

**An exploration into the motivations, barriers, and benefits associated with volunteering among final year full-time undergraduate students.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study aimed to explore the experiences and opinions of full-time final year undergraduate students who participate in volunteering activities in Ireland. The research examined and analysed the motivations that drive student volunteering, the barriers inhibiting participation, and the benefits of volunteering engagement. The data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews on six suitable participants which was subsequently examined using thematic analysis. The findings of the research suggested that the main motivation for students to volunteer was based on the development of career opportunities and enhancement of employability. Additional motivational factors identified in the study included; creating a positive impact on society, and the opportunity to learn and develop new skills and qualities. Lack of time was cited as the core restricting barrier which inhibited the students from participating in volunteering. The study also acknowledged that inexperience due to the young age of the students, and financial constraints were two further barriers emphasised by the participants in the study. The most important benefit to students was undoubtedly the sense of increased satisfaction and happiness, stemming from a positive impact created on society. Further benefits discovered in the study included the positive impact volunteering has on the students college course content, and the development of valuable contacts for future use. The research found differences and similarities between the experiences of final year undergraduate students and other groups who volunteer in society. It is vital to acknowledge the outlook and viewpoint of students and take action in response to their experiences and opinions of the volunteering sector in Ireland. They represent an important and influential group in society and it is imperative to conduct further research in

the area to maximise the potential of students and increase the amount of volunteers participating in the area.

1.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### 1.1 Introduction:

The topical and current issue of volunteering is an area in society that has been highly contested and discussed in recent years. Current revelations presented by the media on charitable organisations has raised awareness of issues and problems that exist within them and has put increased pressure on those who specialise in the field of volunteerism to investigate further by conducting additional research that will benefit the sector. The concept of volunteering is diverse and there are many complex divisions and types of volunteers and charitable organisations in society today. The motivations, barriers, and benefits are core principles that have attracted examination and research in recent times. As a final year Social Science student, volunteerism invokes personal interest, and the idea of an individual offering their services without financial gain to help others in society is intriguing. Youth volunteering is a recent phenomenon that appeals to researchers in the field of volunteering. University students, specifically final year undergraduates are a group in society that can influence and impact the sector enormously and become role models in their communities. This reason, together with many other personal motives is why this interesting and inspiring area has been chosen as the topic for this research project.

### 1.2 Development of volunteering:

In order to obtain a deeper understanding of volunteering it is important to explore the meanings and significance it has in society and how its definition has evolved and developed over time. The study of volunteering is extremely vast. It has been thoroughly explored and examined, thus developing many theories, opinions and policies. Individuals across the world

give up freely and generously of their own time, energy and skills to provide support, help and assistance to people and groups in society who require it.

Over time, the definition of a 'volunteer' has changed, developed and evolved to meet and coincide with the ever-changing structure of society. Volunteering has long been a tradition in Ireland; however it did not earn academic or political attention until recent decades. A study conducted by the Citizens Information Board exploring the roles and contributions of volunteers in Ireland revealed that "volunteering was an inherent part of the way in which communities in Ireland functioned and sustained themselves" (Prizeman, O'Regan, Donoghue & McGee, 2010, p. 18). Traditional elements key to volunteerism included providing a service to someone or something beyond oneself, a willingness to donate effort and time without payment, contribution of time and effort that goes beyond one's normal responsibilities. However, in more recent years these ideas have been expanded upon. Now, most definitions of the word describe the individual who volunteers as a person who engages at one's free will, offering their time, expertise, and effort for a good cause. Similarly, all definitions include the absence of payment for the individual's efforts. (Toman & Leichtman, 2010). The development of a recent and more contemporary definition of volunteering has broadened the traditional concepts, yet it is still centred on the traditional ideas. These new concepts of volunteerism include the acknowledgement that volunteering not only benefits those who are on the receiving end, but also those who provide the service. Although it may seem straightforward, defining volunteering can be a complex task. Toman & Leichtman (2010) draw on the definition that describes volunteering as "choosing to act in recognition of a need, with the attitude of social responsibility, and without concern for monetary profit, going beyond one's basic obligations". Wilson (2000) defines volunteering as "an activity in which time is given to benefit another person, group or cause". He sees volunteering as a

‘cluster of helping behaviours, entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance but narrower in scope than the care provided to family and friends’ (Wilson, 2000, p. 1). Toman & Leichtman (2010), comment on how Volunteer England has identified four main principles that help guide the definition of volunteerism. These four principles state that; it is the volunteers choice what activity they engage in, equal opportunity to all individuals, both the recipient and volunteer should benefit, and that the effort of the volunteer should be recognised.

In recent times the division of volunteering into two types, formal and informal, has also further developed the definition of volunteering. “Tipping the Balance”, a report conducted in 2002 on volunteering in Ireland, stated that “formal volunteering relates to voluntary work done with or through an organisation. “Informal volunteering, on the other hand, refers to voluntary work done by the individual at her or his own behest and not through an organisational setting, but not for a relative and unpaid”(National Committee on Volunteering, 2002, p. 6). There has been an increased involvement and interest in formal volunteering in society and this has allowed extensive research to be conducted in the area. The difficulty in obtaining a standard and conclusive definition of volunteering highlights how broad and complex the area of volunteering is. It is evident however that volunteering plays a significant role in providing a service that offers support and assistance to people and groups who require it.

### 1.3 Value of a volunteer:

The value of volunteering to society and the economy is difficult to gauge and measure but it is evident that the volunteering sector is of significant worth and importance. Organisations and projects around the world rely heavily on volunteers to ensure the continuation of

services and support for people less fortunate in society. Volunteer Ireland highlighted on their website that “between January 2010 and May 2012, volunteers registered with the organisation contributed 1,037,069 hours of their time at a value to the economy of €22.7 million” (Volunteer Ireland, 2014). Research in the United States of America also showed that over 63 million people engaged in volunteering at least between 2008 and 2009, representing over 26% of the overall American population. It is evident that volunteering is a dominant aspect of society across the world. Helping others is an important part of life for many societies, with “high schools and colleges, companies and businesses, social fraternities examples of groups that encourage volunteering and community service activities” (Michalos, 2010, p. 25). The broad spectrum of potential volunteers creates a diverse team of people with different and unique skills, qualities and ideas that offer an invaluable contribution to others in society who require the assistance and help. It is vital to take advantage of volunteer skills, by matching volunteers carefully to specific jobs that will best suit their skill set. Immediate orientation, training, supervision and evaluation all improve volunteer sense of worth in organisations, and in turn will improve professionalism and work rate. These measures will enhance further the value of volunteers to society.

Youth volunteering is an area that has become increasingly prevalent, especially in recent years. The value of younger volunteers to society is enormous, particularly in modern times with the variety of skills, qualities, and educational attainment that this group possess. A report entitled “Lending a Hand” conducted a study on people aged between 15- 25 in Ireland, to develop a clearer understanding of young people’s attitudes and experiences of volunteering. This qualitative study explored the value and worth of volunteering to society. It highlighted that multiple benefits are available to society when young people participate in volunteering. In the study, “volunteering was recognised for the role that it plays in providing

young people with positive role models and in helping these young people to build confidence and sense of belonging” (O’Connor, 2011, p. 23). These results clearly portray the important and dynamic role of young volunteers in our society and the positive impact they can make on the lives of others.

#### 1.4 Predictors for volunteerism:

The literature in the field of volunteering has extensively analysed and investigated the predictors for volunteerism. It is important to know how the different life circumstances and situations of people can impact on whether they may participate in volunteer work. In an article by Wilson (2000) the author looks at the predictors of volunteering. These predictors have a major impact on whether or not people volunteer, and the reasons why they do so. Levels of education, employment, social networks and family relations all play a vital role in volunteerism.

Wilson sees education as the most consistent predictor of volunteering. Education improves an individual’s awareness to community and global problems, increases empathy, helps develop self-confidence, and as a consequence, those who have received an education are more likely to be asked to volunteer or be friends with a person who volunteers. Educated individuals are involved with and belong to a higher number of organizations and develop more civic skills, which can further influence rates of volunteering. Similarly, children of parents who volunteer are more likely to have higher levels of knowledge about volunteerism, and as a result can inherit their parent’s volunteering habits. Research generated in the “Tipping the Balance” study reinforces the idea of educational attainment acting as a predictor for volunteer participation. The research highlighted a positive association between educational attainment and volunteering. Those who completed the

primary cert, the lowest form of attainment were the least likely to participate and showed the largest decrease in volunteer participation over the survey years of 1994 to 1998. In contrast the participants in the study who had obtained third level qualifications showed a much higher involvement rate in volunteering (National Committee of Volunteering, 2002, p. 17).

Employment also plays a vital role towards prediction volunteering involvement. Although it may sound like a contradiction, those who are in part-time and full-time employment are more likely to take part in volunteering than those who are unemployed. This is caused by the social integration achieved by those who work, which in turn can encourage volunteering. Having a full-time job can also teach organizational skills and boost self-confidence. Organizational memberships and extensive social networks both increase the chances of taking part in volunteer programmes (Wilson, 2000). Similarly social networks and ties help us generate a sense of trust, and trust then helps influence individuals to take the step forward and volunteer. The development of this literature has impacted the area of volunteering. Predictors of volunteer participation help to show the type of people who volunteer, and provides the framework and foundation for the motivations behind why individuals choose to undertake voluntary work.

### 1.5 Motivations:

The literature on volunteering clearly highlights the value the sector is in society. It is evident that people are constantly offering themselves freely to help others. A question that has been continuously explored is why people volunteer? What motivates people to generously donate their time and energy and volunteer? Volunteering is something that should create opportunities to improve the lives of all involved. It should create a sense of nourishment to mind, body and spirit, and create reward that goes far beyond a kind of physical monetary

supplement. The desire and motivation to volunteer may be influenced by a number of different reasons. It may be influenced by personal satisfaction, academic credit, desire for leadership skills and training, openings for careers exploration or potential for future employment. Individuals can also build self-esteem, gain valuable knowledge, foster personal growth and discover new talents when volunteering. Volunteering opens many opportunities for the individuals involved, for example developing skills, enhancing employability, and increasing social awareness. (Holdsworth & Brewis, 2014)

A report conducted by Volunteer Ireland explored the motivations of volunteers and organisations. It found that “individuals volunteer for a complex variety of reasons, including: cultural reasons, integrating into a new locality, work experience/career development, initiating and maintaining social contact, feeling part of a movement, filling time, wanting to have an impact, giving back something etc” (Volunteer Ireland, 2011, p. 21)

The reason behind what motivates a volunteer to participate has been of notable interest to researchers, and has been shown to consist of complex factors including altruistic, egoistic and social motives. One of the commonly cited scales used to assess motives for volunteering is the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI). This VFI identifies six functional motives for volunteering. Francis (2011) summarizes the VFI scale as follows;

Values: express and act on humanitarian or altruistic tendencies, Protective: protect the ego from negative features of the self and negative feelings, Enhancement: develop and expand the positive aspects of one’s ego, Understanding: learn and practice life knowledge, skills and abilities, Career: develop, prepare and maintain career related skills, Social: be with friends and do something important that others view favourably (Francis, 2011, p. 2,3.).

In general, youth motivations are found to be similar to that of adult motivations, in that the common themes of helping others, recognition and social interaction all come to the surface. However, for youth volunteers some motives proved to be more important than others. These motives included self-actualization, peer pressure and socialization to pro-social behaviour. In a study by Leventhal et al (2008) a sample of 47 volunteers were studied in relation to their motives to partake in volunteering. From the study, two main groups were generated; adult volunteers (19 and above), with a mean age of 27, and youth volunteers (12-19) of which the mean age was 17. Although the 19 and above age group is present as '19 and up', one could consider these participants as university aged individuals. This study presented multi-leveled and complex motives as to why the participants engaged in voluntary work. The most important of their motives was the combination of altruistic and egoistic factors. "86% of the participants agreed that volunteering 'made them feel good about themselves', while 70% of youth volunteers agreed that volunteering would help them in the future" (Leventhal et al, 2008, p. 840). A similar study was conducted by Holdsworth (2010) where 3083 students from six different universities around the UK were researched. From this study, the researchers found that three main motivational factors influenced the student participants. These factors were Employment, Skills and Enhancing Learning, Personal Values, and Opportunities to Volunteer. The researcher noted, however, that none of these presented a fully sufficient or complete reason as to why volunteers participate, but often participants displayed more than one, sometimes three or four different motives to volunteer. For some students, the opportunity to improve employability was the main reason for their initial involvement in volunteering, as was the opportunity to improve their CV. One particular participant, Liam, stated that

It was kind of, it was kind of a CV bump up but also like you know doing something good, so it was a win/win kind of thing (Holdsworth, 2010, p. 428).

From Liam's statement, it is clear that volunteering is not solely motivated by one particular reason, yet instead he is motivated by a number of interconnected motives. It is apparent that Liam is motivated by the possibility of improving employability, while at the same time realising that volunteering gives him the chance to do something worthwhile. For other students in the study, their motives for volunteering were more specifically aimed towards employability. Some participants entered volunteering as a means to experiencing certain professions, while others began volunteering to develop specific skills rather than looking for an improvement on their CV. However, the idea of improving employability was not of ultimate importance to some students. It was recognised by the participants that volunteering could benefit their CV and future employment opportunities, but for some this was an unintended benefit. One of the participants, Nina, stated that,

I guess it sort of indirectly helps you in a way... But that's not why I'm doing it. I think it's not something just to put on my CV (Holdsworth, 2010, p. 428)

Volunteering does hold an obvious opportunity to gain experience in a given subject area. This can be seen in a study carried out by Kritzungner & Pillay (2010). In this study, a volunteer programme for undergraduate psychology students was researched and analysed. From this study, the researchers found that,

96.2% reported improved understanding of psychopathology, 98.1% noted increased knowledge of the mental health care system, 86,8% reported

increased interest in clinical psychology, and 47.2% felt less anxious about working with persons with mental illness as a result of the programme (Kritzinger & Pillay, 2010, p. 873)

While the ‘CV bumping’ and future employment benefits are associated with student motives to volunteer, other factors, such as personal value, and skill-related factors were more closely linked to their motives to volunteer. Similarly, a report by The National Youth Council of Ireland called “Lending a Hand” revealed that “job and career development, while a significant motivational factor, is not the most influential lever to involvement on volunteering” (O’Connor, 2011, p.9) In the same the report, the reasons for volunteering were explored and divided into four categories, the first being the most influential. In category one “the most frequently cited and more importantly, the most strongly emphasised reasons for involving oneself in volunteering were a connection to and belief in the underlying cause, being asked to get involved, a peer or family connection to volunteering, a desire to help and experience in results following the volunteers contribution of time and energy” (O’Connor, 2011, p.28). Reviewing the relevant literature develops a deeper insight and understanding of the different motivations that drive people to volunteer. Each volunteer may have their own reason or personal motivation to become involved in volunteer work and the sources highlighted above demonstrate how each motivational factor is important, with volunteers generally indicating that they are motivated to volunteer for a combination of reasons.

## 1.6 Benefits:

The motives and benefits of volunteering are closely interlinked and connected. Generally, the motivation to volunteer will result in a benefit for the volunteers themselves. The benefits achieved from volunteering can be understood as “the achievement of motives and unanticipated rewards that emerge during the volunteer experience” (MacNeela, 2008, p.132). In a study by Borgonovi (2008), the author looks at the relationship between volunteering and health and happiness. Borgonovi recognises that there is a strong link between volunteering and improved health and well-being, and identifies this as a possible key benefit for engaging in volunteering. The results of this study indicate that volunteering is strongly related to increased happiness and improved health and this generally has a positive impact on the participants. The study found that

People who volunteer for religious groups and organizations are 6% more likely to report being very happy than people not volunteering with similar socio-economic characteristics... people who volunteer for a secular group are 4% more likely to be in excellent health and 9% more likely to report being very happy than similar non-volunteers (Borgonovi, 2008, p.2326)

The results of this study support the notion that volunteering is associated with improved health and happiness. Wilson (2000) also makes reference to the physical and mental health benefits instigated by volunteering. The generation of increased social ties gives people the opportunity to become more integrated and involved in their community. This acceptance and integration into the social setting can produce positive effects on health and increase the overall sense of satisfaction felt by volunteers. It is evident that the rewards and benefits to volunteers are numerous and can largely depend on the initial motives chosen to participate in

volunteer work. MacNeala (2008) explores the benefits to volunteers in detail. The opportunity to learn something new was highlighted as another important benefit. Social benefits were also mentioned by the participants, as a reason to become involved in a group or an organisation. In the study career benefits were recognised as a key benefit, but this was largely dependent on a person's career stage, and the field of work they occupied. The study stressed that "volunteering could be helpful at the outset of a career, providing hands on experience in health and social care..." (MacNeala, 2008, p. 132). It is clear that benefits associated with volunteering are diverse and are closely related to an individual's own idea of the outcomes they hope to achieve.

### 1.7 Barriers:

A key concept related to successful volunteering is the removal of potential barriers that exist for participants. Barriers to volunteering include language differences, cultural differences, economic difficulties, physical and mental issues, time restrictions, and distance. Such barriers can have a negative impact and prevent people from volunteering. Overcoming the barriers highlighted above is vital to increasing the number of people participating in voluntary work. The literature on volunteering has identified potential barriers that exist to volunteers in society. A report published by the National Children's Advisory Council, explored the barriers to volunteering in Ireland. Peer opinion was the most significant barrier to volunteering. Other barriers included, not knowing or liking people involved, fears of not meeting adult expectations, lack of opportunity, lack of awareness and lack of time. (National Children's Advisory Council, 2006) A study on volunteering in Ireland produced similar findings;

Never being directly asked to volunteer, lack of spare time, lack of information on volunteering, disabilities, lack of volunteer experience, other responsibilities and negative perceptions toward volunteering (Velthuis & Bradley, 2011, p.21)

Similarly, The National Youth Council of Ireland published a report called “Lending A Hand”. This report is one of the leading and most influential studies on youth volunteering. In the study, the most highlighted barrier to the volunteers was not having enough time to engage. Other barriers cited in this report were “lack of information, not being taught about volunteering, reluctance to make the first move, a sense that young people would not enjoy volunteering, and the absence of a volunteering role model” (O’Connor, 2011, p. 40). A further study which supports the evidence that potential barriers exist in volunteering is the “Tipping the Balance” report. It reported; lack of time, never thinking about participating, and never being asked by others to become involved, as the main barriers to volunteering. MacNeela (2008) also reported lack of time, family commitments and problems within volunteer organisations, as major barriers to volunteering. The challenges that youth volunteers experience are unique and can differ from adult volunteers. The “lack of welcoming opportunities was a significant constraint to initiating volunteer involvement” (Shannon, Robertson, Morrison & Werner, 2009, p.31). The results of the above studies, reinforces the opinion that lack of time, peer perceptions and lack of information are amongst the main barriers to volunteering. The view that volunteering is too time consuming, is widely accepted as a key barrier in the majority of studies. It is important for the organisations and society who strongly depend on the volunteer sector to find ways to alleviate the barriers associated with volunteering. It is paramount for the future of

volunteering that the difficulties associated with volunteerism are minimised, for the benefit of those who require the help and support in society.

### 1.8 Conclusion

The review of literature surrounding the subject of volunteering has highlighted the complexity of the area. The difficulty in obtaining a precise definition shows how volunteering is a multi-faceted activity. The available literature successfully reviews some of the motivations behind volunteering, as well as analysing the barriers and benefits that are associated with it. Participation in volunteering is an integral and fundamental component of society and the research highlights this by recognising the value volunteerism has to others who require the help, support and assistance. It is evident however that volunteering is a two-way street, where the volunteer's life is enhanced and developed from helping those in need as well as the group or organisation benefiting from their efforts and assistance. The research intends to examine thoroughly the opinions and outlook of final year undergraduate students towards volunteering by exploring the drive and motives they have to volunteer, the barriers they face and the benefits that result from participating in voluntary work.

The aim of this research project was to generate in-depth data relating to the motivations and barriers that exist for final year undergraduate students who volunteer and how it impacts on their studies and future profession. The interest and significance of youth volunteering has increased rapidly in recent years, as the number of students obtaining third level education has increased, and the scarcity of job prospects due to the economic recession has become more prevalent. During the research, a series of questions were asked, to obtain perspectives of the participants on their volunteering motives, the barriers or difficulties of student volunteering, its impact on college workload, and how it can benefit towards future employment.

### 2.1 Design

The researcher chose a qualitative approach for this research project based on suitability towards answering the research question. Qualitative approach was preferred over a quantitative approach because the researcher sought to explore the attitudes of final year undergraduate students and develop an understanding of their opinions. “Quantitative researchers are often portrayed as preoccupied with applying measurement procedures to social life, while qualitative researchers are seen as using words in the presentation of analyses of society” (Bryman, 2008, p. 393). A qualitative design allowed the researcher to obtain rich, in-depth and subjective data by exploring and analysing the opinions and life experiences of student volunteers. Qualitative methods have the “facility to describe and display phenomena experienced by the study of population, in fine-tuned detail and in the study participants own terms” (Richie & Lewis, 2003, p.27). A qualitative design offers the researcher more scope and opportunity to analyse the experiences, feelings and personal view

of the participants and as a result this type of design was ideally suited to answering the research question.

Semi-structured interviews were adopted for this research. This type of design was considered most suitable by the researcher because it gives the interviews a format but allows the research to vary the order of the questions depending on the flow of the interview. It also gives participants the opportunity to expand on any issue that may arise during the interview process. It is important however that the researcher maintains the focus on answering the research question and does not allow the participants to drift away from the principals of the research. “The semi-structured interview provides the best of both worlds as far as interviewing is concerned, combining the structure of a list of issues to be covered together with the freedom to follow up points as necessary” (Thomas, 2009, p. 164). The interview schedule consisted of 23 open-ended questions, exploring a wide range of issues relating to final year student volunteering. (See Appendices 1). Open-ended questions produced a natural flow of conversation between the researcher and the interviewees, thus generating consistent and valuable data collection. The use of semi-structured interviews provided a framework and a guide for the researcher to focus on the core principle needed to answer the research question, while also giving the participants scope to expand on their opinions.

## 2.2 Materials / Apparatus

All of the participants were provided with a consent form and information letter. This process, in addition to a short briefing discussion ensuring confidentiality and other ethical issues, was conducted prior to commencement of the interviews. An interview schedule was constructed, with a variety of semi-structured questions developed, to address the core concepts of motivations, barriers and impact on college studies and future employment. The

use of carefully designed and structured questions ensured the data collected was appropriate and useful towards the research, with scope for the participants to expand and elaborate into other applicable issues.

An I phone 4s was used to record each interview. A voice memo application was used to make a recording of all the interviews conducted by the researcher. The use of this method was the most effective and straightforward way of obtaining the required data and storing it securely. The careful transcription of the interviews was completed on a Toshiba laptop. The transcriptions were transferred to the Nvivo10 programme, where they were coded and analysed for use in the findings section of the research. Nvivo10 is a qualitative data analysis programme which allows the researcher to perform thematic analysis on the interview transcripts, generating shared themes and patterns that arose in the interviews.

### 2.3 Participants:

Six participants were used for this study, all full-time, final year undergraduate college students between the age of 20 and 25, who are currently undertaking voluntary work. The participants selected were predominantly studying courses in the social studies domain. The use of largely social science students was chosen by the researcher because of the nature of the study. Volunteering and social studies are closely related and go hand in hand in society. This may impact on the study, and create limitations due to the narrowness of the participants chosen. The researcher adopted purposive sampling as the technique in obtaining the participants to engage in the study. This form of sampling ensures that all participants fit the specific conditions to allow the researcher to answer the research question. In purposive sampling, “the sample units are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics which will enable detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes

and puzzles which the researcher wishes to study” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 78). This sampling technique allowed the researcher to select students who were suitable and appropriate for the study, avoiding any time constraints in selecting unsuitable participants and developing data which is accurate and valuable to the research. Snowball sampling was used to gain access to five out of the six participants in the study. Due to the type of participants needed for the study, this technique of using a personal contact to obtain other suitable participants, was effective in gaining access and saved valuable time also.

#### 2.4 Procedure

After completion of the sampling procedure, six suitable participants chose at will to take part in the study. Contact information was gathered from all participants and stored securely. The researcher made contact with the participants via telephone calls, to establish a suitable plan for conducting the interviews. An appropriate time and location which suited both the researcher and the participant was arranged. Some of the participants chose to meet in locations across Dublin, while others chose to complete the interview in their own home. The choice was given to the participants because the researcher felt that giving them the option would ensure they were comfortable and less nervous, thus resulting in a higher quality of data. The interviews were conducted in locations that were quiet, relatively free from distractions and provided a sense of comfort and security for the participants. This was effective and allowed both the researcher and the participants to concentrate solely on the interview process.

Prior to commencement of the interviews, each participant was provided with an information letter and a consent form. The information letter gave the participants additional information on the topic and also provided them with the researchers e-mail address should any issues

arise following completion of the interviews. A consent form ensured that the interviewee's participation was voluntary, was free to refuse any questions and could withdraw at any stage. The "advantage of such forms is that they give respondents the opportunity to be fully informed of the nature of the research and the implications of their participation at the outset" (Bryman, 2008, p. 123). The researcher then proceeded by debriefing each interviewee to ensure that all participants were clear about what the interview process entailed and how their interviews would be used for the purpose of the research. Each interview consisted of between 20-23 questions depending on some of the answers from the participants. The interviews were recorded using the voice memo application on an I phone 4s, with the interviews lasting between 15 and 25 minutes. The device was functional, discrete and did not interfere with how the participants answered the questions, while producing a high quality recording of each interview.

After all interviews were successfully conducted, all of the interviews were transferred on a password protected Toshiba laptop. They were transcribed verbatim to be analysed and reviewed. Each transcription was securely saved and given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality to all participants. The carefully transcribed data was then analysed using the Nvivo10 software programme. This was extremely beneficial and valuable as it allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the interview content and highlighted common themes and patterns which were regularly evident in the interviews.

## 2.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is a fundamental part of any research study. The type of analysis deemed most suitable by the researcher for this qualitative study was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used to "classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent

categories” (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p.262). The interview transcripts were transferred and imported to the Nvivo10 software programme. This programme makes use of the “computer’s capacity for recording, sorting, matching and linking can be harnessed by the researcher to assist in answering their research question from the data, without losing access to the source data, or contexts from which the data have come” (Bazeley, 2007, p. 2). Nvivo10 is a qualitative analysis software programme that allows the researcher to develop common and re-occurring themes and patterns from the data. The themes developed were then sub-divided into further themes, allowing the researcher to examine further the data. The software was used to code the interviews, thus forming nodes which generate the themes and trends for future use in the findings.

## 2.6 Ethics

Ethical issues were identified and carefully adhered to, in conjunction with the ethical guidelines of Dublin Business School. Any research study raises ethical considerations and it is paramount that all ethical issues are addressed with the utmost attention to ensure the dignity and rights of the participants are adhered to. These ethical considerations include informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, protecting participants from harm, debriefing and the right to withdraw. Confidentiality is an integral aspect of ethics. “Researchers need to guarantee participants complete confidentiality that the information about them is only used in a way which makes it impossible for others to identify the participants...” (Flick, 2006, p. 49). This fundamental aspect of ethics was achieved by the researcher by providing pseudonyms to each participant. As mentioned previously each participant received an information letter highlighting the key principals of the research and signed a consent form, agreeing to participate in the study. (See Appendix 2). The researcher reassured each

participant that their safety was of vital importance and that they had the right not to answer any question or to withdraw from the interview process at any time. No deception was used in the research as this may cause distress and harm to the participants. The research sought to explore the views and experiences of final year third level student and no vulnerable groups were contacted to participate. Recognising and implementing the ethical consideration highlighted above assures that all ethical consideration were adhered to while undertaking this study.

### 3. Findings

As stated in section two, the participants involved in this research project were final year undergraduate students who are currently undertaking voluntary work. The main focus of the study was to gain an understanding of the participant's motivations towards volunteer work and explore the barriers, benefits and impact it has on them and their lives. Conducting six in-depth interviews generated informative and expressive data. From the data collected, common themes and patterns emerged, that were anticipated and predicted. Alternative sub-themes also materialised and will be developed and focused later on in the findings. From the study undertaken, the key themes that emerged throughout were; motivations to volunteer, barriers inhibiting the volunteering process and the benefits obtained from volunteering.

#### 3.1 Motivations

The study produced extensive data on why final year third level undergraduate students chose to participate in volunteer work. The motivation for students to partake in volunteering was the principal theme that filtered continuously throughout the research process. Three major sub-themes emerged from the study and highlighted key motivational factors which triggered student's decision to volunteer. These were career opportunities, making a positive impact on society and the opportunity to learn and develop new skills and qualities.

##### 3.1.1 Career opportunities

The motivation to volunteer in order to enhance employability and further career opportunities was evident throughout the course of the interviews. Results show that career progression has been a huge motivation for students and has been a core driving factor for them to partake in volunteering.

Well as a final year social studies student, it just fits in with my career path, well hopeful career path (Emma)

It will also further my career in the future, as volunteering is so important for a number of careers, especially to do with social studies and social care (Peter).

Similarly the view that volunteering would offer valuable experience to students was seen a key motivational factor. The acknowledgement of participating in volunteering activities would also be of notable worth to their c.v. and this undeniably acted as a driving force for students to engage in volunteerism.

I suppose the main reason I started volunteering is that I need to get experience for my career in social care, which I am studying in DIT and I know how important it is to have it on your C.V. (Lorraine)

It is like all careers, volunteering is a big plus on any c.v. because it shows you are a team player. (Peter)

The practice of gaining real life experience in a particular professional area was an underlying motive for many participants. It can offer the opportunity to obtain an increased understanding and insight to a given subject area.

I have experience with an older person previously and the lady that I am volunteering with is actually developing dementia as well, so that is another experience that would help me in the future. (Ciara)

The opportunity to further enhance and develop ones career prospects was undoubtedly a chief motivator for students engaging in volunteer work. The view that this would be of significant benefit to them in the future was the principal reason for volunteerism.

### 3.1.2 Creating a positive impact on society

The concept of giving back to society by creating a positive impact on others was identified as an important theme throughout the research. Many of the participants made reference to the results they achieved through the support and help they provided to others who require the assistance and attention. The sense of satisfaction felt by lending a helping hand and raising awareness of fundamental issues that require attention in society, was cited as a major motivator for student volunteering.

I enjoy giving back to people, giving what I have, and they unfortunately don't have... I believe that what goes around comes around. (Sean)

Thomas reinforced this idea and highlighted how the GAA had helped him in his childhood and felt it was necessary to repay the favour:

It is just the idea of giving something back to someone that has helped you so much as you grow up. (Thomas).

The motivation of creating a positive impact on society was connected closely to the participant's tendency to give back to their local community. The sense of pride and the feeling of responsibility to help people from their local community was an important motivation for volunteer participation among the students.

I have got to interact with people who are a lot less fortunate than I am and it gives me the opportunity to give back to society and especially to the community I grew up in and benefited so much from. (Emma)

These factors which undoubtedly influence the reasons why final year undergraduate students become involved in volunteering shows the importance of creating positive results in society.

The opportunity to make a decisive and clear impact on the lives of others less fortunate than themselves was recognised as a significant motivation to the student participants.

### 3.1.3 Opportunity to learn and develop new skills and qualities

Results from the research highlighted the importance of helping others as a significant motivational factor for student volunteering. The study also displayed other attributes of volunteering, triggered by personal motivations, namely the prospect of acquiring new skills and qualities. Several of the interviewees stressed the importance of skill development and that volunteering offered an opportunity to develop and learn fresh skills and qualities. They hoped that the skills they had developed would maximise their life chances and assist them in their day to day duties and tasks.

Volunteering gives me the chance to learn new things by providing help for those in need. It allows me the opportunity to mature and develop new skills and qualities, making me a better person. (Peter)

Emma indicated how she had learned so many new skills from her “little sister” as part of the Foróige Big Brother/Big Sister programme;

I have also learned a lot of new skills. Generally I let my little sister choose the activities. She actually had a really strong enthusiasm for dance which I never really shared before, so I went along to dance class with her and found that I really liked it and developed a passion for it as well. (Emma)

Similarly Ciara revealed how she has developed her communication skills while volunteering with an elderly lady on a weekly basis;

Oh, I have definitely improved my communication skills because as I have said she’s developing dementia so there are a lot of things I have to learn, and

I have developed my skills so I understand the different ways of talking to her.  
(Ciara)

The development of new skills was a motivational factor which was reiterated by most of the participants. Some students also admitted to improving their qualities as part of the role they play in helping in society.

I have learned to be thoughtful and kinder to people less fortunate than I am. I suppose as a student, you do only think of yourself but you definitely learn so much and grow up very quickly when you work with those marginalized in society. (Lorraine).

It is clear from the research that the students engage in voluntary work for numerous reasons. The motivational factors can vary depending on personal issues and circumstances; however the study highlights the importance of career opportunities and progression as the chief driving component that motivates final year undergraduate students to undertake voluntary work. In addition the research recognises the importance of making a positive impact on society, particularly to the local community. The prospect of learning and developing new skills and qualities was also identified as a key motivation for student volunteering.

### 3.2 Barriers

The removal of barriers surrounding the area of volunteering is an important aspect for students. Students face many challenges and difficulties that can differ from other groups who volunteer in society. The research highlighted that a wide variety of barriers exist for student volunteers. The key barriers identified in the research were time management, age limitations and lack of experience, and financial constraints.

### 3.2.1 Time management

The issue of time constraints was stressed as a core barrier that exists for students who engage in volunteer work. Balancing all aspects of life can be a difficult and challenging task and this was a barrier that was strongly emphasized by the participants. A lack of time to undertake voluntary work was apparent throughout the interviews.

I suppose being realistic, I would have to say that time constraints are one. When you are studying yourself, trying to play, as well as trying to coach there are moments when you think; I don't have the time to be doing all this.  
(Thomas)

The most significant difficulty suggested by the final year students was the challenge of balancing their education and volunteering activities. Many of the participants felt this was a crucial barrier and had problems in overcoming the issue. For the students, the workload associated with the last year of their third level undergraduate studies was bottomless.

It is a very hard balancing act trying to get both college work and volunteering done. It is important to realise this before starting to volunteer because I think it is very tough. (Sean)

As I have said it is very time consuming and just juggling between studies, volunteering and social life is very very difficult. (Peter)

It must be also noted that although the restriction of time, and the difficulty of balancing college and volunteering was clearly a fundamental barrier for students, many of the participants stated that dealing successfully with this difficulty would be valuable in future.

If it means going in earlier to college in the morning or staying up at the weekends to get work done, that's what I have to do but I definitely think it will be worth it. (Ciara)

The reality is that college takes up the majority of student's time especially for final year undergraduates. It is clear that the participants faced significant difficulties connected to time constraints. The principal barrier identified was undoubtedly the difficulty of maintaining an effective balance between full time college education and volunteering.

### 3.2.2 Age limitations and lack of experience

Research suggested that age was an issue for the students. The idea that they were not mature enough to be recognised as a group in society who have the ability to provide help and assistance to others created a barrier for participants. Volunteering for elderly people was recognised a particular barrier.

Ciara made reference to how she initially found it difficult to engage with the elderly lady she volunteers with;

When I started first, as I said to you, she was very kind of upfront and I'm not used to dealing with older people so at the beginning that was a barrier.  
(Ciara)

Emma similarly highlighted the issue of being perceived as too young and immature to volunteer and be accepted in society as a group that can make an impact;

Another problem that faces student volunteers is that it is hard to be taken seriously because of our age. (Emma)

The problem of not possessing life experience, resulting from their youthfulness was similarly identified as a barrier. Numerous participants stressed how lack of know-how and inexperience can be worrying for students and this can cause students to contemplate not participating in volunteering.

Students are generally self-centred and inexperienced in dealing with marginalised society. (Lorraine)

The research recognised that age limitations and lack of experience created barriers for volunteer students. The difficulties associated with age, was identified as a reoccurring theme throughout the interview process.

### 3.2.3 Financial constraints

Throughout the six interviews there was a collective view that economic difficulties were a barrier for students. The challenge of earning money was a concern for the participants. The students highlighted how most of their finances were required to fund their studies. It was difficult for many of the participants to fund the volunteering activities that were costly and expensive.

There are also the financial constraints. The reality is most students do not have a lot of money and they can incur expenses in travelling to or from the place they choose to volunteer. I know in my own situation there is the extra travel cost playing away games and it might seem small but it all adds up. (Thomas)

Similarly to the views of Thomas, Ciara acknowledged that it was difficult for students to undertake certain activities as a result of financial resources.

Sometimes I find it hard to know what to do with her and I think if there was more funding or resources available to me, I'd have better ideas and be able to facilitate more for her. (Ciara)

Financial difficulties were an obvious barrier for the students in the research. Some of the interviewees made reference to knowing friends who unfortunately had to discontinue volunteering because of economic difficulties;

I know people who have given up volunteering because they must finance their education themselves. (Peter)

Although each of the participants highlighted that financial constraints were a barrier for students, some also recognised that volunteering involves contributing ones time and energy generously for the benefit of others. It must be noted also that many of the students hoped that their generosity would be useful to them in the future.

So I accept the fact that my work is on a voluntary basis only but of course then I'm hoping that it will give me financial gain in my future career.  
(Lorraine)

The researcher developed key themes related to the barriers that are present for students who volunteer. The study recognised that these barriers can exist prior to engaging in volunteer work and also during the course of the volunteering. The views and opinions of the participants illustrated how the lack of time was a crucial barrier. The workload from their college course made it difficult to locate the spare time to volunteer. Additionally the study established that inexperience due to age was a barrier for students. Finally the barrier of economic difficulties was an evident factor throughout the study. The inability to fund specific voluntary activities was a defining barrier for undergraduate students.

### 3.3 Benefits

The benefits of participating in volunteering are generally closely linked to a person's motivations to volunteer. This research recognised some key benefits resulting from volunteer work. The participants continuously acknowledged the benefits of giving their time and energy freely, by assisting and providing help to those individuals and groups who require it in society.

### 3.3.1 Increased satisfaction and happiness

The interviews produced data which highlighted the importance to the students of feeling a sense of satisfaction and happiness for the volunteer work they complete. A sense of achievement as a result of making a positive impact was a key benefit to participants in the research. The students recognised a strong link between their volunteering and increased health and happiness in their lives;

The opportunity to offer my skills to help others in my local community is extremely satisfying. I suppose I act as a role model to the younger members of the club. (Thomas)

Every time I'm leaving she is like, "oh thank you so so much" and she is very grateful for my company so I think it definitely gives me that sense of satisfaction and I feel I'm helping someone also. (Ciara)

The sense of satisfaction experienced by the participants was strongly related to the recognition they received for their voluntary efforts. A simple gesture of acknowledgement was appropriate and sufficient for the students and this was seen to represent the greatest sense of satisfaction;

The parents of the children I look after are always thankful and grateful. I don't get any rewards such as money and I wouldn't expect to. I am happy to get recognition from parents and the children would often thank me for their day's outs. (Sean)

### 3.3.2 Impact on college course content

All of the participants in the study indicated that their college course was in some way related to the type of volunteering they chose to engage in. This produced a positive impact on the

course content for many of the students. Volunteering offered them an opportunity to connect what they had learned in the classroom context and put this into real life practice.

Some of the modules I have studied as part of the course are definitely related to the volunteer work I do. This gives me the opportunity to put into real life the theories I have learned. (Lorraine)

Peter reinforced this idea and commented on how his volunteering with Special Olympics Ireland and Kerry stars organisations had impacted positively on his college course and helped him in his studies;

Positively, as in it gives you and insight into the textbook content. If you read something in a textbook you may not really understand it until you are in that position and volunteering gives me this opportunity. (Peter)

The research demonstrates the positive impact volunteering has on the course content of final year undergraduate students. It definitely allows them to connect real life situations to the material learned in lectures and textbooks. It was the collective opinion of the participants that the positive influence volunteering had on their studies was a significant benefit.

### 3.3.3 Development of valuable contacts

All six participants in the study reported a very positive experience of volunteering. The contribution of time and energy to help those in need has certainly created many benefits for the students. Many of the people and organisations that the participants have come in contact with will create a distinct employment advantage for them over other potential employees who have not volunteered. Each of the students highlighted how the contacts they have made will benefit them in the future.

I have already come across people in my volunteer roles that I hope at some point in the future will be able to help me out or give me a steer in the right direction. (Thomas)

Emma made reference to how she had come in contact with other volunteers who shared the same goals and motivations as herself. These contacts allowed her to meet likeminded individuals and broaden her understanding of the whole area of volunteering. She highlighted how the group had come together and created an online group, where they discussed issues and highlighted opportunities that became available to the members;

Because we are a big group of volunteers together, we are all helping each other and we are establishing a web of online volunteers which is obviously beneficial. (Emma)

The students expressed the importance and benefit of generating suitable and worthy contacts to utilise in their future careers. There was a collective view from the participants in the study that the references gained from their volunteering commitments would be of significant benefit to them;

It's important to get a good reference because it is a reflection of your personal worth and makes you very employable. (Lorraine)

Even if I don't choose to work with either organisation I have volunteered with, Special Olympics Ireland will give me a reference that is recognised globally because it is a world renowned organisation. (Peter)

### 3.4 Summary

This study conducted on volunteering explored the views and opinions of final year undergraduate students. They described their experiences, and the motivations, barriers and benefits of engaging in volunteer work. The findings of the research showed the importance

of recognising the motivations that drive students to undertake volunteering activities. They illustrated the barriers they must overcome in the present contemporary society which act as a deterrent for student involvement in volunteering. The data obtained over the course of the interview process displayed how the students benefited substantially from their volunteering experience. The collection of data from these three central themes is crucial to the research process, as it allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of final year undergraduate student's experiences and feelings towards volunteering. The following chapter will discuss and examine the themes highlighted above and make references to the aforementioned literature.

## 4.

## Discussion

The aim of this research was to obtain an in-depth and particular understanding of final year college student's views and experiences of volunteering. The study sought to focus on this particular group in society in order to gain an exclusive understanding in the area of volunteering for these students who are presently in their final year of third level education. It was evident that the participants held distinct and clear-cut views on the topic and this allowed the researcher to obtain worthwhile and informative data. Although the area of volunteering has been thoroughly examined and evaluated previously, there is a lack of qualitative research conducted in the field. Previous studies have concentrated on the actual number and percentage of people who participate in volunteering worldwide. Quantitative research has analysed the monetary value volunteering has had on society and also the hours of service provided by volunteers. It is only in recent years that research sought to explore and analyse the life experiences and outlook of the volunteers themselves. This literature has highlighted a range of motivations, barriers and benefits linked to volunteering, however the study of specific groups in society who undertake volunteering activities is limited. This has provided an opportunity to investigate and expose the volunteering experiences of an exclusive group in Irish society, namely final year undergraduate third level students, by concentrating predominantly on the motivational factors influencing volunteer participation, the barriers obstructing student volunteering and the benefits associated with volunteer involvement.

### 4.1 Motivations

The previous literature highlighted that people are motivated to volunteer for a variety of interconnected reasons. The current study showed that career enhancement was the principal

motivational factor that encouraged final year college students to volunteer, thus creating opportunities to complement their profile for future employment. Encountering real life situations in a particular professional area is invaluable to the students, and the acknowledgment of this work on their curriculum vitae is undoubtedly an underlying factor for participating in volunteering for each of the students. Similarly Holsworth (2010) suggests that, in a study of university students in the United Kingdom, the opportunity to increase employability was the main reasoning for some participants firstly becoming involved in volunteering. In the influential Irish report entitled “Lending a Hand”, O’Connor (2011) draws attention to the idea that job and career development is not the most influential motivation for volunteering among youth participants. However, in the current research, all participants concurred that the main reason to volunteer was career based progression and enhancing of opportunities.

As expected, the opportunity to learn and develop skills and qualities was an important motivator mentioned by all participants in the study. Acquiring new skills and qualities, while also helping others in society, was a win-win situation and was a key reason why students chose to become involved in volunteering activities. Previous research by Kritzinger & Pillay (2010) generated similar findings. A study of psychology students undertaking voluntary work at a clinic illustrated how the participants had substantially developed their skills, and the majority of the students were subsequently less anxious about working with the clients who suffered from mental difficulties. Clear parallels can therefore be drawn from this research study and previous literature, which reinforces and strengthens the findings that the opportunity to learn new skills and qualities is a significant motivation for student volunteering.

Research by Velthius & Bradley (2011) recognised the importance of wanting to make an impact by giving something back to society. Providing help and support to those less fortunate is a motivational factor evident in the majority of former studies. This was also apparent throughout the analysis of the research project. Many of the participants referred to the importance of creating a positive impact by volunteering to support and assist those individuals and groups in society who requires help and assistance. It is interesting to note that many of the students in the study alluded to a preference of having a positive effect in their own local community. The students identified that they had learned so much from people in their local area, and believed it was important to return the favour by offering their services in the form of volunteering. Further research would be required to ensure reliability and confidence in these findings.

#### 4.2 Barriers

An aspect of volunteering that required detailed exploration was the barriers that inhibit students to becoming involved in volunteering. It became apparent from the participants contribution that there are several barriers preventing final year undergraduate students from undertaking volunteering activities. In line with previous research, the researcher found that lack of time would be the most dominant barrier facing this group of students. O'Connor, (2011) recognised that the most highlighted and influential barrier for the youth in Ireland was a lack of time. Similarly Velthius & Bradley (2011, p. 21) supported this notion by acknowledging that “lack of spare time” was one of many interconnected barriers that thwarted student volunteering. The experiences of the participants in this present study closely matched the findings of previous research. The issue of time management was also a challenging factor for the students. All of the participants found it difficult to balance and

juggle their educational needs, volunteering, and social life. The volume of work in the final year of their undergraduate course hindered their participation in volunteering activities. Being a full-time final year student involves a large amount of additional work and the students in the study stressed how it became increasingly difficult to find a balance between their education and volunteering. It is important to recognise this issue and further research in the area is necessary in order to explore the possibilities of overcoming this barrier for students.

An interesting barrier that emerged in the study was the issue of inexperience due to the young age of the students. This was not anticipated by the researcher as there was very little evidence of this in previous research. Many of the participants indicated that, due to their age, they were worried how they were perceived by others in society. It was the collective view that they may not be mature enough to deal with certain issues that arise during volunteering. A lack of know-how, as well as not possessing the necessary life experience, was a substantial worry and this acted as a barrier for student involvement in volunteering. Previous research does show some similarities with the findings of this study. Shannon et al (2009) recognised that a barrier to volunteering was the absence of a welcoming offer to become involved. In addition the National Children's Advisory Council (2006) recognised that not meeting adult expectations was a barrier for youth volunteering. It is clear there is some comparisons between the findings of this study and previous literature, however it must be noted that students considered it as a notable barrier, and this is certainly an area that requires further research.

The issue of financial difficulty for this group of students was another barrier that became clear in the research, and inhibited them from volunteering. This subject of financial gain in

charitable organisations has become a controversial issue in Irish society, and one which has been highly deliberated recently. In general, volunteering is recognised as an activity where people give freely of their time and energy to help others less fortunate in society. It is important to acknowledge the views of the participants in this study and explore how the issue of financial constraint can act as a barrier to engaging in volunteering. Although many of the participants accepted volunteering as a donation of their time to help others, which in turn would also help them in future, each student identified that the issue of financial difficulties may be a barrier for students in general. The challenge of having to work part-time to fund their education was recognised as a barrier for the students. There is very little reference to this issue in previous research. In order to eliminate this barrier for students, it is vital that additional research is conducted in the area to encourage new programmes and initiatives to ensure students lead by example and continue to partake in volunteering in Ireland.

#### 4.3 Benefits

The benefits gained by the students who engaged in volunteering showed both similarities and differences to previously conducted research. The benefits of volunteering are closely linked to the outcome of one's motivation to participate in this area. Drawing comparisons with previous research from Wilson, (2000); & Borgonovi, (2008), the current study highlighted how individuals who volunteer are more likely to feel an increased sense of satisfaction and happiness than those who do not engage in volunteering. Experiencing increased physical and mental health, as well as integrating into society and feeling accepted by others, was highlighted as a key benefit to volunteers (Wilson, 2000). Similarly in this research, the participants identified increased satisfaction and happiness as a core benefit of

volunteering. Making a positive impact in society, particularly in their local community enhanced the student's sense of enjoyment and happiness. Simple gestures, such as acknowledging the impact the participants were making, offered the greatest sense of satisfaction to the volunteers. This study adds further substance and strength to the perception that increased satisfaction and happiness is a core benefit of volunteering.

An interesting theme that arose in the study was how volunteering had impacted positively on college course content of the participants. The opportunity to put into real life practice the theories and literature learned in the classroom was considered to be of great benefit to the students. In each of the interviews, the area of volunteering was closely linked to the specific subject they were studying. This allowed them to sample the working environment of a particular profession and provided them with the fundamental aspects associated with their college course. Mc Neala (2008) developed comparisons by recognising that volunteering was beneficial to people at the outset of engaging in a profession because it provided hands on experience in a specialised area. This is closely linked to the benefit of impacting on college course content, however it would require extensive further research to ensure that this benefit is a representation of the entire student body.

The development of creating contacts through their volunteering experience which could ultimately benefit them in the future was highlighted by all of the students in the study. The opportunity to create contacts in a specialised field gave the students the opportunity to become recognised by their peers for the efforts they are making on a voluntary basis. Meeting likeminded people allowed the participants to broaden their knowledge in a particular area of interest. Putting yourself out there to be valued and recognised was illustrated as a significant benefit in the research. However there is a lack of research in the

area especially when dealing with such a small group in society. It is clear that the third level students valued the contacts they had made as part of their volunteering, especially as it would benefit them in the future. For this reason it is crucial to make note of this benefit and make further explorations to see if this benefit is also recognised by others who engage in volunteering activities.

#### 4.4 Limitations

Conducting any qualitative study with only six participants will produce limitations to the research. Qualitative methods can be a time consuming and lengthy process and this was an evident characteristic in the study. The restriction of time was an issue that arose in the project and as a result, only a small sample of students could participate in the study. Taking this into account, there is the possibility of leaving potential gaps in the research. It must be also noted that although limited by time, the participants in the study generated in-depth and comprehensive answers directed towards answering the research question. The interviews provided the researcher with extensive data and therefore, due to the scale of the study, not all topics discussed in the interviews could be included.

The researcher used snowball sampling as a technique to acquire participants. This limits the study to specific small groups in society, thus making it difficult to assess if the sample is representative of the general population.

The results of the research were generated through thematic analysis; however researcher bias in qualitative research is an issue that can prove difficult to avoid. Qualitative research analysis is heavily dependent on the individual views of the researcher. The personal interpretations can significantly influence the results and taking this into account, it must be

considered that one person's understanding and analysis of a small study cannot be seen as a reliable representation of the general population.

#### 4.5 Recommendations for future research

This research study explored and analysed a narrow and limited sample population by focusing largely on students who are engaged in a college course linked to the study of society. Conducting research on a considerably larger scale, incorporating a wider range of final year undergraduate students from different disciplines, would only benefit and enhance future research in the field of volunteering.

A noteworthy and interesting area to propose further research was the exploration of the student's proposals and ideas on how to increase the participation levels of final year students in volunteering by addressing the issues that surfaced in the study. This research would confront and address the issues surrounding students volunteering in Ireland. This is a fascinating and appealing concept that was discovered while analysing the data, but the lack of time available meant this issue could not be included into the research question. This concept could act as a basis for further research and would add considerably to the body of literature conducted previously. Some interesting themes arose in this study; however there was limited previous research on some of these issues highlighted. Although final year undergraduate students represent a small group in society, it is vital to conduct further research in the area to explore if the findings are supported, thus strengthening the findings of this research project.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

This research study attempted to develop and build on previous research within the area of volunteering among students in Ireland. The study explored and analysed the motivations, barriers, and benefits of volunteering for final year undergraduate students. Although a small scale study, this research effectively used qualitative research methods to generate extensive results, which highlighted a variety of interesting and thought-provoking ideas on the topic of volunteering. While the research has its limitations, it certainly provided further explanation on the difficulties that inhibits volunteerism in society, and the advantages of engaging in volunteer work. The motivations for volunteering among final year students were matched closely to the findings evident in previous research. The motivation to volunteer was primarily developed on the opportunity for the students to enhance their future career. The barriers recognised during the research show how final year full-time students can encounter a distinct and unique experience of volunteering. Barriers such as inexperience due to age, as well as financial difficulties were unexpected findings in the research. The benefits of volunteering for students were clear during the research. The sense of increased satisfaction and happiness was the principal benefit for participants, and highlighted the positive outcome felt by helping those who are less fortunate in society. The research's strength lies in the uncovering of different and fresh experiences of the student volunteers. The study raised fascinating and stimulating themes for use in future research. Further research is required to analyse the area further, ensuring this group in society are provided with the framework and support to participate in volunteering activities across Ireland.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 - Consent Form



An exploration into the motivations, barriers and benefits associated with volunteering among final year full time undergraduate students.

My name is Niall Kelly and I am conducting research that explores the motivations, barriers and benefits of engaging in volunteer work for final year full-time undergraduate students in Ireland.

I am inviting you to participate in this research which will involve contributing to an interview process lasting between 20 and 40 minutes.

Participation in the study is completely on a voluntary basis and therefore you are not obliged to participate. If you do choose to partake in the research, you do not have to answer any of the questions and can withdraw from the study at any stage should any difficulties or issues arise during the interview process.

Your participation will be strictly confidential. If, after the interview has been completed and you request to have your interview removed from the research this can be completed up until the research study is published in April.

The interview and all relevant data related to it will be safely secured on a password protected computer.

**\*It is important that you understand that by completing the interview,  
you are consenting to participate in the study\***

Should you require any further information on the research or should any issues develop, please do not hesitate to contact;

Niall Kelly- [niallpatrickkelly@gmail.com](mailto:niallpatrickkelly@gmail.com)

Thank you for your cooperation and participation in the study.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2 – Interview Schedule

### **An exploration into the motivations, barriers and benefits associated with volunteering among final year full time undergraduate students.**

#### General volunteer questions:

Could you tell me a little bit about yourself and the voluntary work you undertake?

What type of organisation do you carry out volunteer work for? What are the goals of the organisation you volunteer for?

Why did you choose this area to volunteer in?

What type of activities do you undertake?

Describe the different roles you have held and what you like and dislike most about them?

Tell me about your volunteering experience?

In general how many hours do volunteer for on a weekly basis?

How long have you volunteered for?

Have you been involved in any training as part of the voluntary work you do?

How would you rate your overall volunteer experience?

#### Motivations:

Why do you participate in volunteer work? What is important to you?

Do you feel a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment from your position?

What aspects of volunteering motivate you to participate?

What skills and qualities have you learned and have they helped you?

What are the benefits of engaging in voluntary work?

Did you receive any recognition for your work? How did this affect you?

Barriers:

Have you experienced any barriers while engaging in volunteer work?

Do you feel volunteering can be a difficult and challenging experience for students?

What do you feel are the main difficulties for students who engage in voluntary work?

Has the concept of a lack of financial gain been a barrier in your voluntary work?

How have you overcome these issues?

College course/ future employment:

How do you balance volunteering and third level education?

How has volunteering impacted on the college course you are currently studying? Has it interfered with your studies or impacted you positively?

Is there any relation between the college course you are currently doing and the type of voluntary work you undertake?

Are the specific voluntary interests and activities you participate in currently related to area of work you hope to pursue in the future?

Do you feel volunteering can help towards obtaining employment in the future?

Do you think the contacts you have made will benefit you when seeking employment?