
Canal & River Trust

A study into the economic and social value of volunteering to the organisation, to those who volunteer, and to wider society.

April 2021



The background

- The **Canal & River Trust's** research shows that spending time by water can make us feel happier and healthier; at a time when the UK is suffering from ever increasing rates of obesity, stress and declining mental health - compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic - the Trust believes it is uniquely placed to make a significant contribution to improving the wellbeing of millions of people.
- The Trust relies heavily on the work of its volunteers. The volunteers enjoy their roles, and there is no doubt that the work of the Trust would be impossible without volunteers. The question therefore is how we might best assess the economic and social value of this resource.
- To do this, State of Life conducted surveys, interviewed volunteers in person, and cross-referenced these findings with statistical information from existing research and large national datasets.
- **What follows is a summary of our findings and conclusions.**

“Even just walking along the canal, that’s good for your mental wellbeing - such a beautiful setting, great surroundings”

Tom, volunteer. Birmingham



Key findings: Wellbeing, satisfaction, anxiety

1. Trust volunteers display higher personal wellbeing statistics than the general sample of a similar age in the national comparison group.
2. Trust volunteers have **very similar and at times marginally higher scores than other volunteers in the national data** - demonstrating that Trust volunteers do experience the same wellbeing benefits as other volunteers.
3. We restricted the analysis to the subsample 'aged 65+ and retired / not working' in order to mitigate against any bias caused by the high proportion of older, retired people among Trust volunteers, as mentioned earlier.

	Trust volunteers (age 65+, retired)	Community Life (CL) aged 65+, not in labour force	CL volunteers aged 65+, not in labour force	CL volunteers (age 65+, not in labour force) weighted by IMD quintiles
Sample size (n)	124	1277	593	593
Wellbeing				
Life satisfaction - mean	7.56	7.41	7.7	7.75
Feeling worthwhile - mean	8.02	7.55	7.91	7.93
Happiness - mean	7.84	7.42	7.7	7.8
Anxiety - mean	2.33	2.91	2.97	2.91

Key findings: Dosage, Duration

- We compared the Trust sample to sport volunteers from previous surveys run by State of Life, as well as sport and non-sport volunteers in the national data.
- We find that the Trust sample is almost **twice as likely to be weekly volunteers**.
- **Trust volunteers are hard-working** - data from the Trust survey shows volunteers doing ca. 3.42 hours/week compared to 3.06 hours/week for sports volunteers.
- **Trust volunteer wellbeing increases with frequency of volunteering**, following the pattern of national data as discussed earlier.

Value of Volunteering with / to the CRT

The total social value of volunteering associated with the Trust is about £14.4 million per year.

Of this, £6.9 million is generated by volunteers with the Trust itself, and £7.6 million by volunteers with partner organisations. £5.2 million of the total value is due to the increased personal wellbeing of the volunteers themselves, and another £9.2 million is due to the benefits to society, estimated via a wage replacement method.

	The Trust volunteers	Partner organisations	Total
Total wellbeing value	£2,470,287	£2,682,026	£5,152,312
Total wage replacement value	£4,415,547	£4,794,022	£9,209,569
Total social value	£6,885,834	£7,476,048	£14,361,882

Findings: In summary

Volunteering is good for you. We find this particularly true for:

- people in later years of life
- people from lower socio-economic groups
- people who are unemployed
- people living with chronic physical health conditions
- people with lower levels of wellbeing.

Structured Volunteering, i.e. with the Trust is especially rewarding:

- Formal volunteering as part of a group (e.g. the Trust) is up to four times more significant in improving wellbeing.

Volunteering is good for community - local and national:

- Volunteering is good for society as it underpins the provision and delivery of many services that contribute to our quality of life – social care, preservation of the natural environment, heritage, sport, arts and culture.

Findings: In summary

As with other beneficial activities, e.g. sport and religious worship, volunteering is best done weekly:

- Volunteering with the Trust is at least as good as volunteering in general in terms of its benefits to wellbeing - and potentially a little more positive and on a par with sport volunteering.
- We find the wellbeing of Trust volunteers increases with frequency of volunteering, following the pattern of national data, with weekly being more beneficial for wellbeing.

Volunteering for the trust has a high, measurable impact on wellbeing and mental health:

- We find the difference in anxiety is particularly strong: Trust volunteers show lower anxiety than both non-volunteers and volunteers of a similar age and working status.

In pounds and pence, Volunteering for the Trust is extremely valuable to everybody:

- The total social value of volunteering associated with the Trust is about **£14.4 million per year.**