](#)
- [Bird watch guide](#)
- [Bug hotel instructions](#)
- [Post Pals](#)
- [Thank you 'letters'](#)

### [Bookings template](#)

### [Taxi & transport bookings template](#)

## [Attendance list template](#)

## [Micro-volunteering opportunities](#)

## [Wellbeing top tips](#)

## [Icebreaker questions for tables](#)

## [Volunteers - certificate of thanks](#)

## [Feedback form](#)

## [Photo & video consent](#)

## [Video downloads](#)

### [The benefits of volunteering in a social setting](#)

- [Albert](#)
- [Margaret](#)
- [Helen](#)
- [Jean](#)

### [The benefits of volunteering](#)

- [Albert](#)
- [Margaret](#)
- [Jean](#)

If you are viewing a printed version of this guide, all download files can be found on the KCV website:

<https://kcv.org.uk/a-toolkit-for-social-get-togethers/>



# What will this guide help you achieve?

## From supported to supporter - how to engage your service users with volunteering

An accessible guide to break down barriers to volunteering, aimed at voluntary sector organisations working with people over 50, but could be easily adapted for other groups.

It includes tips to help convert people from being supported by your organisation into becoming supporters of your organisation by breaking down barriers to volunteering. It shows what has worked for Kent Coast Volunteering (KCV) to engage people- and includes examples of accessible micro-volunteering.



### Who is this guide aimed at?

- Volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) such as charities and community groups
- This guide can be used by:
  - any group that brings people together and is interested in introducing the idea of volunteering
  - any organisation interested in recruiting volunteers from people they support
- It is important to note this guide is *age-friendly* not *age-specific*

### What will you gain?

- Guides and resources for social get togethers
- Marketing materials – posters and invitations
- Example micro-volunteering activities
- Volunteer certificates
- Feedback forms
- Practical tips about what to consider
- Insight about what didn't work for us





# Background

In Thanet during 2019-2020 KCV was selected by the Centre for Ageing Better to run a year-long project to test out ways of better engaging over 50s into volunteering....

The kernel of our idea began with a few examples of people who had been supported by KCV to become 'supporters' – by volunteering for one of our services.

## Barriers to over 50s getting involved in volunteering

Many people would like to be active community members through volunteering, but often experience barriers to participation. These barriers can be practical, emotional and/or structural.

Find out more about barriers from: [The Centre for Ageing Better](#)



### PRACTICAL BARRIERS

- ⊕ Costs
- ⊕ Transport needs
- ⊕ Physical access
- ⊕ Language



### STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

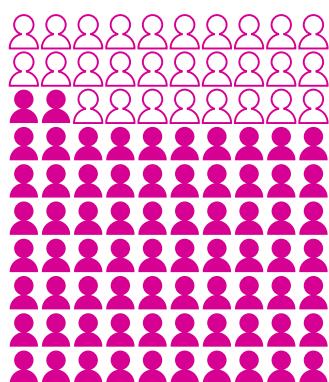
- ⊕ Inflexible offers
- ⊕ Lack of neutral spaces
- ⊕ Lack of resources
- ⊕ Digital divide



### EMOTIONAL BARRIERS

- ⊕ Lack of confidence
- ⊕ Stigma/stereotype
- ⊕ Fear of overcommitment
- ⊕ Not feeling valued

Of the 98 asked in Kent Coast Volunteering feedback forms for this project, 72% had one or more reasons that they don't currently volunteer.



*Quotes on why people don't volunteer:*

**Lack of confidence to try something new**

**Worried about commitment**

**Done lots of it when younger, now it's 'me' time**

**Too many responsibilities**

**Looking after my wife**



## Our approach

We wanted to build on people's need for social connection and the benefits this brings

We focused on one of the key reasons people choose to volunteer – to meet people. We discovered bringing people together socially in a neutral 'third space' was a great way to engage our service users.

We realised that social connection and participants' understanding of how it made them feel was a potential springboard for doing other things – such as volunteering.

We were clear about what we wanted to achieve and worked backwards from there. We wanted more of our service users to consider volunteering and we were able to work towards this outcome by:

- Enabling participants to meet new people
- Building relationships with participants
- Improving people's confidence
- Micro-volunteering activities

**“Was nervous, did not know what to expect, I need not have worried. Cannot wait to come again**

Michele



>We used Ageing Better's [six principles to age-friendly and inclusive volunteering](#) for inspiration for our sessions.

## Our volunteer videos

### Helen's Story



### Margaret's Story



### Albert's Story



### Jean's Story





## Case study

Our approach resulted from earlier trials where we offered support to people who were interested in volunteering but didn't feel ready to start

Sessions were themed around confidence and wellbeing and while these were identified by participants as essential for them to be able to move into volunteering, the sessions had fairly low attendance.

During Volunteers Week we trialled “micro-volunteering” – quick, easy volunteering tasks during a social session. It was a light-bulb moment. It led to us continuing with the social get together approach and introducing volunteering as a fun experience to break down barriers to volunteering.

### This Volunteers' Week means a lot to me

At the beginning of 2018, I became quite ill. I started taking time off work, and eventually my employers let me go. It was devastating. All my friends were still working, so I saw less and less of them. When I did see them at the occasional birthday party it wasn't the same – I wasn't in the loop, I didn't have any of the gossip. I felt left out.

I became very isolated and began to feel quite depressed. It was hard to leave the house sometimes.

➡ I had a friend who volunteered with [Kent Coast Volunteering](#) at a local social group and she kept inviting me along to help out. I wasn't sure about it, but in the end dragging me along was the best thing she could have done. It changed my life.

I do the teas and coffees usually, take money at the door, and help to run with the quizzes. All sorts of people come to the group, from different backgrounds and abilities, but everything we do is really inclusive and everyone gets involved. They're a brilliant crowd, and it's a space where I feel totally comfortable.

But we're always stretched for volunteers. So, this week, for Volunteers Week, we're changing our regular social group into an event to encourage the people who come along to the group to get involved in running it. We'll have a quiz and games – I've written the questions for Blankety Blank! And there will be an opportunity for people to shadow volunteers, to find out what it's like and what's involved.

Volunteering has been life-changing for me – if it wasn't for getting involved, I would have been in a very bad way. As it is, I've been really supported and it's been wonderful. We would love to see more people getting involved so we can keep supporting people in turn.

➡ [Read more...](#)

- Jane



# How to break down barriers & inspire engagement with volunteering

## Addressing the barriers to volunteering

We wanted the events to be 'Sociable and Connected', 'Flexible and Responsive' and 'Enabled and Supported'. We did this by addressing the barriers to volunteering outlined previously (on page 6).

To engage people, our get togethers were:

Marketed as	Free, friendly and fun A chance to meet and chat with light refreshments and activities	✓
Time-limited	e.g. 90-minute weekly sessions for three weeks	✓
Flexible	Participants could book one, two or all three sessions	✓
Connected	To encourage attendance at all sessions, sessions one and two were to prepare for session three	✓
Informal	Participants could engage with the activities or just have a cup of tea. No pressure	✓
Accessible	Free transport offered where needed, fully accessible venue	✓

And we worked really hard to ensure the session activities followed the other six age-friendly and inclusive volunteering principles:

I am disabled and all activities wholly do-able!

Christine

-  1 Flexible and responsive
-  2 Enabled and supported
-  3 Sociable and connected
-  4 Valued and appreciated
-  5 Meaningful and purposeful
-  6 Makes good use of my strengths



## Top Tips

### Tried and tested approaches

As a new member,  
I felt welcomed and  
enjoyed the session

Pat

#### The personal approach

- ✓ marketing the events with posted invitations and following up with phone calls
- ✓ emphasis on being warm and welcoming during the sessions
- ✓ through participants attending more than one session and phone calls with participants between sessions, we were able to build relationships, enabling frank discussions around interest in volunteering

**Top Tip:** phone calls help build relationships and promote attendance

By helping other  
people, I helped  
myself

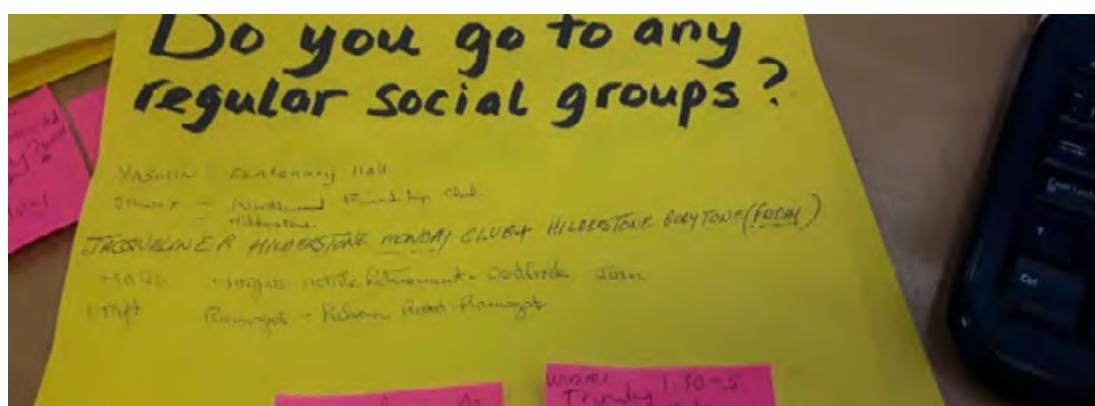
Helen

#### Shaping activities

Participants were encouraged to volunteer by shaping and running the sessions, which resulted in group purpose and identity.

This was through:

- ✓ small volunteering tasks e.g. meet and greet, sign-in, collecting feedback, making tea for their table
- ✓ sharing their skills to provide session activities e.g. poetry, dancing, quizzes, craft
- ✓ coming up with ideas for third and final celebration / thank you session
- ✓ sharing local knowledge about social clubs, events and hobby groups
- ✓ sharing and recommending volunteer opportunities





“Very good and lots of chats”

Barbara

“I didn't think I would gel with anyone here, so I surprised myself when I found myself getting into conversations”

James

## Icebreaker questions

Really worked for some groups to get people talking to each other on new topics and encouraged sharing local knowledge. A way of attendees meaningfully and briefly connecting with one another.

[Icebreaker Questions for Tables](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

## Micro-volunteering tasks

We introduced quick, simple, fun but meaningful volunteering tasks as the planned activities to break down barriers to volunteering and engage people in volunteering. These activities provided a focus and enabled people to chat more easily.

**Top Tip:** tasks must be fun and meaningful!

[Micro-Volunteering Activity Instructions](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)



“Lovely to hear about the Town Shed - something I have always wanted to do”

Michelle

## Making connections...

...with volunteer-involving organisations (VIO) to raise awareness of groups in the community with volunteer opportunities

- ✓ inviting local VIOs and their volunteers to join the sessions so the volunteers act as “volunteer advocates” mixing with participants and talking about what they do
- ✓ donating items to VIOs e.g. Christmas presents to local women's refuge, household staples to foodbank
- ✓ thanking volunteers for their work in the community with certificates e.g. local foodbank



“  
People commented on how nice it was that they were thanked

Heather

“  
A huge heartfelt thank you to everyone who has donated to us so that the women and children spending Christmas in refuge can have a special day. It's this sense of community that really helps us to add magic during the festive period

Oasis Domestic Abuse Service

## Volunteer recognition

- ✓ also see 'Making connections with VIOs' section earlier
- ✓ thanking existing volunteers for their work, with certificates
- ✓ feeding back on how volunteering during the sessions is appreciated e.g. reading out thank you tweet in response to donations to women's refuge
- ✓ the above actions highlight different volunteer opportunities and show volunteering is a rewarding activity

Thank You 'Letters'

[DOWNLOAD](#)

Volunteers - Certificate of Thanks

[DOWNLOAD](#)

## Feedback forms

The questions on the feedback form helped make it clear the activities people did during the session were volunteering.

**Top Tip:** we found a prize inspired engagement

Feedback Form

[DOWNLOAD](#)

### Volunteering Please circle your answers

**6. Did you realise you were volunteering by doing the activities?** ☺ ☺ ☺

Yes / No

Comments:

**7. Knowing you have volunteered today –  
by taking part in these activities  
– how does that make you feel?**





# How to gauge success

We used feedback to evaluate activities, attendee wellbeing, how sessions went, learn lessons for subsequent sessions and gauge interest in volunteering

[Feedback Form](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

## Results and outputs

The following statistics give a flavour of the impact of the social get togethers we trialled.

Measures of success focussed on:

- How welcoming and friendly people found the sessions
- How enjoyable the activities were
- How many would consider volunteering in the future

### Combined outputs from our sessions

135 feedback forms completed across six sessions

- 100% found the session welcoming and friendly
- 124 enjoyed the activities (a few didn't answer)
- 128 would like to come to other similar events

Average 'happiness' rating before each session: 3.9

Average 'happiness' rating after each session: 4.8



**37%** were interested in volunteering

We also trialled our session plans and activities at established over 50's social get togethers to see how the activities and approach worked in an existing social group:

- 38 feedback forms from attendees at 3 sessions
- 100% enjoyed the activities
- 53% responded 'maybe' to volunteering, 18% 'yes'

Average 'happiness' rating before each session: 3.9

Average 'happiness' rating after each session: 4.6

Helpful, friendly, welcoming and full of information  
Evelyn

Very enjoyable and productive time  
Martin

Activities got conversations going around volunteering  
Heather



## Highlights from our micro-volunteering sessions

Lots of people signed up to share their skills through dance demos, quizzes, poetry, leading carol singing.

One woman who had previously signed up as a beneficiary of our befriending service offered to support others as a volunteer befriendeer instead.

One attendee, who came to five of the six sessions and volunteered at them all said it had given him the confidence to try attending another group.

One participant suggested a RNLI role and another attendee who'd not volunteered before followed up on it.

One keen quiz contestant offered to create, print and get the prizes for a quiz for two of our sessions.

Two participants volunteered as tea makers at one of KCV's other projects.

Participants donated items for the local foodbank and women's refuge – including one woman who knitted animals for Christmas presents.

Lots of participants including a housebound octogenarian continued letter writing at home.

When I saw how much they'd been appreciated, it brought a tear to my eye  
Margaret

I am a writer, I will get on that straight away  
Gladys

## Video commentaries on the benefits of volunteering



**Albert**



**Jean**



**Margaret**



# Social get togethers - the practicalities

## What's involved?



So much of an event's success lies in the planning. The following resources should help get you organised.

## Plans

Guide to Putting on a One-Off Social Get Together

[DOWNLOAD](#)

Session Plans x3

[DOWNLOAD](#)



## Logistics

Bookings Template

[DOWNLOAD](#)

Attendance List Template

[DOWNLOAD](#)

Taxi & Transport Bookings Template

[DOWNLOAD](#)





# Micro-volunteering

Breaking down barriers to volunteering

## What is micro-volunteering?

“Easy, quick, low commitment actions that benefit a worthy cause”

↪ [NCVO Know How](#)

“Micro-volunteering takes a simple idea – that people are more likely to volunteer their time in short and convenient, bite-sized chunks – and turns it into a new approach to community action – easy tasks that can be done anytime, anywhere, on your own terms. It could involve anything from signing a petition or retweeting a message to taking part in a flash mob or counting birds in your garden”

↪ [The Guardian](#)





## Micro-volunteering activities

### Example activities

#### Bird feeders

Look after the birds all year round.

[Make a Recycled Bird Feeder](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

[RSPB Big Bird Watch](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

[How to Feed the Birds All Year](#)

[LINK](#)

Loved the crafts  
and help of  
the volunteers

Annie

#### Build a bug hotel

Give ladybirds a place to shelter.

[Bug Hotel Instructions](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

[RSPCA Activities to do at Home](#)

[LINK](#)

For the first time  
in my life, I made an  
insect bug hotel

James

#### Post pals

Brighten a sick child's day by posting them a letter or card.

[Post Pals Task for Social Sessions](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

[PostPals.co.uk](#)

[LINK](#)

I really like the  
idea of writing to  
poorly kids

Marion

#### More micro-volunteering ideas

A handy list of micro-volunteering opportunities to inspire you and your group.

[WoollyHugs.com](#)

[LINK](#)

[BBC.co.uk](#)

[LINK](#)

[Micro-Volunteering Opportunities](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

Something for  
everyone

Ida

#### Attendee participation

- Sharing of their skills, interests and local knowledge e.g. crafting, local fitness clubs
- Helping shape and run the sessions e.g. write a quiz, plan a volunteer thank you party

It was fun to be  
able to join in

Michele



# Social get togethers - what to consider

Giving you the best chance of success



## Venue

- Neutral 'third space'
  - welcoming and comfortable
  - highly accessible and local to users
  - free or inexpensive
  - availability of food and drink
  - habitually visited by regulars, supporting both old and new friendships
- Near public transport links
- Free parking
- Taxi drop off / pick up locations
- Disabled toilets
- Wheelchair accessible
- Large room – space for wheelchairs/walkers
- Ideally all on one level
- Short walk from entrance to event location
- If many steps involved, lift needed
- Hearing loops and/or good acoustics – not echoey
- No trip hazards
- Comfortable temperature
- Risk assessment
- Affordability
- Facilities e.g. catering arrangements (if you can bring your own cakes etc. it cuts costs hugely)

It is the way a group is gathered that determines what happens in it and how successful it is, the little design choices you can make to help your gathering soar

'The Art of Gathering' by Priya Parker



## Timings

- No more than two hours, our sessions were 1.5 hours
- Do not start too early – enable use of free bus pass etc.
- Time between main meals e.g. 10.30am-12pm or 2-3.30pm
- Make sure regular buses running before and after session
- Avoid travel home in the dark
- Check other local events and regular social group timings and dates to make sure not competing with

Perfect venue,  
light, airy, very  
nice

Evelyn

It made  
my day

Lynne



## Refreshments

- Offer healthy snacks (fruit etc.) as well as pastries/biscuits/cakes
- Check dietary requirements e.g. gluten-free
- Encourage attendees to help themselves to drinks and help others who are less able
- Free!

**The cakes  
were awesome,  
thanks!**

Anthony



## Volunteers

- Help with prep and admin before and during events
- Phoning possible attendees to confirm etc. – a chance for event organisers and participants to build relationships
- Organising the transport
- Recruit volunteers from within the group to help sign in, do tea coffee etc.
- Invite volunteers from other local VIO groups to join the sessions. This way they become volunteer advocates with the potential to inspire others to volunteer

**Did not expect so  
many volunteers,  
made everyone feel  
so special**

Michelle



## GDPR

- Make sure to store personal data correctly
- Think about personal data at events, attendance lists, taxi lists etc.
- Store information securely at events and do not allow individuals' data to be accessed / viewed by others
- Use consent forms for photos & videos

**Photo & video consent download**

**DOWNLOAD**

**ICO Guidance**

**LINK**



# Social get togethers - promoting attendance

The first hurdle to a successful event is how to encourage people to attend

We got our message out via printed invitations in the post, with the 'pull' of free refreshments and welcoming atmosphere. Posting invitations was the most appropriate method for our service users and was expensive. It achieved around 10% conversion rate to becoming an attendee.



## Invitations

- Selling points
  - People love something “**free**” – offer free attendance and refreshments
  - People love a **theme** – use this and associated activities to market & structure the sessions e.g. Christmas, ‘New Year, New You’
  - **It's good to talk** – offer a chance to ‘meet & chat’
- Marketing materials to edit:

Themed Activities [DOWNLOAD](#)

Poster Templates [DOWNLOAD](#)

Invitation Templates [DOWNLOAD](#)

## Examples of event invitations and posters

(these templates are downloadable using the links above);





## Other tips

- Try running the sessions as part of an existing social group, where attendance is guaranteed
- Down-play the volunteering aspect initially, then introduce more openly once you have built relationships and trust
- If budget is available – offer free transport (minibus or shared taxi/car shares would also work)
- Phone calls – follow up, remind, explain about the session being very welcoming and friendly and informal
- Offer one-off or limited number of sessions – to alleviate fear of commitment and promote ‘trying something new’

[Guide to Putting on a One-Off Social Get Together](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

[Taxi & Transport Bookings Template](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

[Session Plans - 3 Sessions](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)





# Final thoughts

## Lessons learnt



**Time consuming & expensive** to offer taxis, although it does increase attendance



**Reconfirm** with those receiving transport



Phone calls very **time consuming but worth it**



**Ever shifting numbers attending** – make sure to ask for **RSVP** by a date. However, plan for ‘unknowns’ to turn up anyway and many ‘confirmed’ not to show – although these numbers seemed to balance each other out! Around a third were no shows at each session from those who had confirmed.



Be prepared for **last minute cancellations** – due to hospital appointments, illness etc. and expect to contact transport providers with the cancellations the day/evening before



If running a series of events, **keep day and time of week the same**, to avoid confusion



Venue – **no such thing as a perfect venue**. We tried many, all had their issues. It’s a balance of priorities, responding to feedback



Two people minimum needed to run session for 15-30 participants – think about the **needs of your group** for how many helpers you will need



Over **30 attendees** can be unwieldy to run by one-two 'leaders'



More attendees can mean the groups become **less personal** and overwhelming for those less confident. And very loud! More like a party!



**Remove unused chairs** from tables, once everyone arrived – helps connection and more space for movement / less chance of tripping



Encourage people to **sit together on tables** as they arrive – potential to make new friends



Put the whole **range of activities** on each table – people don't tend to move table to do the activity they prefer. They like the variety / choice before them



Make time to **thank volunteers**



**Volunteering** still might be far removed. It might take several attempts to find a good fit



The percentage interested in **engaging with volunteering** will depend on a number of factors which we are unable to influence – such as caring commitments



Giving people **appropriate volunteering opportunities** to consider, based around their situation and preferences can work

[Micro-Volunteering Opportunities](#)

[DOWNLOAD](#)



# Useful links

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## Centre for Ageing Better

- ↪ <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/>

## Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering Leaflet

- ↪ <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-05/Age-friendlyandinclusivevolunteeringfinalprint.pdf>

## Interactive webinar on age-friendly and inclusive volunteering

- ↪ <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/events/age-friendly-inclusive-volunteering-webinar>

## Press release of barriers some people face to volunteering

- ↪ <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/news/age-friendly-inclusive-volunteering>

## Review: Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering: Review of community contributions in later life

- ↪ <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/age-friendly-inclusive-volunteering>

## Kent Coast Volunteering

- ↪ [www.kcv.org.uk](http://www.kcv.org.uk)

## NCVO Guide to micro-volunteering

- ↪ <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/how-to/how-to-engage-people-into-microvolunteering>