

# Wider Impact of Volunteering in Wolverhampton

*Does volunteering help create “Active Citizens” and increase “Community participation?”*

## Introduction:

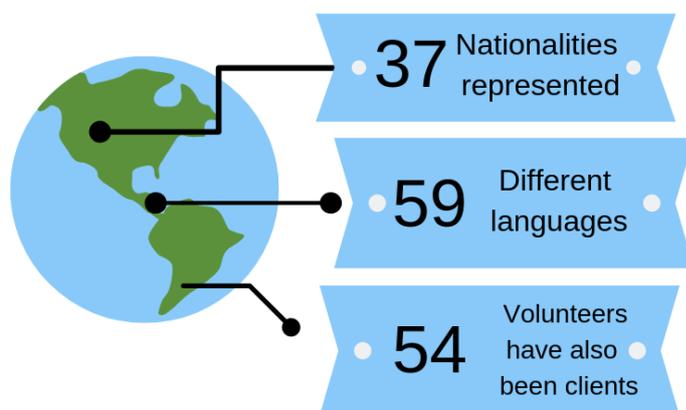
Wolverhampton RMC has received many accolades for the services it provides from its 3 sites in Wolverhampton, Walsall and Birmingham for asylum seekers, migrants and refugees (list egs) In this report we wish to focus upon another aspect of our work: the role volunteers play within the organisation and, importantly the effect volunteering has on their lives and activities within the local community. As part of our normal activities we have, as would be expected, recorded many aspects of the impact the organisation has on its volunteers and how they are able to grow and develop a wide range of skills. But given the wide diversity of our volunteers, we also wanted to see how their development affected the wider community and their involvement with it. This was in part a consequence of our wish to support Wolverhampton City Council’s Strategy for 2011-2026, which included in its key priorities the fostering of Active citizenship and increasing community participation. We also felt other organisations using volunteers would be interested in our findings.

To try to understand RMCs impact, we gathered ongoing data from our regular Volunteer Feedback, and our 2018 Volunteer impact report. We also distributed a one-off anonymous electronic questionnaire in which we asked our Wolverhampton volunteers to provide further feedback on the ways in which volunteering had impacted upon their lives, including the services they and their family used in the local area. Around half our 40 Wolverhampton volunteers responded to this additional survey.

## Who are our volunteers:

We are lucky to have a diverse and varied team of volunteers. From our overall impact report, our diversity is clear across our offices in Wolverhampton, Walsall and Birmingham.

175 different volunteers  
gave time in 2018

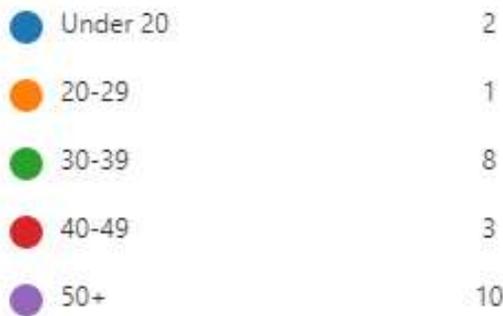
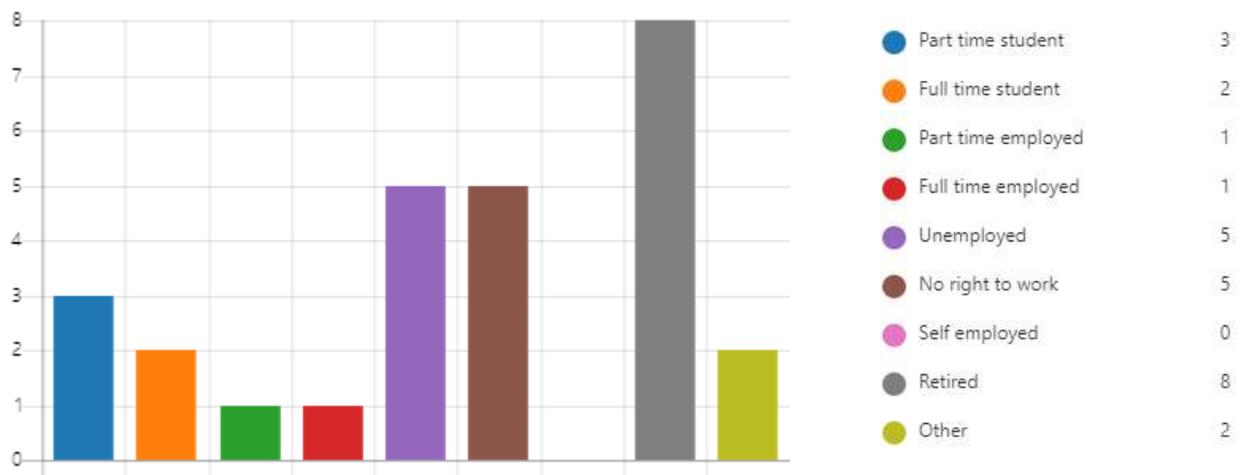


**23%** of volunteers in 2018 started as part of University/College placements, using volunteering as a chance to develop real world skills, develop further knowledge and enhance their education and future employability

**30%** of volunteers had been clients of RMC, being able to give back to the service, but also often develop their English language, their understanding of the UK systems and gain skills and work experience for future employment.

**14** Volunteers showed their skills well enough that they were hired for paid roles by RMC during 2018, with an overall 30.8% of our volunteers leaving due to gaining employment.

**Of those who were part of our specific Wolverhampton wider impact survey:**



*Most respondents (17/24) live in Wolverhampton with a range of length of time living here from Under 1 year (2 people), 1-3yrs (5), 4-10yrs (5) and over 10 years (5)*

## What our volunteers do:

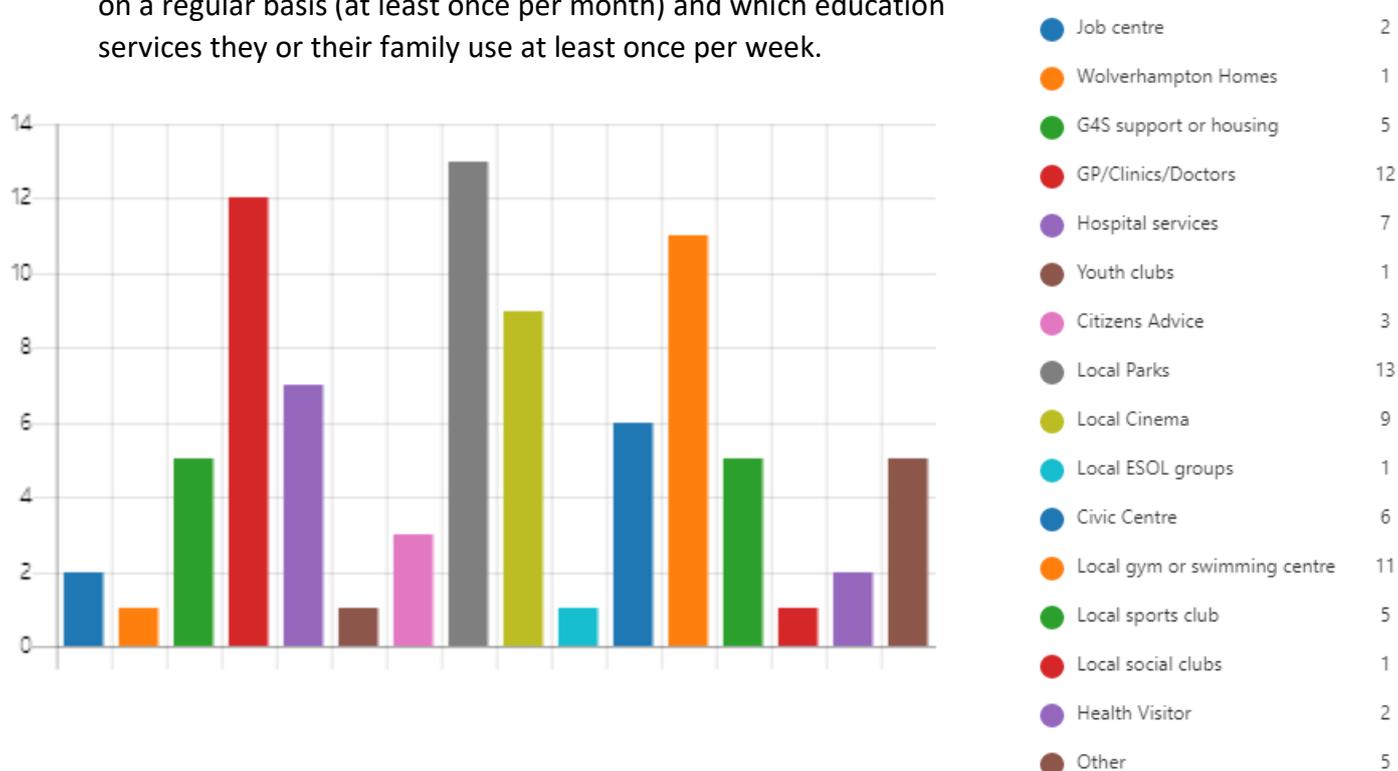
Volunteers at RMC have a wide range of ways to get involved depending on what they want to get from the experience. From Advisor volunteers – giving practical face to face advice and guidance, to Admin Volunteers – supporting more behind the scenes, they can develop a range of skills, all supported by our team.

All volunteers are given a mentor to work with and a range of training opportunities including: Mentoring, Administrative Systems, Safeguarding, Employability, Customer Service, Welfare & Benefits, OISC (immigration) as well as wider knowledge sessions on topics such as Domestic Violence, Police services, Asylum support, Suicide prevention & Modern day slavery. Many of these are open to our whole team of staff and volunteers.

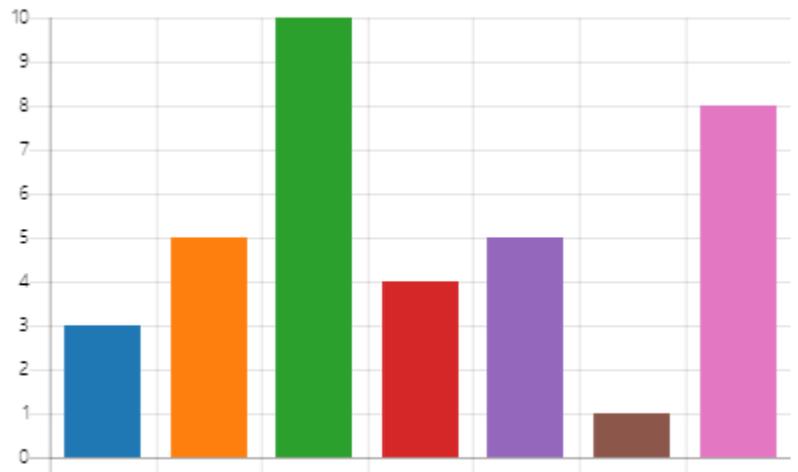
The Advisor volunteers across all 3 sites dealt with an incredible 13,350 enquiries in 2018, helping over 4,146 clients. This figure does not include our Employment, ESOL and other volunteers!

## The impact of volunteering:

The smaller, more detailed survey asked for more information concerning local service usage and ways in which participation in RMC activities has any impact on this. Our volunteers regularly use many of the local services within Wolverhampton, even if they do not live within the area. We asked them which services, they or their immediate family use on a regular basis (at least once per month) and which education services they or their family use at least once per week.



- University 3
- Adult Education 5
- Primary School 10
- Secondary School 4
- Further Education College 5
- Parent/teacher groups (once p... 1
- Other 8

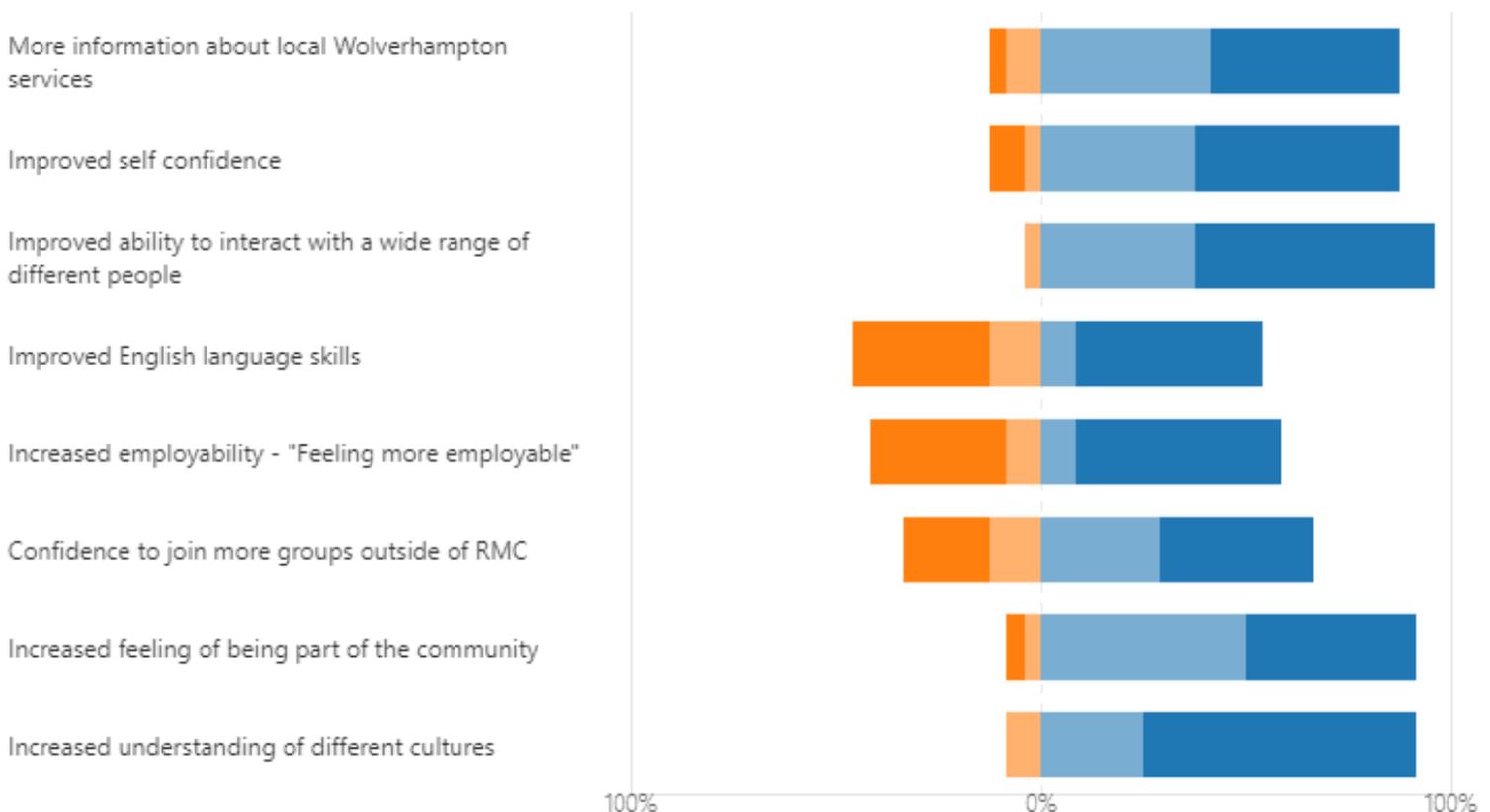


From this, we can see that our volunteers use a wide range of local services and are very involved in the community.

Of the 24 responses, nearly half (11) said that volunteering had directly increased their confidence or ability to access at least one of these services, clearly showing that volunteering has had a positive impact on the community and access to local services.

To understand this impact in more detail we asked further questions on the nature and strength of that impact:

- No impact
- Little impact
- Moderate impact
- Great impact



**This data clearly shows that by volunteering, our respondents have:**

- Learned more about local services
- Improved their confidence
- Grown in ability to work with different people
- Felt more a part of the community
- Understood more about other cultures

**There was mixed impact on several things such as:**

- Increasing language skills
- Increasing employability
- Increasing confidence to join more groups

With a diverse group of volunteers, this is to be expected, as many are retired, have lived in Wolverhampton for many many years, are clearly not looking for work and have English as their primary (and possibly only) language.

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## Impact on different types of volunteers:

These differing impacts were interesting and enabled us to develop a set of models showing differential benefits and community interactions. Clearly these ideal types can overlap but they do highlight the range of ways volunteer development can be explored.

- **Retired volunteers** – Volunteer to be able to help RMC and use the skills they already had. They gained a sense of being part of the community and increased their ability to interact with different groups of people. However, volunteering had no impact on their sense of employability, or their English levels.
- **Newer volunteers** (volunteering under 1 year) – 50% improved their confidence to access services due to volunteering at RMC, 70% improved their confidence to access education due to their volunteering and they scored highly on the impact measurements for almost all questions (*some of these were retired and therefore had lower impact on employability and English*)
- **Long term volunteers** (1+ years) – 35% improved their confidence to access services and education services due to volunteering at RMC and a lower impact on confidence to join other groups compared to new volunteers. Overall there was a good/great impact on their confidence, interactions with different people and cultural knowledge and (with a few exceptions) moderate/little impact on English ability, employability and knowledge of local services.
- **New to Wolverhampton** (under 3 years) – Excluding the 2 retired professionals in this category, all volunteers recorded Great impact on almost all questions.
- **Living in Wolverhampton over 4+years** – A majority recorded Moderate-Great impact on building on knowledge of local services, increase in confidence, working with a range of people, being part of the community and understanding of different cultures. However there was much less impact on confidence to join new groups, employability and English levels.

This modelling summarises a higher impact on newer volunteers and those new to the area, which is understandable as there will be many more new opportunities on arrival with the possible effect being less noticeable in a longer - term role. Even volunteers who have lived in the area are likely to discover new ideas, friends and places, but this impact is highly likely to lessen over time. Clearly skills such as employability and English level are much less likely to be developed with volunteers such as British retired doctors and solicitors who volunteer in order to use their existing skills to help others.

The findings are useful and show the importance of a range of induction and training strategies, such as development logs, which document aspects of skill development. These can be widened to include involvement and familiarity with community facilities and to celebrate existing skills in volunteers.

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## Community impact:

The above report shows that our volunteers are gaining valuable confidence, skills and knowledge as individuals but that these are also likely to provide clear benefits to other service providers as they increase their participation in the the local community. The following are some examples.

**Cost saving and health benefits** - Reports show that the NHS spends £64,000 per day on translation across the country, with a translator costing £22,191 per year currently. If our volunteers are increasing their English skills through volunteering, alongside their confidence to actually attend appointments, this will help reduce this costs while ensuring people are getting the support they need. This also links to our feedback that volunteers have started to use services like outdoor gyms and swimming pools having found out about them through RMC, which will increase overall health and wellbeing.

**Housing** - Many of our volunteers in G4S and Wolverhampton Homes housing reported an increase in confidence using these service, having volunteered at RMC where we support clients with housing issues and teaching people how to apply for, and manage their housing matters. With more people knowing the systems, it reduces time and costs for these organisations.

**Integration & Non-Dependency** – Volunteers are provided the opportunity to increase their own independence by understanding their own personal circumstances better with options to learn more about things such as Universal credit, something many of our volunteers will be on themselves. Alongside all of this, 79% said they had made friends through their volunteering that they meet with outside of volunteering, allowing for more social mixing, integration and sharing of knowledge.

**Increase in footfall to local services** - Volunteers also reported finding out about local services such as cinemas and with events at RMC that have collaborated with services such as the Lighthouse, Libraries, Wildside Activity centre etc. It puts more money back into the community and has increased the number of people accessing key city centre cultural attractions.

**Inclusion** -Through increasing social mixing, understanding of other cultures and providing community engagement offers such as “Meet the police”, VAWG sessions and Hate Crime Awareness sessions to our team, we also reduce the chance of things such as victimisation in the community, and hopefully increase the likelihood of reporting crimes in the area – a priority in the Community Safety and Harm Reduction Strategy from Wolverhampton council

**Increase in volunteering in the community** - Not only are people volunteering in the community by supporting RMC, many of our volunteers also volunteer elsewhere, using skills they develop with us, in those organisations (and vice versa). From our wider volunteer statistics, we find they are highly likely to recommend volunteering to a friend (9.55/10). For those we are unable to take on, we signpost to organisations such as the Volunteer Centre who can help find suitable opportunities to ensure those interested are engaged and involved

**Education** – Many volunteers came through RMC initially as part of a placement from universities, colleges and similar institutions. These volunteers get the same kind of impact as most new volunteers do, and get the 2 fold impact of using some of their knowledge and skills to help our clients and teams, but also take the skills they learn with us back to their classes and share the knowledge further. It also helps them build vital work experience and employability skills in order to gain future employment.

**Diversity in Volunteering** – As shown in our 2018 Impact report, nationally, diversity is a general issue in volunteering. According to the NCVO report: Time Well spent, from January 2019, volunteers are likely *“to be older, well-educated and from higher socio-economic groups”*

Within RMC, we are proud of our diversity and wide representation. RMC Volunteers in 2018 had an average age of 38, with the youngest being just under 18 and our oldest at 81. We had 33 different volunteers under the age of 25 and RMC has volunteers from a range of socio-economic groups. Many of our volunteers have an unsettled immigration status, some with No-Recourse to Public Funds, Limited leave to remain or currently Asylum Seekers awaiting a decision. Alongside this, we have trained doctors, Professors, Solicitors and Councillors. This all shows that our opportunity is accessible and open, giving those that may not feel volunteering is “for them” a chance to get involved, and often then go on to volunteer in additional other places.

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## Summary:

Our research indicates that volunteering with RMC does increase community engagement and active citizenship and is likely to occur in most valuable volunteering opportunities. With our unique diversity of volunteers, our inclusive environment allows those less confident to volunteer, to get involved and build the confidence, knowledge and skills to participate further in the community.

We also found that the benefits of volunteering can depend on your circumstances before starting, and the length of time you volunteer/length of time you have lived in the area. For example, retired professionals living in Wolverhampton for many years reported a much lower impact development on their employability and skills, but a great impact on their sense of being part of the community. We also believe that the sense of impact for long term volunteers can be lower, in part due to the fact they may have developed the skills/knowledge over a longer time or now held those skills for long enough there is a less personal sense of it being a new skill. This is not to say that there is no impact on this group, with many still reporting a great impact was had, but that the feeling of development may be less.

In addition to offering mentoring, training and the volunteering experience itself, it is safe to assume that having a diverse mix of volunteers would mean that many people would actually share the skills they came with, with other volunteers, creating a chance for people to feel more valued, showcase their skills and socially mix in order to do so. For example, having some of our volunteers support our Volunteer Solicitor, they will have gained additional knowledge as well as tips on working with people, while our solicitor is likely to gain new understanding from them.

**In an inclusive, engaging environment, where development is encouraged in equal measure to showcasing your existing skills it is highly likely that volunteering would help to create citizens more willing to engage in their communities. In an organisation set up to support newly arrived people, this would also add the addition of helping people discover new parts of the city, grow confidence to access services and improve English (where necessary) to do this. All of the above can help people into further education, employment or training opportunities, feel more comfortable working with a wider range of people, and feel a greater sense of belonging in their communities.**