

# Reviewing Volunteering at HSU

July 2024

## Executive Summary

- Socialising/making friends, boosting career prospects, and learning new skills were the top motivations for wanting to volunteer as a student, which supports already established HSU research.
- Students want to volunteer for about 2 to 4 hours each week. This hypothetical set-up was favoured over longer sessions of volunteering less frequently. In the local community or in Sheffield city centre were the preferred locations for volunteering opportunities, agreed unanimously.
- Students were most interested in volunteering opportunities that involved children/young people or concerned disabilities, with over two-thirds of participants selecting each as a valid cause.

## Recommendations

- Efforts should be made to promote current volunteering opportunities through various channels such as course- or career-related opportunities via specific university staff. Having a page on Blackboard with information about the volunteering service would be extremely beneficial in boosting engagement.
- HSU volunteering services should offer adapted training sessions ahead of various opportunities, such as first aid training for some volunteering with older or vulnerable people.
- The volunteering services should introduce more flexible, accessible roles for students. Since students would prefer 'little and often' opportunities – shorter sessions but weekly – and in the local community or Sheffield city centre.
- Commitment to volunteering while studying should be recognised, and so HSU should reward students who participate with 'volunteering passports' that receive different 'stamps' or stages as students complete more hours. This would reward students for their commitment as well as quantify hours and efforts in a way that benefits their skills and employability.

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## Introduction

In an effort to boost engagement with the volunteering services at Hallam Students' Union, research was conducted to better understand the details of what students want to see from a volunteering opportunity during their studies. In collaboration with the volunteering team at HSU, initial questions concerned *what* students would want to do for a volunteering opportunity, and *how* students would want to do it.

For this project, students were contacted regarding involvement in the focus group (or workshop) who had never been involved with the HSU volunteering services. Both those that had engaged with the Students' Union services and those that had not were invited to register their interest in attending.

A workshop was held on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2024 at HUBS, with 12 students attending. There was a mix of engaged and unengaged students at a ratio of 8:4. There was an even split of international and UK students, so the demographic profile was representative of the wider SHU student body.

Participants were incentivised with a £15.00 payment for one hour of their time in-person at the workshop. On the day, however, as the session ran over an hour, and in agreement with the participants, the payment was increased to £20.00.

## Findings

The participants took part in multiple activities which concerned various dimensions of volunteering and what kind of offer would make students want to engage more frequently with volunteering opportunities.

### Why volunteer?

To begin the workshop, and as an icebreaker activity of sorts, participants (who were sat on different tables) were asked to discuss in groups the reasons why a student would or would not want to volunteer. The list below represents the themes identified by students as being reasons why students would volunteer:

- **Socialising/making friends** (mentioned by all 3 groups)
- **Building skills** (2 groups)

- **To feel good about yourself** (2 groups)
- **To feel part of a community** (2 groups): interestingly the individual who said this claimed volunteering would help other international students feel a part of the local community.
- **Looks good on CV** (2 groups)
- **Personal growth, time management, offering skills** (mentioned by 1 group)
- **Having a positive impact on the community** (1 group)

In terms of reasons for not wanting to participate in volunteering opportunities, the key themes were:

- **Not interested in volunteering**
- **It might interfere with studies**
- **Find it stressful/overwhelming**
- **No monetary benefit**
- **No recognition for volunteers:** when asked to elaborate they spoke about needing almost a reward or recognition to encourage the volunteer to “keep doing good” and to encourage others to join in.

In the Volunteering opportunity building task, when asked what students wanted to get out of volunteering, the results were synonymous with the icebreaker task (see Figure 1). The top three motivations for volunteering, or what students want to get out of volunteering generally seem to be **skills, personal fulfilment, and making friends/socialising**.

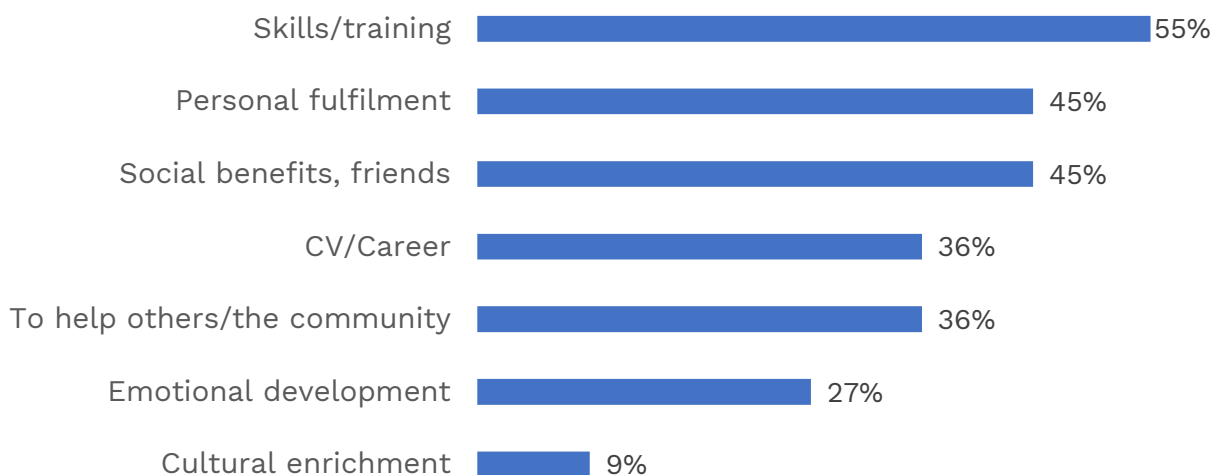


Figure 1: What do students want to get out of volunteering opportunities? (n=12)  
(NB: They were open-ended questions and so percentages will not total 100).

## When volunteer?

During the volunteering opportunity building task, students gave insights into how often and what times they would like to volunteer. Figure 2 represents how many hours per volunteering session students would like to see.

How many hours per session?	Count	%
1	0	0

2	4	40
3	1	10
4	3	30
5	1	10
6	1	10

Figure 2: How many hours per session students would like to volunteer for (n=10).

In terms of when students would like to volunteer, **at the weekend** or **in the evening** were both the most common, with 40% of participants choosing that time. One person did say daytimes in the week as well.

**60% of participants stated that they would ideally volunteer once a week.** 2 people said twice a week, one person said three times a month and another person said once a month.

### Where would students volunteer?

Students, when designing their volunteering preferences, outlined their preferences as well for where they would like to have their volunteering sessions. According to the students:

- 5 students said **in the local community.**
- 5 students said **in Sheffield City Centre.**
- 4 students said **virtually or from home.**
- 2 students said **at University or on Campus.**
- 2 students said **definitely not online.**

### What topics for volunteering?

Students were asked to indicate which specific themed volunteering opportunities they may like to partake in. Figure 3 represents the interest in each topic by percentage, and as one can see volunteering opportunities with children and young people, and about disability or disabled people were the two most popular themes, with 67% of students choosing them.

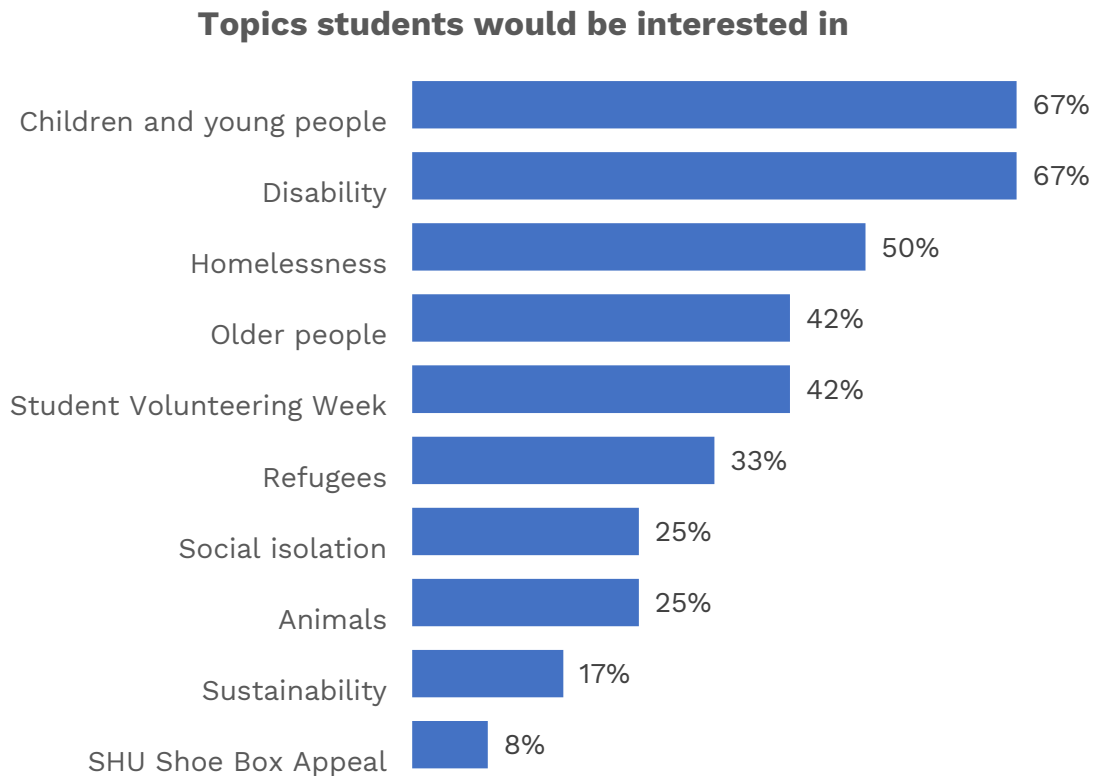


Figure 3: Students' Interest in various themes for volunteering (NB: They allowed for multiple answers so the percentages will not total 100).

### How can HSU help?

Towards the end of the workshop, participants were asked to discuss in small groups about the ways in which HSU can help get more students involved in volunteering opportunities. The main themes that they spoke about were:

#### **Raising awareness of current volunteering opportunities:**

The most prominent theme concerned students' awareness of HSU's volunteering opportunities and the volunteering service more generally. Many spoke about the need for targeted emails or promotion of specific volunteering opportunities through course and department chains, especially opportunities that are course related. Two of the participants mentioned that they believe lecturers should promote volunteering opportunities to their students.

When discussing promotion of volunteering opportunities, one mentioned in a group discussion about Blackboard:

*"I see that for different people the marketing of volunteering works differently. So I believe like if it was on Blackboard and there is just like little tabs that show you what's going on now. I think students log on there during term time almost every day. It actually gives us a chance to see that. And it will reach probably more with big outlet and a bigger audience."*

Many others agreed with these comments, arguing that Blackboard or a specific software or mobile app for HSU volunteering may attract a larger audience. This

arose initially when a student suggested volunteering opportunities being promoted via the career's services, so that information about skills-boosting or CV-enhancing volunteering can be distributed to students accordingly.

Participants were asked about how they would like to find out about volunteering opportunities, to which one student remarked:

*"I wouldn't recommend posters because when there was an election for... what was it for? The president of the union. Yeah. They would all kind of look the same. It's just the same old everywhere. And if our lecturers promote things that are going on locally, we can help out."*

### **Rewards and recognition:**

Participants discussed rewards and recognition for taking part in these volunteering opportunities. In small groups, the participants spoke about potentially getting awards or certificates for the best volunteers. One group spoke about a ceremony to "give thanks to the volunteers" and encourage them to keep doing good.

Another group said that instead of a reward there should be greater recognition for volunteers' efforts. One student suggested a volunteering 'passport' where the students get 'accreditation' or stamps for the number of hours of volunteering they do.

Another point worth noting is that socialising or making friends as a result of volunteering seemed like it could be a central 'reward' to consider. As research shows, friendships and socialising are often being sacrificed or foregone by students due to the cost-of-living crisis, and so pushing volunteering as an opportunity to do good and make friends may be a potential branding direction.

### **Training sessions:**

A few students spoke as well about how they would be drawn to volunteering opportunities if there were certain training courses provided by HSU prior to beginning. For example, one student suggested first aid training and many others agreed that this would be a good incentive.

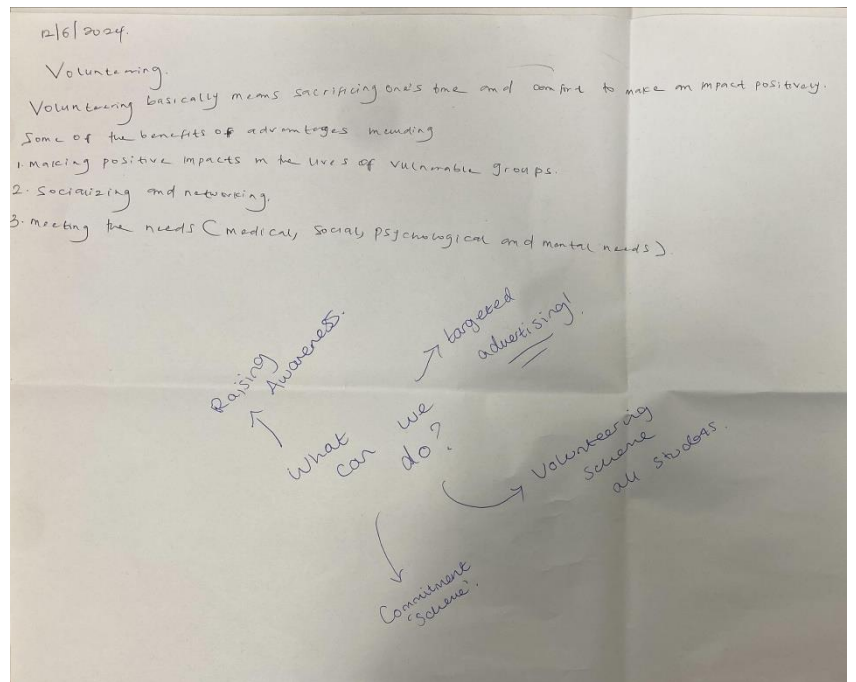
## **Conclusions**

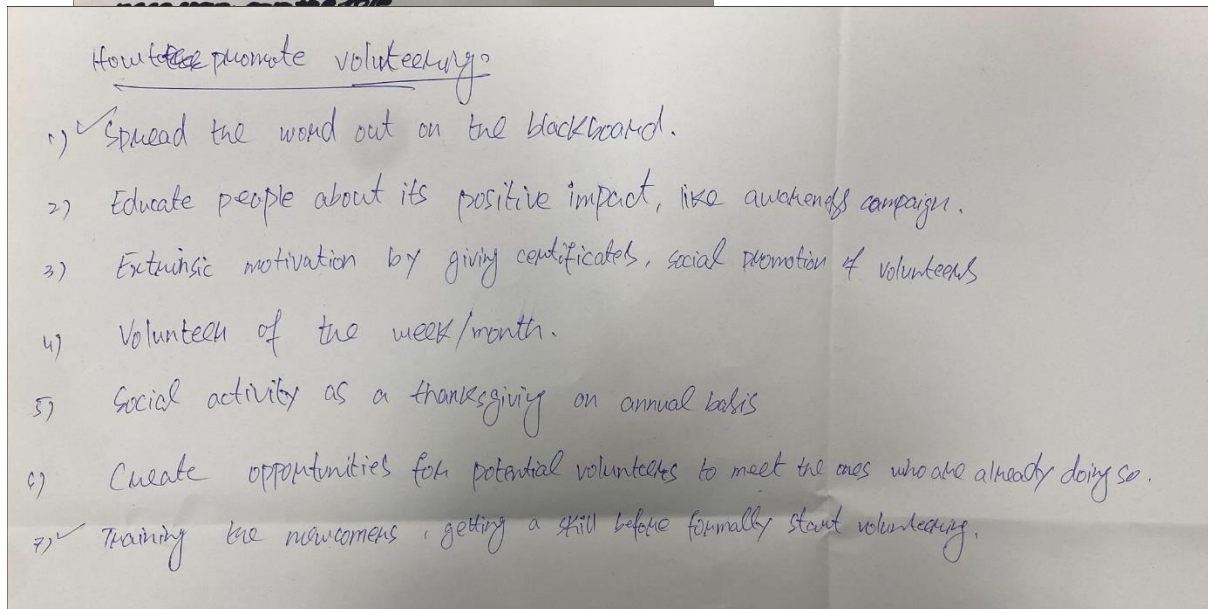
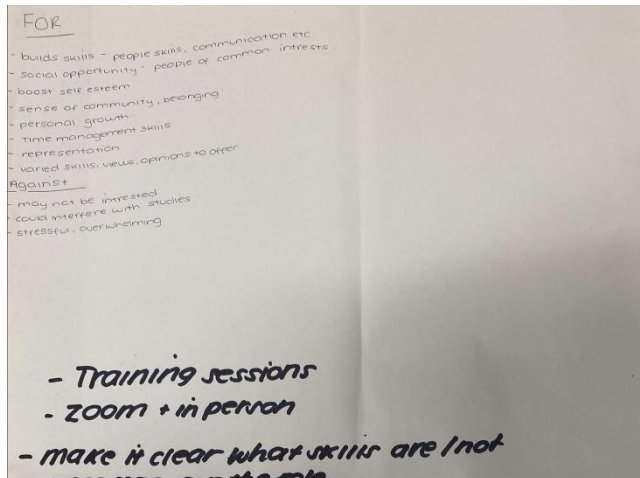
The shape of volunteering for students at Sheffield Hallam has changed, and so the way that HSU promotes and offers volunteering opportunities must also change with it. Students want to volunteer little and often – about 2 to 4 hours per week – and they want to volunteer in the local community. As previous HSU data suggested, this research has confirmed that the most important motives for volunteering for students is to boost career prospects, learn new skills, and socialise. This was further reinforced when students agreed they would rather hear about volunteering opportunities through careers' advice services or teaching staff.

Students agreed that they were, on the whole, unaware of the opportunities on offer from the HSU volunteering service. Members of the workshop spoke of how Blackboard could be used to distribute information about the services and opportunities available, since it is accessible and central to the student experience.

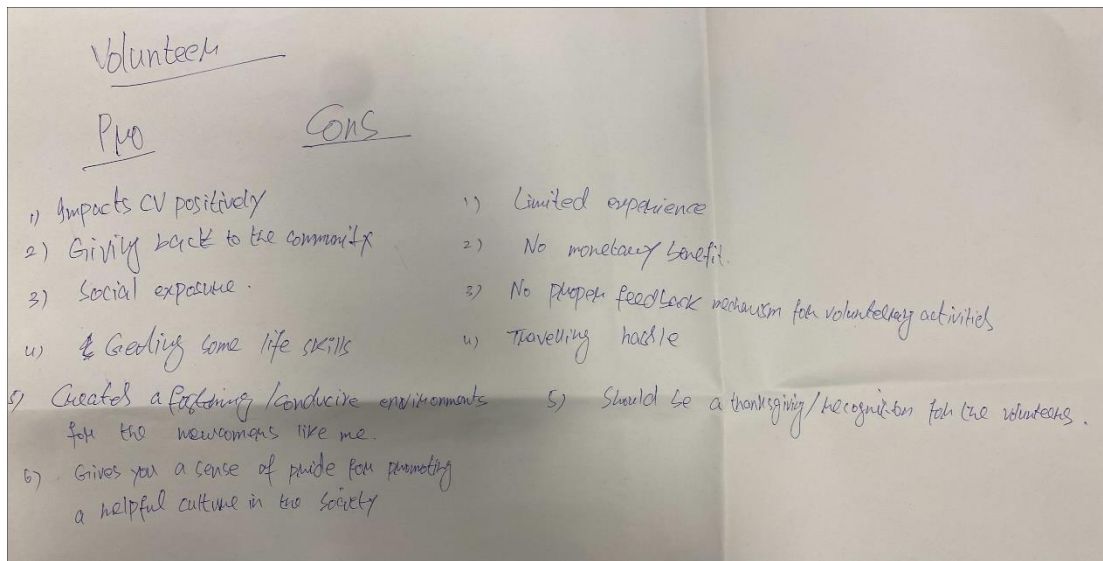
## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Notes made by participants in the group discussions









Appendix 2 – 'Build Your Own Volunteering Opportunity' completed worksheet

**H** Hallam Students' Union

### Build Your Own Volunteering Opportunity

<p><b>What?</b> Cleaning garden for older people          What kind of cause is it for?          Related to your course?          What will you be doing on the day?          Clean the garden for old people.          Mow the garden, take-out weeds, and          (pressure wash) pavement.          clean the</p>	<p><b>When?</b>          How often? Once a month, house          Daytimes? Evenings?          How many hours? 2 hrs.</p>	<p><b>Where?</b>          In Sheffield? At Uni?          In your community? In the community of older          From your home? Computer? people.</p>
<p><b>Why?</b>          Why is this important to you?          Why these times and locations?          Seeing a nice and clean garden          relaxes people. It's like grounding.          Helping the older people and          it helps the community look          clean and nicer.</p>	<p><b>What do you want to get out of it?</b>          What skills? Or experience?          Or friends? Doing the garden relaxes me          and its grounding, and its helping          the older people who cannot do          the garden themselves.</p>	<p><b>Would your friends, course mates, or other students volunteer if this opportunity was available?</b> I am not sure, but with my course as a Chemical Engineering student, they might not as they'd rather do their own, instead. but if they know someone who is older needs it, they might.</p>