



Improving Volunteering Opportunities for People Over 60

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Introduction

Vintage Volunteers is a [VAST](#) project funded by the [Big Lottery](#) helping people aged 60+ find volunteering opportunities. The project was launched in 2017 and to date has supported 61 people into successful volunteering placements.

While the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering are well recognised, Vintage Volunteers are aware that people over the age of 60 can experience specific barriers to engaging in, and remaining engaged in, volunteering. Vintage Volunteers asked Staffordshire University to conduct a participatory research project, the findings from which will help organisations better understand the volunteering needs of people over 60 and ensure that appropriate and inclusive opportunities are offered to people in this age group.

To help understand the issue, a team of members from Vintage Volunteers were trained as community researchers and conducted interviews and focus groups with people over the age of 60 in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire. The community research team were recruited through informal drop in sessions prior to the start of the project and were involved through all stages of the project, from planning the research, designing the questions and conducting interviews and the focus group, to analysing findings and sharing learning.

The research questions

The community researchers asked the research participants a series of questions about volunteering. The questions were slightly different for those people who had experience of volunteering and those who did not.

The questions were designed to help us understand people's motivations for volunteering, how people find out about opportunities in Stoke-on-Trent, the types of support people need from volunteer placements and what stops people from volunteering. The full list of questions can be found in Appendix 1.

Methods used to conduct the interviews and focus groups included using a diagram (please see Appendix 2) to guide participants through the questions and a survey which was completed with participants.

The people involved

Eight Vintage Volunteers were trained as community researchers and spoke to 65 people in total between April and June 2019. Three community researchers were under the age of 60 and five were between 66 and 75. The community researcher team carried out focus groups and interviews with participants in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.

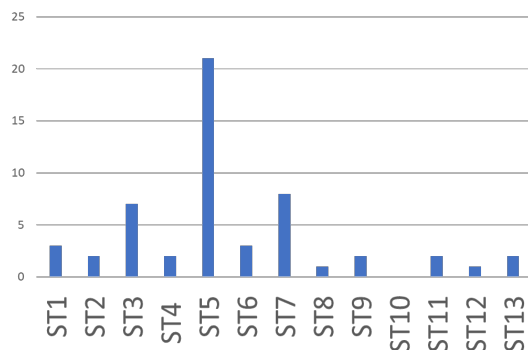
Who were the research participants?

The research participants were contacted by the community research and university-based team.

Geography

A high proportion of participants were from Newcastle-under-Lyme (ST5). This was likely to be as a result of one of the community researchers volunteering for a large organisation in the area and holding a focus group with its volunteers.

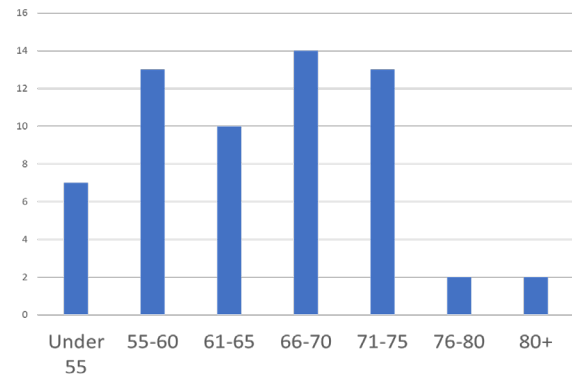
Figure 1. Postcodes of participants



Age

There was a broad spread of ages between 55 to 80+, with 7 people from the sample falling below the age of 55.

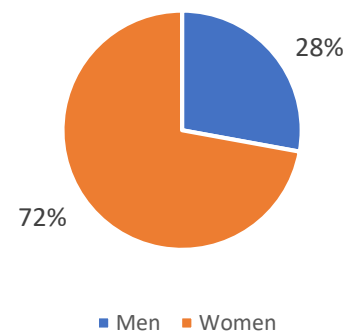
Figure 2. Ages of participants



Gender

There were more female research participants involved in this study than male participants, with 72% respondents being women.

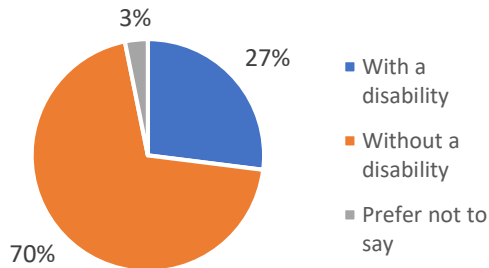
Figure 3. Gender of the participants



Disability

27% of research participants said they had a disability.

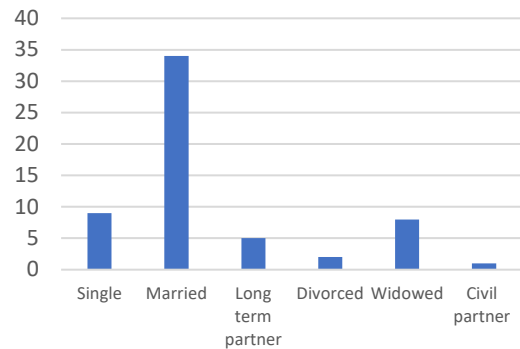
Figure 4. Participants who said they had a disability



Relationship status

Over half of the research participants in this study were married.

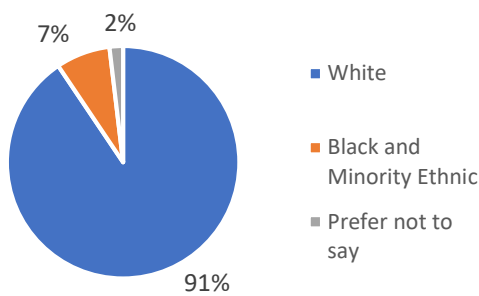
Figure 7. The relationship status of participants



Ethnicity

7% of participants involved in this study described themselves as of a Black and Minority Ethnic background.

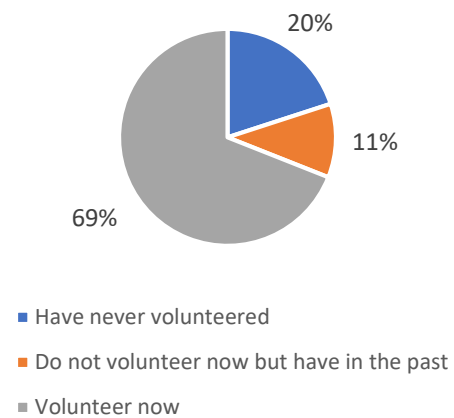
Figure 5. Ethnicity of participants



Volunteering

The majority of participants in this study currently volunteer in some capacity.

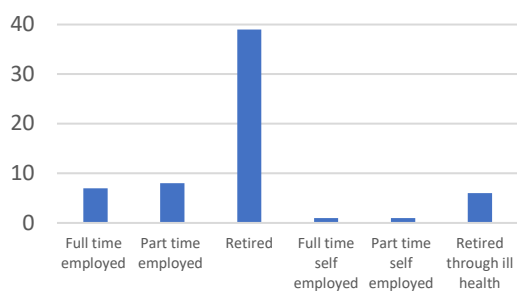
Figure 8. The number of participants who currently volunteer



Employment status

Most participants were retired, although some people were still in employment.

Figure 6. The employment status of participants



The research findings

Our findings about where people over the age of 60 volunteer and the roles they do

People volunteered at a broad range of organisations and undertook a large number of different roles, from reading with school children, administration, delivering activity sessions and working in charity shops to more executive roles such as trustee of charities, treasurer and school governor.

There was not one typical role for people over the age of 60. However, our findings indicate that being able to use existing skills and knowledge was an important factor in motivating volunteers and therefore it is recommended that volunteer managers take time to get to know potential volunteers and remain open about the potential roles people over the age of 60 could adopt.

Why do people over the age of 60 volunteer?

We asked participants why they volunteered.

SOCIAL INTERACTION and contact with others was a significant motivator for volunteers in both deciding to volunteer and to continue their volunteering roles.

SHARING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE was important for a number of volunteers with some noting that they wanted to use the skills they had to help others. Utilising their skills was also important to making volunteers feel 'useful and valued'. There was a sense that volunteering helps to "use my brain and imagination" and keep the volunteer active.

"I needed something interesting to think about and talk about."

FEELING VALUED for the contributions made to the organisation and feelings of usefulness were also a motivating factor for people over the age of 60 volunteering. This was particularly relevant for some people after retirement.

"I had time on my hands after work and wanted to do something useful with my free time."

Feeling valued by service users helped to motivate volunteers to continue in their roles.

GIVING SOMETHING BACK was also important to volunteers and was often a core motivator for people to start volunteering. Many volunteers had experience of the service as a service user prior to volunteering with the organisation and wanted to volunteer as they recognised the value of the organisation for others.

A PERSONAL CONNECTION was often a motivating factor for people to start volunteering. Some participants had been asked to help by a close friend. Others had had a close friend or family member use a vital service and had felt that they wanted to help after getting to know the work of the organisation.

"My wife and I have struggled with disabilities and wanted to help others not go through some of the same problems."

"With the music the friendship is a very important part of what helps me carry on volunteering."

Promoting Volunteering opportunities

There was a difference between how people who volunteer find out about volunteering activities and how people who do not volunteer find out about what is happening in the city. This has implications for how organisations promote their volunteering opportunities to people who do not currently volunteer.

WORD OF MOUTH is an important means of communication for both volunteers and people who do not currently volunteer. However, for people who are not well connected with other people who volunteer it can be difficult to find out about opportunities available. Therefore, organisations should not rely on word of mouth as the only way of promoting opportunities if they want to recruit new volunteers.

Equally, some people who volunteer found out about their volunteering opportunity by USING THE SERVICE or through DIRECT CONTACT with a member of staff or manager.

“I was asked to get involved by a member of the Church.”

On the other hand, people who do not currently volunteer said they were not aware of what volunteering opportunities were available. They are more likely to turn to sources such as LOCAL NEWSPAPERS, LOCAL RADIO, the INTERNET or SOCIAL MEDIA to find out what opportunities or activities are available locally. Some people who do not volunteer said they find out about what is happening in the city through friends at the pub.

These findings indicate that to recruit people who do not currently volunteer the organisation may need to promote opportunities in alternative places and make use of local and social media.

Barriers to volunteering for people over 60

Many people over the age of 60 have commitments that restrict the amount of time they feel able to commit to volunteering. The main commitment was CARING RESPONSIBILITIES, in particular looking after grandchildren.

A further barrier to volunteering is HEALTH PROBLEMS. In some cases, these are actual and current health problems, but other people do not feel able to commit to long term volunteering placements because of concerns that a health condition may prevent them from continuing in the future. This leads to some people feeling unable to commit to volunteering for fear of letting the organisation or the service users down.

“If my health deteriorated, I’d have to stop.”

PUBLIC TRANSPORT poses a further challenge to volunteers. For people without their own transport they are often restricted in which volunteering placement they can take due to long and time-consuming public transport journeys.

“If it’s a long journey, cancelled buses, getting soaked in the rain, it can be very off putting.”

Finally, some potential volunteers were put off by FEAR of the unknown and feeling that they would not be able to contribute anything useful to the organisation.

“Charities don’t always offer appropriate ways for some people to volunteer if they lack confidence.”

Supporting people over 60 to continue volunteering into the future

Many people are concerned that they will need to give up volunteering as they get older. They identified the following series of support measures that they felt would help to retain volunteers over the age of 60 for longer.

FLEXIBILITY is needed for many people over the age of 60 to commit to a volunteering opportunity. Flexibility in relation to the times people need to commit to and ensuring cover is available if a person is unable to attend a session due to a health condition or unexpected childcare are important factors for the recruitment and retention of volunteers over the age of 60. Support for people to adapt the role should health and wellbeing factors become problematic would also help to encourage more people over the age of 60 into volunteering. Equally, shorter term commitments would help more people over the age of 60 feel able to volunteer.

The **SOCIAL CONTACT** gained through volunteering is an important part of the experience and should be acknowledged. Recognise that volunteers are part of the wider team and ensure that they are communicated with and involved in the same way as paid workers.

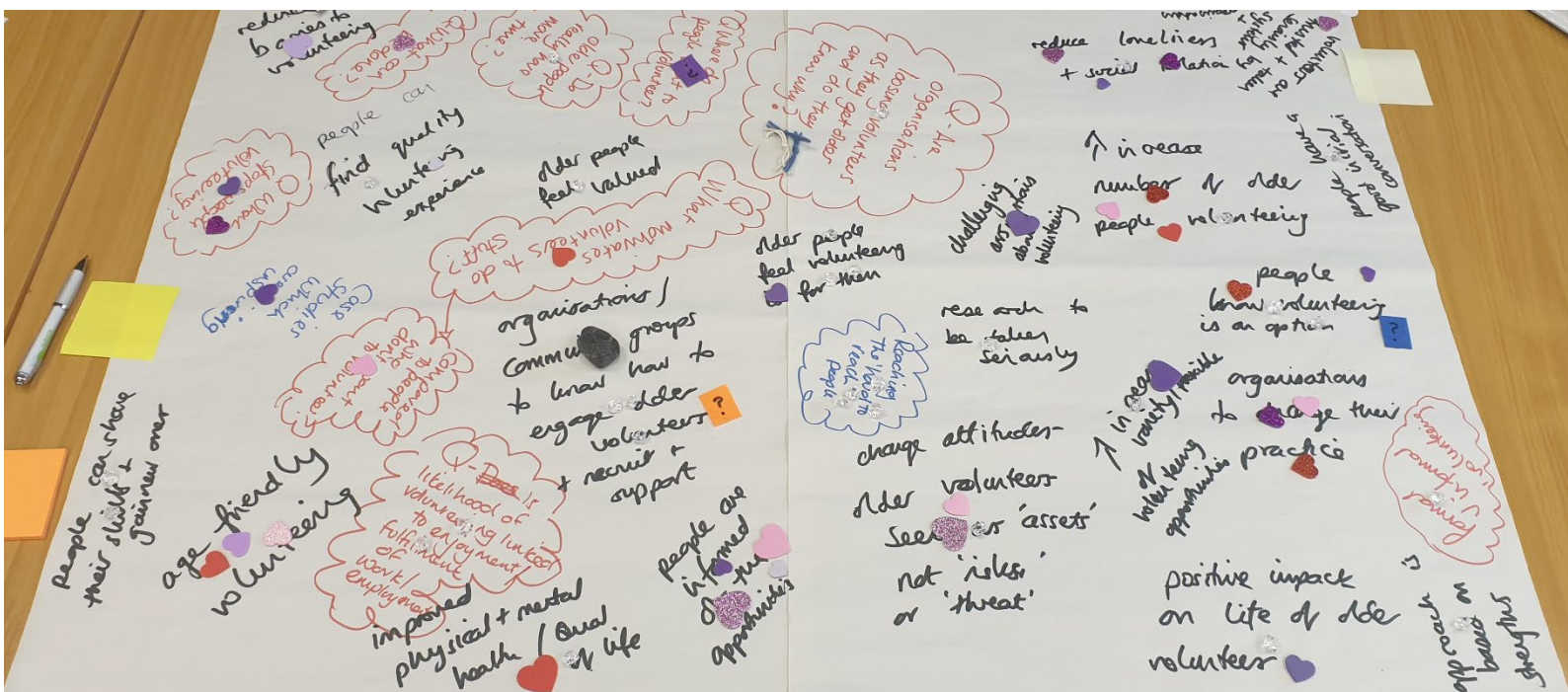
SKILLED VOLUNTEER COORDINATION is essential to volunteers feeling supported. Poor coordination and management of volunteers was given as a reason why some people would leave their placement. Skilled volunteer coordination involves clear and consistent communication, clear and negotiated roles and being available to discuss problems or support needs.

Using and gaining new skills is often a motivating factor for people to start volunteering. **TRAINING** is therefore essential to ensure that people feel confident and safe in their roles and is a way of 'giving something back' to the volunteer.

BEING THANKED AND FEELING VALUED is one way in which volunteers can be retained for longer. People said that a verbal or written thank you can help to increase motivation.

Finally, **ENJOYMENT, MAKING A DIFFERENCE AND FEELING USEFUL** will help volunteers to sustain enthusiasm and continue with their roles into the future.

“Be supportive and understanding. Do not assume all over 60s are the same.”



Conclusions

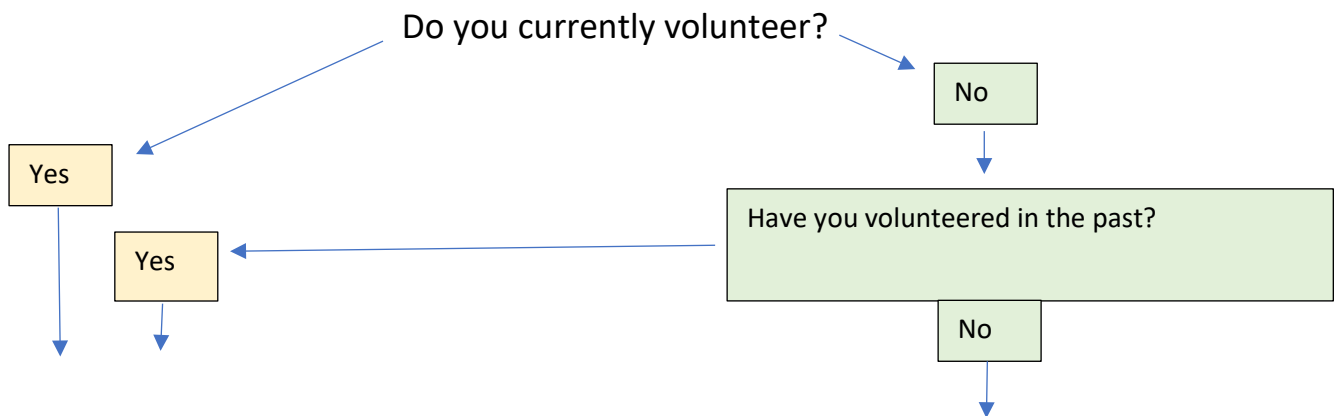
Through consultation with people over the age of 60 across Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire, community researchers concluded that inclusive volunteering opportunities that offer flexible volunteering opportunities are important factors in improving the experiences of volunteers over the age of 60. Equally, providing skilled coordination and opportunities for social interaction can help to attract more volunteers over the age of 60 and retain them once in post.

The team highlights a series of barriers to volunteering that organisations should bear in mind to help potential volunteers to overcome them, and a list of support measures which will help to better recruit

and retain volunteers. The research findings have been developed into a list of questions which organisations and volunteer coordinators can use to develop inclusive and accessible volunteering opportunities that are attractive to people over the 60. The list can be found in Appendix 3.

Appendix 1.

Improving volunteering for people over 60: Question prompt sheet



Volunteering

Where do you/did you volunteering?
 How long have you volunteered for?
 What do/did you do as a volunteer?
 What do you enjoy?
 What would you change?

Work

Did you/ do you work as well as volunteering?
 What did you/do you do?
 Do you/did you enjoy it?
 What did you like?
 What would you change?

Work/employment

Did you/do you work?
 What did you/do you do?
 Do you/did you enjoy it?
 What did you like?
 What would you change?

Finding out

How do you find out about what is going on around the city?
 How should organisations advertise their volunteering opportunities?

Motivations for volunteering

How did you get into volunteering?

How did you find out about it?

What motivated you to volunteer?

Do you feel valued as a volunteer?

How?

Support

What helps you to carry on volunteering?

What support do you receive?

Barriers

What gets in the way of you (or others) volunteering?

What is difficult about volunteering?

- Prompts: Individual barriers such as health
- Organisational barriers such as too little flexibility
- Wider barriers such as transport?

What do you wish you could change?

The future

What will you need to carry on volunteering in the future?

Barriers

What stops you (or others) from volunteering?

What gets in the way?

- Prompts: Individual barriers such as health
- Organisational barriers such as too little flexibility
- Wider barriers such as transport?

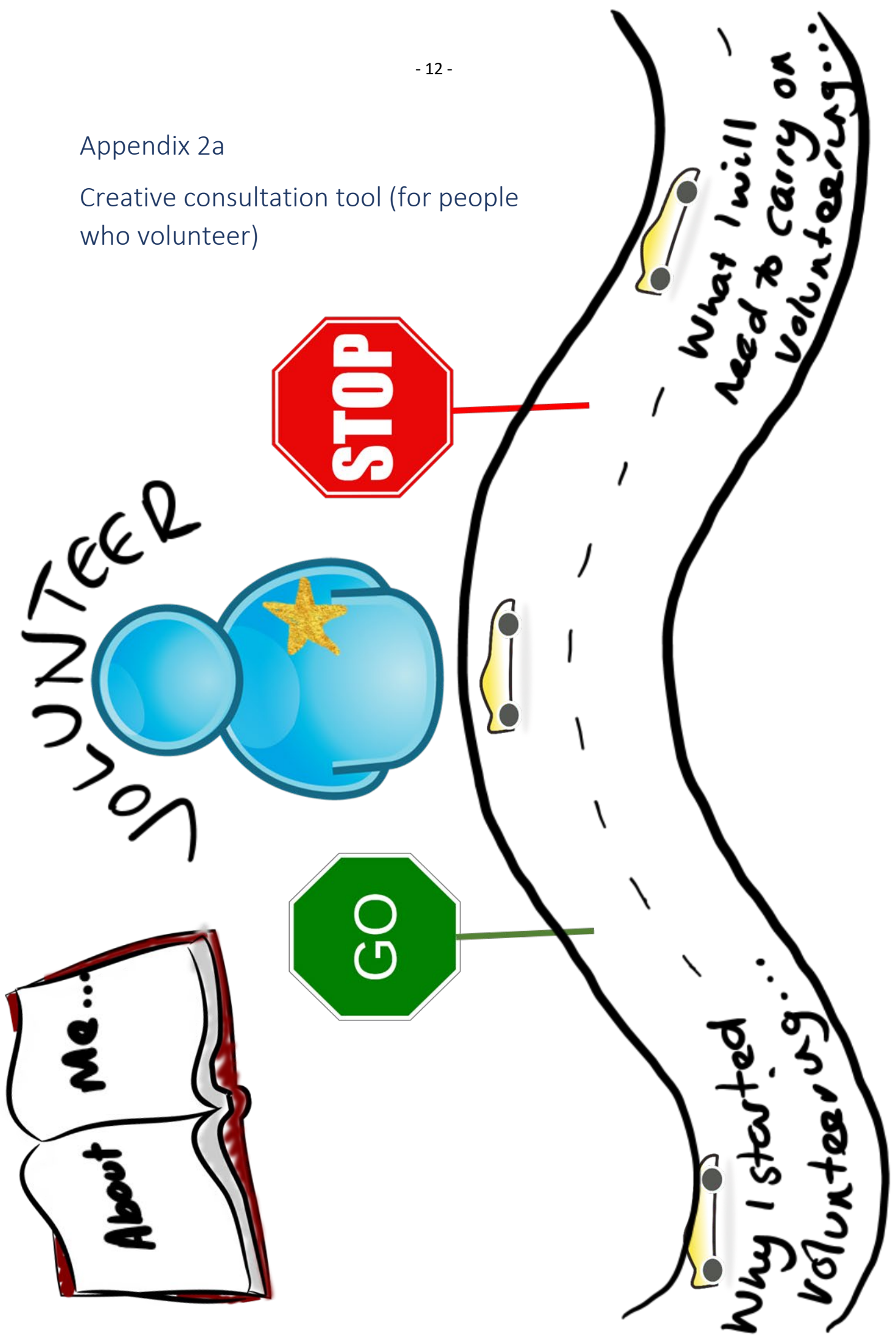
Support and information needed

What would attract more people over the age of 60 to volunteering?

What could organisations do to help people over 60 in volunteering placements?

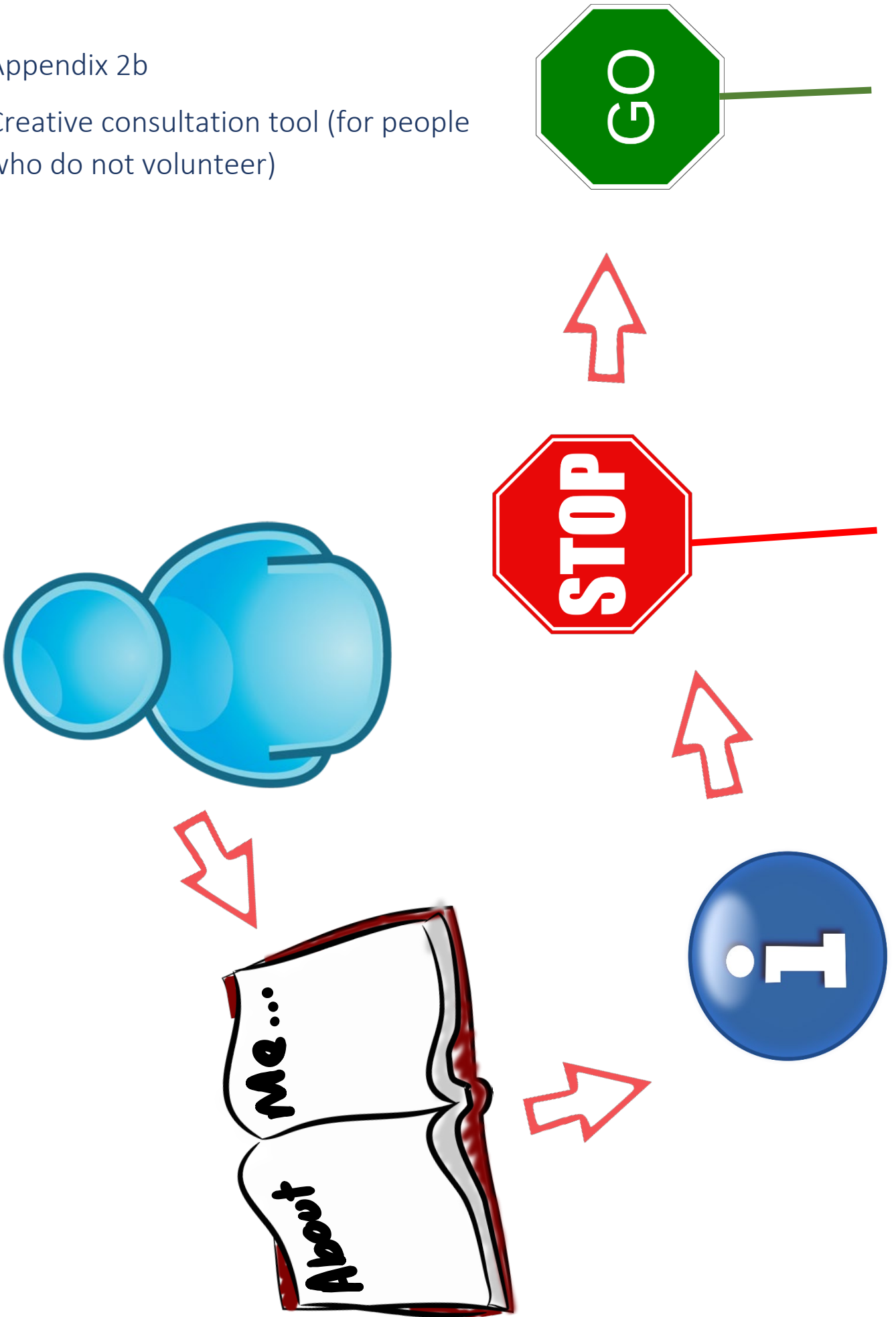
Appendix 2a

Creative consultation tool (for people who volunteer)



Appendix 2b

Creative consultation tool (for people who do not volunteer)



Appendix 3

Improving volunteering for people over 60

A list of helpful questions

THE ROLE

Are you clear about what you want the volunteer to do?

Are there tasks you have not considered?

Have you discussed the volunteer's interests, skills and past experiences with the volunteer?

What does the volunteer want to gain from their experience?

Have you conducted a risk assessment for the volunteering post?

Have you considered the additional resources you will need?

FLEXIBILITY

How flexible are your volunteering opportunities?

What happens if a volunteer is unwell or unavailable, eg due to caring responsibilities at home? How easy is it to get cover?

What can you do to make your opportunities more flexible?

ACCESSIBILITY

Are volunteers restricted in the times they are expected to volunteer?

How accessible is your opportunity for people without their own transport? Can you do anything to improve this?

Do you reimburse expenses? How easy is the process for volunteers to make an expenses claim? Can volunteers request upfront expenses?

How accessible are your volunteer opportunities for people with disabilities? Is there anything you can do make your opportunity more accessible?

Have you asked what support your volunteer needs? Is this reviewed on a regular basis?

VALUING YOUR VOLUNTEERS AND THEIR SKILLS

How do you welcome volunteers, both when they start volunteering with you and each time they arrive for their session?

How do you thank your volunteers?

Are you communicating regularly and providing feedback to your volunteers? How do your volunteers know how well they are doing?

How do you support volunteers who are struggling?

What training do they receive? Do they have access to training that is not immediately relevant to their roles?

Do you make opportunities for your volunteers to interact with each other outside of the work?

Do your volunteers have opportunities to share their own skills with others? How could you support them to do this?

How do volunteers know that they are making a difference?

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Have you got a clear and inclusive volunteer agreement that is adapted for each new volunteer?

Is it clear about what you expect from the volunteer?

Is it clear about what the volunteers can expect from the organisation?

For further information and support on making volunteering more accessible for people over the age of 60 please contact Vintage Volunteers on:

Telephone: (01782) 683030

Email: info@vintagevolunteers.org.uk

Website: <https://vintagevolunteers.org.uk>

NOTES

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