



## POTENTIAL OF A LIFETIME

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### Research Summary Number 2

### Study of Third Age Volunteering with the Support of Employers

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This study of more than 200 employees aged 50-plus in six private and public sector companies throws light on the impact of employer-supported volunteering (ESV) on older employees. It also explores the role of voluntary work in the transition to retirement and the scope for developing retiree volunteering. With increasing numbers of employers recognising the benefits to the community, the employee and the company of encouraging and supporting voluntary work by employees, the findings provide useful information and insights for those involved in developing ESV, pre-retirement and retirement programmes.

### Findings

- None of the employers specially targeted older employees in their ESV programmes. Some, however, recognised that older people could contribute distinctive skills and qualities and might have different expectations from younger employees.
- Over a quarter of the older employees did not know that their employer supported voluntary work by employees.
- Sixteen percent of the sample had taken part in the ESV programme. 6% had been introduced to voluntary work for the first time. A picture emerged of these employees getting a lot of satisfaction and enjoyment from volunteering and experiencing few drawbacks.
- The most common reason given for not taking part in the ESV programme was: 'No one has asked me', but many employees also had family and domestic responsibilities which prevented participation or they were already involved in voluntary work elsewhere. Some wanted to get away from things connected with work in their spare time. 13% said they would be interested in taking part in the future.
- More than half of the whole sample were positive about their employer's support for volunteering. They felt it reflected well on the company. A smaller number thought participation fostered good team spirit. Fewer still believed that participation helped to develop skills which were useful to their jobs. They thought that better publicity would be one of the best ways of involving more older people.

- Over a quarter of the employees who had taken part in the ESV programmes said they had been introduced to activities that they would probably continue in retirement. At least two of the employers recognised the value of voluntary work in preparing employees for retirement. An example was given of a company outside the sample which had designed a special programme to encourage volunteering amongst employees approaching retirement.
- Some of the employers in the study provided opportunities for their retirees to continue to volunteer in the ESV programme, but the uptake was patchy. Looking further afield the research confirmed that retiree volunteering is widespread in the United States, but in its infancy in the United Kingdom. Four models of retiree volunteering were identified in the UK based on:
  - retirees participating alongside employees in ESV programmes;
  - a ‘matching’ service being set up for retirees wanting to do voluntary work;
  - voluntary work projects being established specifically for retirees;
  - grants being given to organisations in which retirees are involved as volunteers.

## Conclusions

ESV programmes were viewed favourably by the majority of older employees in the study. They had succeeded in introducing some people to voluntary work for the first time. There appeared to be considerable scope for expansion by targeting older employees, by focusing on volunteering as part of the preparation for retirement and by supporting retiree volunteering. Employers challenged to target would need to review their existing programmes.

## A checklist for employers

- Check out the existing ESV programme – how well does it cater for the over 50’s?
- Check out measures to help employees prepare for retirement – when, where and how can information about voluntary work and opportunities to volunteer be built in most effectively?
- Check out the scope to develop programmes to encourage volunteering amongst company retirees.

**Methods** – Six private and public sector employers took part. 236 employees aged 50 years and older completed postal questionnaires (36% of those distributed). A key person in each company filled in a separate questionnaire about the ESV programme.

The Carnegie-TSB Foundations Third Age Volunteering Project formed part of the Carnegie Third Age Programme and was generously funded by the TSB Foundations. It was a two year project, involving two separate studies. The main study is summarised in Research Summary Number 1 – A Study of Older Volunteers in Twenty Five Organisations. Both summaries are obtainable by sending an A4 SAE to the Carnegie UK Trust at the address given below.

The full report, *Potential of a Lifetime*, by Jane Forster, covers both studies and is obtainable from:  
The Carnegie UK Trust, Comely Park House, Dunfermline, Fife, KY12 7EJ. Price: £12 including postage and packing.