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Research participants' views on use of verbatim quotations

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This report presents findings from one component of a larger study of the theory, practice and impact of using verbatim quotations in reporting applied social research. The report is concerned with the impact on research participants of the way in which their spoken words were included in a written report of their views and experiences of using a local service which aims to support people in moving towards paid work through taking part in volunteering.

The overall study was funded by the ESRC, and conducted by the Social Policy Research Unit during 2002-05. The component reported here took place during 2004. An earlier report (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005) presented findings from the evaluation of the volunteering service. That report formed the basis for exploration of participants' views on the way they and their spoken words were included, presented here.

The first part of this chapter summarises the overall ESRC funded study, and explains how the component reported here fits within this study. The rest of the chapter presents the design and methods of this component. This is discussed in some detail, as the methods chosen and the way the research was conducted form an important part of the focus of this component. The findings from the initial evaluative study of the volunteering service are presented in full in the earlier report (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005) and Appendix A summarises the views expressed by those who took part in that evaluation. Chapters 2 and 3 present the reactions of participants in that evaluation when they saw or heard how their spoken words had been presented in the draft report for the volunteering service. Chapter 4 explains first how the researchers dealt with participants' preferences and suggestions when they edited the draft report for publication. The chapter goes on to discuss the wider implications of the insights and reflect on the understanding gained.

1.1 The overall study

Qualitative approaches in social research have become popular and influential among UK policy makers (Lessof and Squires, 1997; DSS, 1998). Qualitative research methods are adopted widely across areas including health and social care, education, psychology, employment and housing. Including verbatim quotations from research participants has become effectively standard practice in much qualitative reporting. Many of the frameworks and tools which have emerged recently for assessing quality of qualitative research evidence (see Spencer *et al.*, 2003) point to inclusion of quotations as enhancing quality in various ways. However, until very recently, it was hard to find a well developed conceptual and theoretical basis for inclusion of verbatim

quotations within social researchers' written texts. Explanations of the processes of transcription, selection and editing were relatively rare in research reports. There were few examples of investigation of the impact of quotations on readers, or issues that arose for those who spoke the words.

Against this background, the aim of the authors' overall study was to investigate inclusion of research participants' verbatim quotations within written reports of applied social research, from the perspectives of researchers, research users and people who take part in social research.

Specific objectives were:

- to review conceptual and theoretical arguments for using verbatim quotations in presenting findings
- to explore current practice and beliefs among social researchers
- to explore expectations and preferences of users of research
- to investigate views of those who speak the words which are presented
- to test, among a range of readers, accessibility, acceptability and impact of different ways of including verbatim quotations in research accounts.

The overall study had a four-stage design, using different research approaches to address the various objectives outlined above. This report is concerned solely with one component of the overall study which was designed to investigate the views of research participants on the way the researchers used their spoken words in the research report as 'quotations'. The chapter goes on to explain the research approach adopted.

1.2 Research design

One way of investigating research participants' views on the way their words were included in the research report was to re-contact a group of people who had taken part in social research previously conducted by the Social Policy Research Unit and recently reported. The Unit conducts research across a number of areas including social security and living standards, services for families, and disability and employment. Names and addresses of people who take part in such research are stored in an archive. It would thus be possible to approach again people who had previously taken part in a depth interview, ask them to look at the final written output containing their spoken words, and give us their views.

An alternative approach was to invite people to take part in a new study, of which an integral part would be discussing with them a draft report, to seek their views and comments. The essential difference between the two approaches is that in the former, people would not be expecting to be re-contacted for the purpose of this study while in

the latter, people would be recruited on the basis that the interviewer would return for their views on what had been written about them.

We had a number of methodological and ethical concerns about the former approach. The original interviews would probably have taken place at least one year ago or longer, given usual timescales for analysis, reporting and publication. There were likely to be some problems in re-contacting people and recall. It might be hard to explain the purpose in seeking people's views about the final report, given that it had already been published and there was no possibility of changing anything. So we had some doubts about the levels of understanding that we might enable people to achieve, raising issues of informed consent (see Wiles *et al.*, 2004). In addition, some people may have had new experiences or changed their view since initial interviews. This might both influence how they thought now about what they previously said, and lead to requests for changes or additions we would be unable to make. We had some concerns about returning unexpectedly to people who believed their involvement was over. Some might welcome another opportunity to talk to a researcher, but there might be negative outcomes for others, in remembering the initial interview and the circumstances then discussed, even if they decided not to take part again. There were other possibilities of negative outcomes for people who discovered that they did not like what they read in the published report. There are examples in the wider literature of negative reactions from research participants to the way in which they or their words were represented (Corden, 1996; Beresford *et al.*, 1999). Other researchers have found that some people were shocked by the apparent incoherence of their transcribed words (Kvale, 1996).

Such concerns led us towards the alternative approach: inviting people to take part in an empirical study on the basis that we would show them how they had been included in a draft report and take their views into account when we wrote the final version. One advantage perceived was that this way of working was not hard to explain and was likely to seem logical to people. The researchers thus felt more confident about the validity of people's agreement to take part on the basis of informed consent, although this would require careful management. We would be returning with the draft report within two or three months after the first interview, so there were likely to be fewer problems of recall, and less likelihood of big changes in views. People taking part in the study would be able to influence what we wrote about them, and we could be confident that people were satisfied with the way they were represented and happy for the final report to be circulated and used.

There were some risks in this approach. Attrition might be a problem, if people who initially took part were hard to re-contact or decided they did not want to see the report after all. Agreeing the final report might be hard if there were highly variable suggestions for changes to the draft. On balance, however, we decided to pursue this approach because we thought it was more ethical; methodologically more rigorous, and more empowering for participants.

Having decided to conduct a completely new study, the next decision was the topic for enquiry in the initial stage. We wished to replicate, as far as possible, the usual conditions in which social research is currently undertaken to inform the policy process, and again there were methodological and ethical issues to consider.

The authors' own interests and expertise lie in applied social policy, in particular financial support for people with low incomes; employment, and disability. One option was to pursue a personal research interest in one such area, for example exploring the financial impact of bereavement on recipients of social assistance. We perceived problems here at various levels. It might be hard to achieve a robust sample within resources available. For example it might be complicated and time consuming to negotiate sampling from benefit records for a study which was not a government priority. More fundamentally, however, it was important to meet perceived responsibilities to research participants, and we were concerned about recruiting people to a study whose ultimate aim was methodological unless there was also a more direct policy-related aim. We were not comfortable about asking people to talk about aspects of income and family life just so that other people might understand more about their lives. We did not want to do research when we could not guarantee any positive outcome for participants in terms of interest from policy-makers, or indeed anybody other than ourselves.

We were also influenced by experiences of other researchers whose primary interest has been methodological. Backett-Milburn *et al.* (1999) arrived at a substantive topic for a methodological study somewhat pragmatically, and found it hard to retain sharp intellectual focus on the topic and consistency of approach among interviewers.

Our preference was thus not to set the area of enquiry ourselves, but to seek a sponsor who wanted a small qualitative study based on depth interviews to provide information useful for their own purposes. We would work in our usual way: negotiating a contract specifying aims and objectives of the study; agreeing methods of enquiry, timetable and staffing; agreeing arrangements for selection and recruitment of participants, and the form of written output. Within this agreement would be the understanding that we would show participants how they and their words were represented in a draft report, and take their preferences and suggestions into account in the final report for the sponsor. The latter would be publicly available.

We approached a government department at an early stage, offering to conduct a study of this kind to provide information useful to them. The department expressed interest and willingness to discuss further the practicalities of their participation. However, before any such discussions began the researchers were approached independently by the manager of a service offered by the Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service, who had read one of the author's publications, and wished to talk about issues arising from their project Volunteering for Employment Skills (V4ES).

With funding from the European Social Fund, V4ES offers advice and support to people who are interested in using volunteering as a way of moving towards paid work. V4ES aims to find people a suitable volunteering job and support them for up to three months. This experience, it is hoped, may increase communication skills, confidence and self-esteem; widen horizons, and strengthen work-related abilities such as time-keeping and maintaining relationships at work. The project manager was currently trying to develop this service to make it more useful to people who would like to do paid work, but lacked information about the experiences of people who had been in touch with the project. The topic fell centrally within the researchers' areas of interest and expertise, and they saw an opportunity here for conducting empirical policy-related evaluative research for a research customer as the first stage in the methodological enquiry about verbatim quotations.

The manager of V4ES was interested immediately in the researchers' suggestion for a small-scale qualitative study with people who had been in touch with the project. One researcher made an initial visit to the main office of V4ES to meet staff and gain knowledge about the volunteering project and the people who took part. The project manager visited the researchers at their university research unit, to discuss usual ways of working and a written contract was drawn up.

The study was developed and conducted by SPRU according to our usual ways and standards of working. The only difference was that V4ES was not charged for the work. Topics for investigation were agreed in meetings with the project manager and staff. The researchers wrote a research proposal for a small-scale exploratory study. The main aims were:

- to provide more information about the way in which V4ES enhances, or not, the employability of people who take part
- to understand more about the strengths and limitations of the current service
- to provide pointers to how the service might be developed further.

Within these aims, specific objectives were to seek clients' views on what had helped and constrained their moving towards paid work; the experience of volunteering; the role of V4ES, and how unmet needs might be met.

The additional aims, within the ESRC study, were:

- to explore clients' expectations and preferences about the way in which their own words would be used
- to show them different approaches to using their words in a research report
- to achieve a final report which included all significant findings and reflected preferences of participants, in terms of use of verbatim quotations
- to explore with Nottingham CVS and other research funders the impact of the format of the final report.

1.3 Research methods

The methods used in the initial evaluative study of the volunteering project are described in detail in the final report from that component (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005).

In summary, the volunteering project wrote to 57 most recent clients, explaining the research and offering an opportunity to opt out. The letter explained why V4ES wanted the research, and why it would be useful. The letter said that the researchers would write a report, but show this to people who took part before giving it to V4ES. We then built a study group of 13 people, including men and women, and people across all age groups with different personal circumstances, some of whom had completed a volunteering job and some who had not. We conducted tape-recorded semi-structured interviews with people in their own homes, guiding discussion with a topic guide. At the end of this interview we explained that typists who worked for us would listen to the tapes and type the words for us. We said we would write a report for V4ES based on the views and experiences of everybody who took part, and bring that report back in a couple of months to show people how what they said was included. We said that some people might want changes in what we wrote, and we would make these so that everybody who took part was happy with the final report.

Everybody taking part said they would like to know what the report said, and we might approach them again in a couple of months. Some said at this point that reading a written report would be hard for them, and we agreed to send them a tape recording of the report.

The tape-recordings were transcribed professionally, using basic conventions (Appendix B). A technical failure in tape-recording meant that one discussion was not recorded. This was discovered shortly after leaving the participant's home. The researcher concerned followed our usual practice in such circumstances, dictating into the tape-recorder everything that was remembered from the interview. This was done within half an hour of the interview, when recall was good, and the researcher could remember actual words in some of the participant's phrases and responses.

We analysed the data, using standard thematic data sorting and extraction techniques (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005) and wrote a report in a format commonly used in this kind of work, with an introductory chapter, and two chapters of analysis and interpretation. The latter included indented, italicised verbatim quotations from participants attributed by gender and age group (shown in brackets at the end of the quotation) interwoven with the researchers' text. The researchers have discussed elsewhere (Corden and Sainsbury, forthcoming) different ways of using verbatim quotations in research reports. In this report, quotations were selected and used in two main ways, which generally reflect some of the ways in which White *et al.* (2003) suggest that primary data may be used effectively.

First, some quotations were selected to demonstrate the kinds of terms and concepts which people used when they expressed their views and thoughts about their personal circumstances, volunteering and paid work, and the links they made. As an example, we reproduce part of that section of the report which discusses people's concerns about volunteering. The quotation was selected to show how an initial reaction to the idea of volunteering was that this meant working without being paid.

Some people who had previous experience of working in professional jobs were not sure they wanted to work without being paid:

Volunteer? Unpaid, that's what I was thinking. Voluntary is to do with unpaid.
(woman, in 40s)

from Corden and Sainsbury (2005, p.11)

Second, some quotations were selected to demonstrate the strength of feeling (satisfaction, enjoyment, disappointment or hurt); their confusions, or hesitations. As an example, we reproduce part of a section which discusses how important for some people was the potential impact on their social security benefits of volunteering or trying paid work. The quotation was selected to show how a misunderstanding had a powerful effect. The person concerned wrongly believed that there were rules about working in the criteria determining entitlement to disability living allowance, and this confusion was influencing her views about trying work.

A woman who had received disability living allowance (DLA) all her life said:

Because I'm never sure whether people will give me the right advice or not, or whether its something I should be doing. Because, you know, with being on DLA you've got to be really careful what you're doing because you're only allowed to work a set amount of hours or you're only allowed to earn a certain amount of money.

from Corden and Sainsbury (2005, p.16)

Everybody's words were included at least once, and most people's twice or three times. The researchers would not usually seek to achieve representation of some

words from all participants in this way. It was necessary here so that we could go back to everybody to show them their own words in the report. It would also help us to discuss this approach with the research users in a later stage of the research.

Some of the quotations included words spoken by the two interviewers. There were two purposes in doing this. First, the researchers words demonstrate some of the questions asked, the language and terms in which people were invited to give their views, and the ways in which some people were encouraged to expand on very short answers. The second purpose was so that the researchers could ask participants what they thought about seeing the researchers' spoken words alongside their own, and to discuss this with the research users in a later stage of the research.

A tape-recorded version of this report was made, using different staff voices for men and women participants, and the two researchers. We also prepared alternative versions of the chapters reporting findings (Appendix C) using lay-outs and ways of including quotations which are currently found in some applied social research reports. One version aggregated all the quotations within each section into a lightly coloured 'box'. The second version comprised the researchers' written text without any verbatim quotations from participants.

Three months after the initial interviews we tried to re-contact all the original participants, and were successful in reaching eleven by telephone. All these people said they were interested in receiving a draft report or tape recording, and offered appointments to meet the researcher again to talk about the report. We mailed them a copy of the initial version and sent a tape-recorded version of this to four people who had said they preferred to listen. We were unable to make any contact with two men from the original group despite several telephone calls, leaving answer-phone messages and calling personally at their previous home addresses. Eventually we mailed them the report, encouraging them to get in touch if they wanted to give us their views. These letters and reports have not been returned to the researchers by Royal Mail and we hope they reached the men concerned.

1.3.1 Interviews

The researchers met most people again in their homes, but one person invited the researcher to meet them where they did their voluntary work. Discussions took up to one hour, and people again gave permission for use of tape-recorders. The focus of discussion this time was the report and the way people's words were represented. Using a topic guide (Appendix D) the researchers explored people's reactions to the report; whether they recognised their own spoken words, and how they felt about the way these were included. We showed or explained the alternative versions and explored preferences in terms of format, and balance between quotations and the researchers' narrative text. We asked people for their views about presenting spoken words that might seem 'different', for example regional dialect; speech affected by medication, impairment or depression; and English as spoken by some people from

minority ethnic groups. We drew attention to the way in which quotations were attributed, explained other approaches sometimes used and sought views.

We promised to take into account all suggestions for improvement of the draft version. We explained that we would write a final chapter setting the main findings within a wider context of volunteering, and current government policy. Everybody who took part in the second interview was happy for the researchers to amend the draft and give it to V4ES, and for V4ES and the researchers to show the report to other people, and talk or write about it.

We explained that we would also like to tell other researchers and people who wanted research done what we found out in the second interviews. We explained that researchers often wrote reports without going back to people who took part in interviews, so it would be useful for other people to know the views of some people who did have this chance. At this stage, some people were surprised to hear that researchers did not always go back. Being unused to research, some had assumed that the process in which they had just taken part would be usual. Everybody said they were happy for us to use the discussions from the second interviews as we described. However, it is likely that there were different levels of understanding about this.

1.3.2 Analysis and writing

We analysed the data using the same thematic approach to data sorting and extraction as in the analysis of the earlier material (see above). We looked for the reasons behind people's reactions to the report, and seeing or hearing their own spoken words. We looked for influences on peoples' views about different ways of attributing quotations and what lay behind views on editing the spoken words, where there were hesitations, repetitions, or broken sentences. We explored generally how the researchers might deal with spoken words which might seem 'different' including swearing, regional accents, speech affected by impairments or patterns of speech suggesting minority ethnic background.

This report continues by presenting the detailed findings from the second set of interviews. The next chapter describes peoples' general reactions to seeing or listening to the research report, and the inclusion of spoken words. Chapter 3 presents peoples' views on the details of the way in which we dealt with spoken words. Chapter 4 explains how we took full account of participants' views and preferences in completing the final report of the evaluative study for V4ES, and discusses some of the wider implications for qualitative research.

In this report, we are **not** presenting indented verbatim quotations for a number of reasons. Having emphasised to participants our commitment to showing them a draft report which included their words, we had set a precedent for people in this study group. We felt it would be wrong to write a second report which included their spoken

words unless we also took this report back to them. However, we felt that we had reached the limits of the iterative process in this particular study, in terms of taking up participants' time; in terms of understanding and participation among some people who found both reading and some of the concepts introduced very hard; and in terms of research resources and timetable.

We do occasionally use within the following text italicised single words or short phrases taken directly from transcripts. We do this when a person's own phrase is more direct or explanatory than would be our own construction of what they said. These single words or short phrases are not attributed to particular people.

Chapter 2 Reactions to a report with spoken words

This chapter presents people's reactions to seeing or hearing the draft report and the way in which their spoken words were included. The first part explains what people had in mind when the researcher said a report would be written, how this compared with what they received, and whether they found their own words. The second part explores people's general reactions to the way their spoken words were included within the report. The last part presents views on the format of the report, and the mix of researchers' commentary and participants' spoken words.

2.1 Seeing or hearing the report

Everybody who had received only the written report said they had read at least some of this. Those who said they had read it straight through, generally at one go, were mostly women who did not find reading difficult and found themselves very interested in learning about other people's experiences. Those people who said they had read parts of the report were sometimes people with more limited reading skills. One mentioned for the first time in the second interview that it would have been more helpful to receive a tape-recording. There was also one person who read widely and was used to dipping into books to find relevant or interesting parts, quickly assessing what might be skipped or skimmed. This person said he had not bothered much with the introductory chapter. Everybody who had read selected parts of the report had generally focused on the chapters reporting findings, which included the quotations.

Among those who read the written version, people who had been in higher education or previously had professional jobs had seen similar kinds of documents. Others had been surprised at the length and appearance of the report and said that what they had in mind, when talking in the first interview about a report, had been a couple of sheets of typing, stapled together at one corner. Some said they had no picture in mind when we said we would send them a research report, but some had expected the kind of folded leaflet or flier displayed on information boards in the CVS office. One person had been initially concerned that what appeared a long document of unfamiliar kind would be too hard to read but this proved not the case.

Opposite views came from people who read widely, and were used to handling and reading long books and reference material. Here, there was initial surprise that the report received was not thicker, and one person felt that it could have been made to look more professional, perhaps with more colour on the cover, and a better binding.

People who had received only a tape recording of the report said they listened to the tape, straight through. There had been no problems in hearing the taped report.

Some in this group used their tape recorders frequently to listen to music and material such as 'Talking Books'. For them, listening to the tape had seemed more like a leisure activity. They had enjoyed hearing the different voices used in the recording, and they liked the idea that the researchers had sent them taped material after they had explained that reading would be hard. One person to whom we sent a tape and a written version had chosen to read the document rather than listen to the tape. It was clear that this person had initially down-played their reading skills, and could read both quickly and fluently.

People approached the written report or tape with mixed feelings about the way in which what they had said might be included. Some were curious and interested to see how they were represented, and read quickly on to find themselves and their words. However, feelings of shyness and being unused to speaking to strangers meant that one person had initially hoped not to find herself.

Among those who looked at the written version, not everybody had recognised that the indented, italicised type was different in some way from the rest of the text. This standard technique of identifying spoken words on the page had not worked for some people, and it remained hard for some to see this difference when they looked at the page with the researcher. However, the attributions in brackets did work to signal spoken words to people who read the report. Whether they responded to different type face, or the signposts provided by the attributions, everybody who read the report said they had realised there was a difference between what the researcher wrote and what people interviewed had said. People who listened to the tape said that this difference was clear, because of the different voices used to make the recording.

People reading the written version who had been curious and interested about the way they would be included had generally identified their own words and remembered saying them. It had been harder for people with unreliable memory to identify their own words and when the researcher showed them those quotations which came from their interviews they did not always remember speaking the words. They said they believed the researcher when told these were their words, and when the researchers jogged memories about topics discussed, began to recall the conversations. For one person, however, it was a strange experience to see things she had apparently said but still did not remember.

Some of those who listened to the tape-recording had easily recognised their own words. This group also included people whose memory was not good, but when the researcher read out their own words from the written version, they recognised them and remembered saying them in the first interview.

The next part of the chapter describes how people felt when they saw their words.

2.2 People's reactions to the way their contributions were used

People in this study group were generally positive in their reactions to the draft report. Most said they had enjoyed reading or listening to it and they had found it interesting. They had especially enjoyed hearing about other people's experiences and views, some of which were surprising to them. Some of this reported positive reaction, of course, may reflect the dynamics of the research interactions. Some of the people we spoke to were socially isolated and unused to having their opinions valued. It might be hard for some such people to say to a person who had now visited them twice in their home and given them a money gift that they did not like the report, found it boring, or felt patronised. We might also speculate that some people unused to dealing with a formal report of this kind might be reluctant to express negative views which might reflect perceived lack of education or low literacy. Of course, there may be some such effects on the views expressed. However, as we go on to show in this and the following chapter, people were ready to express disappointments, tell us about errors and ask for some changes. It was not the case that they were reluctant to offer criticism. Against this background we have some confidence that the generally positive reactions to the overall report were genuine.

People who had enjoyed reading the report said that they had found it easy to read, and they liked the way it was laid out. It had been surprising to some to learn how different some people's experiences were. For example, it had been a surprise to some people to see such strong criticisms of aspects of the volunteering project, but they said they had learned why other people felt like this. Learning about other people's experiences had been useful in leading some to think more about their own situations, for example what might happen at the end of their own period of volunteering. One person said that listening to the report and learning that other people faced similar problems led to feeling less different from other people, and more positive about life.

Another reason for liking the overall report was finding it *'fair'* or *'balanced'*. Mentioned here was approval of there being a good mix of people who had taken part. More frequently mentioned in relation to fairness was that there was a general balance between positive and negative experiences and views. It was important to people that V4ES was told about both good and bad things. In particular, it was important for some people whose own words had been used to illustrate a negative experience that elsewhere in the report they found that their own words had also been used to illustrate positive views. It seemed that people wanted to maintain their own identity as *'fair'*, although other readers would not know who spoke the words.

There was general agreement that the report should include at least some words of everybody who took part. One person would have liked to see more of their own words. This was the person whose interview was not recorded, due to a technical failure. The researcher explained what had happened and apologised.

Some people would have liked to know more about the personal ‘stories’ of those who had taken part. For example, they said the report might have included more details about the kind of voluntary work people did, or more about their personal circumstances and what happened to them. The researchers spoke again about the interviews being confidential, and some people being keen that their personal circumstances were not described.

The person with the least positive overall view of the report had skimmed the introduction and description of circumstances of people taking part in the research, looking for more interesting parts. This was mainly what people said themselves, and anything that could be recognised as the person’s own words. This person felt that those who had asked for the research would certainly want to know what it said, however.

2.3 Layout and format

We asked people what they thought about the way the report was set out on the pages. As explained earlier, the study group included several people with little previous experience of seeing a report of this kind. This is likely to be a factor in their generally positive response: some people were just not familiar with alternative layouts. The spontaneous comments are useful, however.

Some people, especially people unused to reading long texts, said spontaneously that aspects which made the report easier to read included ‘*quite bold*’ writing and the spacing. One person would have found larger type easier to read. The type face and line spacing used throughout the report, and the presentation of indented, italicised verbatim quotations has been demonstrated in the extracts on page 7. Sub-headings were printed in bold.

The format of the overall report was unfamiliar for some people, but most who had looked at the written version had recognised that the first chapter was descriptive and introductory, while the second and third chapters were concerned with the views of people who had taken part. There were favourable comments about the acknowledgments which immediately followed the contents page. Thanking people who had taken part was important because it made people feel wanted and needed. One person liked to see included at the end of the report a copy of the letter which V4ES had sent to their clients, explaining the research and inviting them to take part. Including this letter made the report seem ‘*quite professional*’ and showed the research was done well.

As explained in Chapter 1, the researchers showed to those who read the report two other versions of the findings chapters. These are included at Appendix A. The first different version brought all the verbatim quotations used within one section to the

front of the text, in a box shaded blue immediately following the sub-heading, rather than inter-weaving the authors' text with the verbatim quotations. There was little support for this. Again, this may be associated with the fact that when people saw the alternatives they were more familiar with the original version. However, comments provide some useful insights. Several people said that the report would be harder to read and understand if the examples of people's spoken words were brought together at the front or back of the explanatory text. This was because the points made by the researchers would be further away from the spoken words, so the links would not be clear and the impact less strong. It would be easy to forget what somebody had said if the researcher did not write about it until further on. People reading the report did not want to have to check back, which broke concentration and made the reading harder work. One person who had listened to the tape thought it would be confusing to have people's voices brought together. It was easier to understand a taped report by hearing first what the researcher thought and then to '*hear the voices*'.

Among those who looked at the written versions, there was considerable support for the use of colour on the page. Again, the feeling was that this made the report easier to read, and more attractive. One person went further and said that some coloured sections might help people who had eyesight problems or had to deal with letters '*jumping about*' on white paper. (The authors observe here that it is known that some forms of dyslexia are easier to manage if text is presented on tinted paper.) People who liked the idea of introducing some colour into the pages warned against using colours that were too bright, however. One person remembered being put off reading something at the organisation where she worked by the bright yellow and orange presentation, and others mentioned the garish colours used in '*junk mail*', which sometimes identified it as such.

The second different version of the report included no verbatim quotations. There was little interest in this. Again, it is possible that there would have been more positive views if people had seen this version first, but observations made help explain further why people liked reading the quotations. Inclusion of quotations broke up the text and made the report easier to read. Some suggested they might not have read as much of the report if they had been sent a version without any spoken words because the reading task was harder. The version without spoken words seemed less interesting. Knowing what different people had actually said brought things to life. Another view was that inclusion of people's words showed that the researchers really had visited people and talked to them, and not just made up the report in their office. Readers would be more likely to believe what was in the report if it included people's own words, so it would have more impact on those who had asked for the report. Others said that they liked to see their own words in the report because this made them feel that what they had to say was important.

Finally, one person raised an issue that was unexpected by the researchers. This person said spontaneously how glad they were that there were no photographs in the

report. The researcher asked how this might have happened, given that no photographs were taken or even discussed during the interviews. The person concerned had experience in another community programme of being asked for permission to use their photo, for reports or on the Internet (author's note: this appears to have been for promotional purposes.) The person said that some people do not like how they look on photos, but do not like to refuse, so it was good that we had not suggested this.

Chapter 3 Views on the way the researchers dealt with spoken words

The researchers sought people's views on detailed aspects of the way in which they dealt with spoken words, including confidentiality and attribution; and editing. Both these topics were discussed with people who had read the report and those who had listened to it.

3.1 Confidentiality and attribution

As explained in Chapter 1, spoken words were attributed by describing the speaker's gender and age group, in brackets at the end of the indented quotations. As examples, some quotations were attributed to (man, in 40s) or (woman, in 20s). When the researchers' spoken words were represented the word 'interviewer' preceded the words. In one or two places the words were attributed differently, by describing the gender and age of the person concerned in the preceding text, and occasionally, for reasons of writing style, the person concerned was described as 'a young person'.

In the second series of interviews, the researchers explored in depth how people felt about these ways of describing them as those who spoke the words presented.

Both those who read and those who listened to the report recognised the attributions as ways of describing people who spoke the associated words. The attributions in brackets also served as a signal of the difference between spoken words and what the researcher wrote, for some people who did not recognise the signal provided by the indented, italicised typeface. There was general agreement that referring to people's age group and gender maintained their confidentiality but demonstrated the kind of person whose views these were, within the range of people interviewed. Both of these were thought to be important. For example, it was thought that people of different ages would certainly have different views about getting paid work and volunteering, so it was important to know the age group of the person whose words were used. Most people thought that characteristics of age and gender were unlikely to identify people to other readers, although these helped people find their own words in the report. People to whom anonymity was important included people who had been critical of the volunteering project, and people who were still in touch with it or might return for further advice. They said they would not want other personal details in the brackets in case other people knew who they were. One person interviewed did feel that, as the only representative in one age group among the people interviewed, identification by V4ES staff might be possible and was glad that the words we selected were not likely to upset project staff. This person could not think of any other descriptive

characteristics they would have preferred, however, and felt that gender, on its own, was insufficient to explain the kind of person whose words were being used.

The researchers asked others if they would have preferred different attributions but there were no suggestions. The researchers then gave some examples of other kinds of attributions which are commonly used with verbatim quotations in policy-related research reports, for example categories such as lone parent, benefit recipient. People had strong feelings here. In general, people did not want to be described in a way that marked them as different from the other people who took part in the research, or in a way they thought led to other people judging them. Thus, in the report in question, some people would not want their words attributed to 'a disabled person' or an 'income support recipient' because these terms did not reflect well on people. There was mixed acceptance of attribution to 'an unemployed person' – some who saw themselves as belonging to this group were happy to be so described but others were not. Nor did people whom we might have described as 'person with mental health problems' want their words attributed in this way, although some to whom this applied were happy to be described as a person with 'experience of illness'. An attribution to 'single person' would have been acceptable to some in such circumstances, and 'mother' was generally acceptable to women with children. 'Lone mother' was not much liked, but some women who recognised themselves within this category said that the way they felt about attributions would depend on what the research was about, and who else took part. If everybody taking part in the research was a lone parent, they wouldn't mind this attribution. What was important was not standing out as different in a way that invited judgement or criticism.

The researchers explained that in some reports, the researcher gave people taking part pseudonyms or 'pretend names' and used these for attributing words spoken. Some had seen this approach used, for example in the way some agencies and organisations reported on the circumstances of individual people. Nobody liked this idea for the V4ES report, for a number of reasons. Some said that using made-up names would simply be '*false*' or '*telling lies*'. Others said that whatever names were chosen by the researcher were likely to be the real names of people who had or had not used the volunteering project at some stage, and could lead to wrong identifications and assumptions among people reading the report. Some also observed that they would find it confusing and would not like it if they read the report and found their own words attributed to somebody else's name.

The way in which spoken words were attributed to the researchers was not raised spontaneously by anybody, but some people became interested in this when they were told that two different researchers had conducted the interviews. Some women who had spoken to the woman interviewer said they might have said different things to a man researcher, so it might be important to identify the interviewer's gender. The woman interviewer asked some people whether the interviewer's age should also be indicated. People acknowledged that interviews might have gone differently with

interviewers of different ages. Those asked whether the words of one interviewer should thus be attributed to 'woman, in 60s' said no. It was not easy for people to explain why, but we believe this view is consistent with their strong dislike of using categories which might not reflect well on those taking part. It seems likely that they made assumptions that the interviewer would not want to be identified in this older age group.

The researchers asked people how they felt about what had been written about them, in those parts of the report which the researcher wrote. The general feeling was that their own experience was included, but not in a way that enabled other people to identify them. The researchers had taken care to respect confidentiality in their text. However, in a number of places the report described views or experiences of individual people and it was somewhat surprising when these individuals had not recognised themselves here. It seemed easier for some people to recognise their spoken words, with the help of the attributions, than to identify their personal circumstances or views as described by the researcher. Among those who had identified themselves in the text, one had spotted an error in the name of an agency and asked for this to be corrected. Another had not liked our description of them as a 'young person' in the descriptive text, arguing that this term was relative and inconsistent with the way we had used age groups in the attributions.

The researchers pursued in depth with specific people their feelings about the way in which we had written about them. We checked with people who had described difficult life circumstances, feelings of anxiety or insecurity, or negative experiences that what we had written was acceptable and we had maintained confidentiality. Sometimes the people concerned had not recognised themselves as the sources of information, but none wanted changes. The general feeling seemed to be that people wanted the report to describe negative aspects of their experiences but in a way that led to their feeling part of a wider group of people who also had such experiences. The researchers had purposefully not used categories such as 'disabled people' or 'people with mental health problems' when writing the text of the report. People who knew that their personal characteristics meant that others might describe them within such categories spontaneously said that they were glad not to find such categories in the report.

The researchers also checked with one person whose long-standing regrets were described in the report, including their spoken words which we thought reflected sad and painful feelings. The person agreed the experience described was still painful and took some time thinking whether they wanted this part of the report omitted or changed. Their decision was to leave the researchers' text and the spoken words as they were, so that the volunteering project understood what happened to some people using the service.

3.2 Editing

We explained in Chapter 1 that the initial interviews were transcribed professionally outside SPRU, using basic conventions for representing spoken words (Appendix B). The researchers took the representations of spoken words directly from the transcripts, using the transcribers' punctuation. Pauses in speech were indicated by three dots between words. Standard English spelling was used, with some occurrences of *cos*; *yeah* and *wanna* (i.e. *want to*). In writing the report, when the selected spoken words included proper names of people or organisations these were replaced by general terms in square brackets, for confidentiality.

When the researchers discussed the report with those who had read the written version they drew attention to the dots between some spoken words, and the square brackets. It seemed that these had not been problematic for people, although there was little comment.

The researchers led discussion into whether and how much the researchers should change any spoken words to put them into the report, and asked what researchers should do if people's words included swearing, or look very different from other people's when written down. Some of these issues were discussed with people who had listened to the tape recorded report.

This was a novel topic for most people, but there was considerable interest, and people readily engaged with the issues and gave their views and suggestions. There was general agreement that people used words in different ways when they spoke, depending on what part of the country they came from, who they were talking to, and what they were talking about. Some said that their own speaking was sometimes different from other people's, for example when they muddled up words, found some words hard to say or when medication or being shy made them speak slowly using few words.

Most of the people who had read the written report also agreed that when spoken words were written down, they looked different from the way words were used in non-spoken writing, such as that used in letters, forms, magazines and reports. There was a wide range of views and some strong feelings about how the researchers should deal with these two kinds of differences.

At one end of a spectrum of views were people who thought the researchers should definitely 'tidy up' spoken words, taking out phrases frequently used such as 'you know', 'like I said' and 'I mean'; putting in standard punctuation and replacing common expressions such as 'wanna' with standard English. There were several arguments for this kind of detailed editing. One argument was that the report was a written document so should be grammatically correct and easy to read and understand. This was important so that people who read the report thought it was professional and took

it seriously. People such as project managers who wanted to read the report would not, it was suggested, want to pick their way through lots of unnecessary words. Linked to this was the suggestion that if the report was not edited in this way, it would reflect badly on the literary skills of the researchers.

A different argument in favour of extensive editing was that people often did not phrase things very well when speaking, and were not clear and concise in giving their opinions. It would often be necessary to tidy up spoken words, or extract the relevant points made so that speakers appeared reasonable and intelligent. Similar arguments were made for editing some regional expressions and accents. It could be hard to read and understand some regional forms of speech, and some regional expressions were unattractive, and might lead to negative judgements about the speaker.

People who argued for editing included one who asked for specific editing changes in their own words, including punctuation, tense, and taking out 'you know' and 'like I said'. The same person criticised our use of the abbreviation *cos* in a number of quotations, arguing that it was more correct to use 'cause.

At the other end of the spectrum of views about editing were those who initially said that the researchers should not change anything people said. Again, there were several arguments here. Some said there was no point using people's own words if the researchers altered what people said; the report would be '*untrue*'. If people found passages from their own interviews which the researchers had altered they might not like this, and it could raise doubts about what the report said overall. For some, the difference in kinds of voices represented in the report made it more interesting and lively, and editing by the researchers would reduce this.

When the researchers told those who wanted diversity without editing about some of the arguments for making some changes made by others interviewed there were some shifts in position. Representing strong regional accents, they agreed, might mean that words were hard to understand, and the priority had to be readability. Views on what to do about impaired speech remained polarised. People with relatives who stammered thought that attention should not be drawn to this by showing the repetitions. However, they were keen that people with impaired speech would have the same opportunity as others to have their words included. This was thought to be a tricky issue, and one suggestion was for the researcher to present the words the person was aiming towards. One person retained strong views, however, that impaired speech should not be tidied up because the person concerned would know that the researcher had changed their words, and might not like this.

The report did not include any verbatim quotations in which there was swearing. (This was because none of the people taking part in the study had used swear words in the initial interviews, although people did not know this.) The researchers asked what should have happened if some people had used swear words. There were some

strong views that the report should not contain swear words. Some people said they would not want to read or hear such words themselves. Speech containing swearing produced a negative image of the person concerned, as '*an ignorant person*' or somebody '*not very nice*', and some would not want to be associated with such people by appearing to be part of the same group. One person argued that swearing was often a feature of speech of people who were not very articulate and could not express themselves. That being so, they suggested, it would not be a good example for the researchers to choose to illustrate views. The same reasoning was used by another person who pointed out that many people had learned generally not to take much notice of people who swore. There would thus be no point including their words in the report because they would be generally ignored.

People who felt that swear words should be left in included some who argued strongly against any kind of editing, and some people who knew personally people who routinely included words like 'bloody' in their everyday language, but whose views they did not discount. One solution suggested was for the researcher to use the technique used in newspapers and magazines, substituting ***** for 'bloody', so that the person's way of speaking was represented but people did not have to see or hear the words themselves.

The researchers raised the issue of how to deal with spoken words in which patterns of speech might suggest that the speaker came from a minority ethnic background. Some people in the study group had identified themselves in the initial interview as having a minority ethnic background. The report made no mention of this (the researchers purposely waited until the second interview to explore preferences here). The spoken words of these particular people did not, in the researchers' view, draw attention to their ethnic background. The people concerned readily agreed that the spoken English of some people from an Asian or Afro Caribbean background identified them as coming from a minority background, and thought this was another tricky issue. People might be more easily identified by others who read the report if their ethnicity was apparent in their words. One person thought it would be generally positive for the report to show that views were included from people from different cultures. On the other hand, some spoken language just '*didn't look right*' when it was written down, and this might be a disadvantage. On balance, people from minority ethnic backgrounds themselves favoured editing such words or asking the people concerned what to do.

Some of those taking part who came from the ethnic majority found the representation of spoken words from people of minority ethnic backgrounds a new and interesting idea, and agreed it was important. Among those who found the issues hard to grasp, there were some racist comments.

At the end of discussion about ethnicity the researcher asked those who identified themselves as coming from minority ethnic backgrounds whether they would like us to

mention this diversity within the study group. One person had noticed that the first version did not mention ethnicity of participants, but would have liked some explanation, to show readers that people who took part came from various different backgrounds. It was also thought important, however, not to be too specific, so that participants were not identifiable.

Chapter 4 Discussion of findings

This chapter describes first the textual changes made to the draft report as a result of the preferences and suggestions of those who took part, and then goes on to discuss some of the wider implications of the findings.

4.1 Changes and amendments to the draft

One of the researchers' initial concerns was that it might be hard to produce a final report that took account of everybody's preferences and suggestions. This was not borne out. It proved relatively quick and easy to make amendments that took account of most suggestions for improvement.

As a result of requests for change and suggestions for improvement the following adjustments were made:

- we inserted into the section in the report about characteristics of people who took part the sentence 'Some people who took part were from minority ethnic groups'. This made visible the ethnic diversity of the study group, but maintained confidentiality.
- we attributed the interviewers' spoken words separately, and explained in the introductory chapter that one was a man and one a woman. Some participants thought it was important for this to be clarified.
- we changed a reference to one organisation, as specifically requested.
- we edited the spoken words of one person, as requested. This involved changes to punctuation and tense, and taking out some phrases such as 'like I said'. The effect was to reduce the differences between the representation of spoken words and written words. We perceive no significant effect on the meaning of the words presented, or change in their illustrative or explanatory power.
- when cos appeared in spoken words we changed this to because, throughout the report, in view of the strong preferences expressed.
- we changed textual references in the text to 'a young person' to references by gender and age group, to address criticisms of using relative terms and inconsistency.

- we added, at the end of the chapter on views about the volunteering project, paragraphs which gave a general picture of changes in people's health and employment circumstances between their two interviews. This served primarily to provide a longitudinal perspective on the impact of the volunteering project. However, a secondary effect was to provide more of the kind of information about people's circumstances and what happened to them that some people in the study group wanted to see.

There were two suggestions on which we did not take action:

- we were unable to include more spoken words from the person whose interview was not recorded, and are sorry about this.
- we did not introduce more colour onto the inside pages of the report, which some people said they would like. We experimented in the office using coloured type-face for sub-headings and shaded paper, but we considered the effects unsatisfactory, for example risking inappropriate emphases.

4.2 Wider implications

Findings from this small study have led the researchers involved to reflect carefully on their usual practice. We believe the study raises a number of issues which require further consideration and debate among those who commission and conduct applied qualitative social research.

4.2.1 Methodological issues

There are some methodological issues and provisos before discussing findings.

First, there are some points to make about the draft report discussed with participants. The researchers applied their usual standards and practices in collecting, extracting and analysing the data in both sets of interviews. As a result of meeting and talking to people in the study group in the first set of interviews it became clear that there was a wide range of reading skills. This set some challenges in writing the draft, which had to serve two purposes – meeting the requirements and expectations of the programme staff, and providing the basis for exploration of contributors' reactions.

The report aimed to be descriptive. It was atheoretical and the draft version shown to the participants did not have the same depth of policy discussion that would be usual in some of the policy evaluations undertaken by the researchers. The discussion about policy context appears in the final chapter of the report and was written after the second series of interviews. The researchers always aim to write in plain English, using short sentences in simple words, avoiding jargon and ensuring clear sign-posting in the text. However, to meet the range of reading skills among the

participants, there were probably more sub-headings in the text of the V4ES report than the researchers might usually include. The version shown to the participants had 24 pages, and this is a relatively short report. This reflects the fact that it was a sharply focused study with a small group of people and, as explained above, the draft version included a relatively short policy introduction.

The fact that the draft report would be offered to those who took part for detailed scrutiny of the way in which they and their views were represented probably did influence the way we wrote. For example, we knew from previous research how much some people dislike the kinds of categories and labels which are frequently used in this kind of research (for example 'disabled people') so we purposefully did not use them. Also, chapters describing the findings probably contain more examples of people's spoken words than the researchers would currently include in a qualitative report of this kind. This was because in order to explore everybody's reactions to their spoken words we had to include at least some words from all those who took part. The researchers have not recently conducted other research in which they set out to use some spoken words of everybody interviewed. This was a small group with wide variation in views and experiences, however, and there was appropriate and useful primary data for inclusion from all participants.

Drawing these points together, it is likely that there were some differences in the writing and presentation, in comparison with some other research reports routinely written by the researchers. The draft report was written and made available to enable maximum accessibility to participants, without using analytical categories which we thought some might not like, and in which all participants' spoken words were represented.

Such factors may be associated with the generally positive reactions to the report. It might be argued that we would have gained more insight into people's reactions if we had taken less extra care, and produced a report which was less 'user-friendly', with more possibility of negative response. There would have been little point trying to discuss with people a report which was too hard to read or understand, however, and there would have been many wasted opportunities in the second series of interviews. We wanted to maximise discussion about quotations and were not researching more generally how people read reports. We also believe that people who were generally not too dissatisfied with the report were in a relaxed and secure position from which to tell us where they did have criticisms, to give us their views about some of the more complex constructs and ideas that we wanted to explore, and to explain how they might have felt patronised and exploited if the report had been different.

With these provisos, we go on to discuss issues arising.

4.2.2 Informed consent

The study makes a contribution to current debate about seeking informed consent from research participants.

People had been told on four separate occasions that a report would be written (invitation letter; first telephone contact; beginning of interview; end of interview) and all had indicated agreement. However, when they saw or heard the report, the length, detail, mix of narrative text and spoken words meant it was a surprise to some people. This was not what they had in mind when the researcher told them that a report would be written from the first set of interviews, and checked that they were happy to be included.

This leads us to wonder whether researchers have a responsibility to show people in advance the kind of output they are aiming towards, perhaps by taking with them a previously published report or article containing spoken words. There would be some new risks, as well as practical problems. Some people might be put off the idea of taking part at all by their reactions to the report, and some interviews might go differently. Indeed, one person interviewed said they might have said different things if shown a previous report. Asked what might have been different, this person said seeing an earlier report would have made them more careful in what they said. What importance we attach to the latter effect will depend on individual approaches to the nature of interview data (to be discussed in forthcoming publications from the overall study).

The practical issues involved in showing participants an earlier report should not be under-estimated. It might be fairly quick and easy to show a report or article to people with more developed reading skills and more experience of different kinds of written formats. Making an earlier report properly accessible to people with less experience and confidence, and those who do not read at all would be much harder. 'Showing a report' to such people at the beginning of an interview might be little more than a token gesture.

The issues raised also provide a perspective on how far people understand what they are doing when they are asked to sign consent forms which mention use of their words. Our views on the value and management of consent forms are still developing. We did not use consent forms in this study. It would have been hard to explain that we would discuss with people later whether they wanted their words included if at the same time we asked them for written consent to include their words. If we had asked for written consent to use of spoken words in the draft report then we would have needed formal documentation procedures for those who subsequently asked for their words to be withdrawn, or changed. A separate study in the ESRC Methods Programme is looking in detail at consent giving (see Crow *et al.*, 2004) and we did not pursue this issue in depth in our study. One person was interested in this issue however. This person said they would readily have signed a form at the beginning of

the first interview, giving permission for the use of their words. In retrospect, they realised that they probably did have some idea of the way people's spoken words could be represented on a page, but would not really have understood what they were signing, because they had never seen anything like the research report.

4.2.3 Analytical categories

The findings provide further evidence of some people's dislike of being described within some of the categories which are widely used to describe groups of people with particular characteristics. We believe there are important implications here for reporting policy-related research which, by its nature, focuses on groups of people with particular characteristics, circumstances or needs.

People who took part in this study readily talked to the interviewers about their personal circumstances. When they discussed their experiences of volunteering and views about paid work different people told the interviewers about the way in which their lives had been affected by learning difficulties, mental illness, alcohol addiction, behavioural difficulties, domestic abuse, eating disorders, and living in a refuge or hostel. The people concerned used this language themselves. People who identified themselves in minority ethnic groups or '*not English*' used these terms themselves, and women who were bringing up children on their own talked about being a single parent. However, although they themselves used the language of social groups and categories of personal circumstances, there was strong dislike of being identified and described by other people within such categories when this pointed to their 'difference' from other people, or might draw negative judgment.

Such feelings came out strongly both in the discussions about the attributions used for the verbatim quotations, and in reactions to some of the ways in which people were described in the narrative text. For example, people who talked at length to the researcher about the impact on their lives of long periods of mental illness, their treatment and medication, and how these circumstances related to their interest in volunteering, did not want to find themselves described in the report as people with mental illness. For one person who felt like this, it was acceptable to see themselves described as a person receiving treatment for long term illness, but for another, it was better to be described as a woman. It seemed that people generally were happy to be described by gender, which had no negative connotations and was thought important context for their views by some. Identifying people in fairly wide age groups was also generally acceptable, and again important contextually, although if some age groups had few representatives there was risk of identification. There was nobody in the study group who came into the 60s age group, so we do not know how acceptable this description would be for older clients of V4ES. However, the view expressed that it would not be right for one of the interviewers to be identified within this age group provides additional insight into dislike of categorisations which might draw negative judgement, in this case ageism.

Of course, this was a small group of people, and there is scope for wider exploration of views on attributions and descriptive categories. However, the strong views expressed by some people in this study made considerable impression on the researchers; especially when put alongside the fact that in most policy-related social research those who take part do not get the chance to ask for changes in the manuscript.

4.2.4 Anonymity

Findings underline the importance for some people that other people who read the report do not identify them, either in the narrative text or in the spoken words. Those interviewed knew that the staff at V4ES would read the whole report. They wanted the staff to know the views and experiences of people who used the service, especially criticisms or suggestions they had not heard before. Generally, however, they did not want staff to know what they personally had said. Nor did they want the possibility that staff might identify contributors wrongly (one of the reasons for rejecting pseudonyms). The researchers explained that V4ES might decide to show the final report to other people, such as staff in Jobcentre Plus, SureStart or local voluntary organisations which offered volunteering opportunities; or there might be reasons for showing the report to a local newspaper. People said they agreed that this should happen, and some mentioned again here that it was important that others did not know who had taken part.

One had thought about showing the draft report to supervisors at their voluntary work, but doing so would identify them as a contributor, and this was one reason for deciding not to do this.

Strong feelings expressed on this topic underlined to the researchers their responsibilities to people to protect anonymity.

4.2.5 Perceived impact of spoken words

There was much to reflect on in the response of people in this group to the way we included their words. People generally liked the version which included spoken words. The spoken words made the report interesting, and it was easy to read or listen to because the quotations broke up otherwise long passages of text. People liked the diversity of *'the voices'* and the way people talked. Having people's own words in the report showed that the researcher really had done the work and not just made it up in the office. Some people were pleased with the way they were represented, and liked to think that their ideas were so important that the researchers had chosen to write about them. People who often found it hard to talk to strangers, or had few opportunities to talk seriously about things were sometimes surprised that their spoken words appeared, but were pleased, and felt *'wanted'*. Some felt this was a good chance to have their say.

For some, what was important was that spoken words were not changed in any way. The advantages of having spoken words were undermined as soon as the researchers made any changes to them.

On the other hand, some people perceived possible risks and disadvantages attached to using people's words. Presenting their spoken words without editing them made some people feel less articulate and less intelligent than they perceived themselves to be. They did not like this image of themselves, and they thought unedited spoken words made the report look less professional, and thus would not be taken seriously. People from minority ethnic groups thought that unedited words as spoken by some people from minority groups did not '*look right*', and would reflect negatively on the speakers. People who knew personally other people with impaired speech would not want attention drawn to the impairment by using unedited spoken words. Some people would not want to read or listen to swear words such as 'bloody', or be in a report alongside others whose spoken words included swearing (i.e. ignorant people, people who were not nice and people who were not taken seriously).

There was tension for some individual people who liked the ownership and perceived power of unedited spoken words, but recognised potential negative impact on readers of some people's ways of speaking.

4.3 Reflections

This was a small study with a selected group of people in one Midlands town. However, the characteristics and circumstances of the people who took part were such that they were all in groups receiving attention within key government policy initiatives (for example labour market programmes; incapacity benefit reform; support for families with children). There are many recent qualitative research reports which draw on information provided by people like those who took part in the V4ES evaluation, and many of these reports include verbatim quotations. Although our findings cannot be generalised, we believe they are important, and that the issues should be widely discussed and further investigated.

The people who took part in this research liked their own words included in a report for the sponsoring organisation and which would be circulated more widely. They did not like the version which did not include spoken words. Most thought it was important that there were some spoken words from everybody who took part. This is a challenging finding for some researchers, for example when the aim is not this kind of equal representation and there are limits on length.

Anonymity was very important to the people who took part, both for themselves and other people about whom wrong assumptions could be made. Findings underline the importance of researchers taking great care in the way in which they write about

people and the attributions of the spoken words. We believe it is also important for the research community to reflect on the general dislike of being cast in groups or categories perceived to attract criticism or negative judgements.

The final stage in this part of our study is to discuss the V4ES report with people who may use this research report directly. We will pursue with them the impact of reading direct quotations, and some of the issues that were important for the participants whose words were used such as anonymity and descriptive categories. This part of the study will take place in late May 2005, and will be disseminated quickly.

We do not know what issues would arise in similar studies with other groups of research respondents, for example people taking part in research interviews in a professional capacity. Representation of spoken words from interviews conducted through an interpreter raise particularly complex issues. We believe that it would be valuable to extend explorations.

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Appendix A Summary of main findings from the exploratory evaluative study of Volunteering for Employment Skills (V4ES)

Study group

Eight women and five men took part, of various ages. Some were from minority ethnic backgrounds. Seven people had done some volunteering or training arranged through V4ES and six had not; several had done some volunteering arranged without help from V4ES. Voluntary work undertaken included administrative work; residential care; catering and shop work; resource centre and library work, and working in family and community support settings.

Views about the volunteering project

As a result of different circumstances people had various reasons for getting in touch with V4ES. Some keen to move quite soon into jobs hoped for training or workplace experience. Others were not yet ready to think about paid work but wanted to try an activity outside home. Some were looking for something new and interesting to do, and some were encouraged to get in touch with V4ES by staff in other supportive organisations and services.

It was not unusual to have concerns and anxieties at first.

People generally found the V4ES guidance workers easy to talk to, friendly, polite and keen to help them. Things that some people found helpful were:

- the way guidance workers dealt with them
- guidance workers going into community locations
- being made to feel good about themselves
- practical help with information, training, getting a voluntary job
- having support when volunteering
- feeling in control
- social activities arranged by V4ES for volunteers.

Negative experiences and disappointments included:

- feeling uncomfortable talking to guidance workers
- unhelpful pace and focus of interviews with guidance workers
- not getting follow-up action expected from guidance workers
- problems in communication with guidance workers
- needing more information about social security benefits
- feeling awkward about relationships between employing organisation and V4ES

- being unable to take part in social activities arranged by V4ES
- finding it hard to break links with V4ES.

People said they had been helped by V4ES in various ways:

- learning new skills
- building up confidence and self-esteem
- new friendships
- feelings of contributing to society
- gaining better understanding of themselves
- parents feelings that their children's lives were richer, through their volunteering.

Barriers to moving forwards through volunteering included:

- communication problems and delays linked with limited literacy skills
- being unable to provide references for organisations offering voluntary jobs
- voluntary jobs disappearing due to organisational change
- voluntary jobs ending due to problems in relationships at work
- fear of losing social security benefits as a result of volunteering
- staying with volunteering rather than looking for paid work.

Suggestions for developing the volunteering project

There were a number of suggestions for V4ES doing things differently or better.

In the way project staff dealt with people, some participants wanted:

- a quicker service, with drop-in facilities
- guidance workers continuing to go into community locations
- better matching of service to individual needs and interests
- better communication with people with limited literary skills, and people who needed things explained slowly and simply
- good follow-up, and keeping in touch.

In terms of what the V4ES service might offer, some people suggested:

- direct help with looking for paid work
- reliable information about links between benefits, volunteering and paid work
- support with personal issues
- better communication between supporting organisations
- more opportunities for social activities
- options for people who wanted to stay in volunteering and not move to paid work.

For the organisations using volunteers, there were some suggestions for:

- tighter agreements between volunteers and employing organisations
- certificates for completion of periods of volunteering
- priority for competent volunteers in post when paid jobs were advertised.

Appendix B Guidelines for transcription

- Transcription carried out in Times New Roman 12, unless required for analysis via Atlas Ti in which case it's carried out in Courier New 10, or as otherwise requested.
- Interviewer and interviewee are denoted as Q: and A: in a two-person interview, and then continuing on to A2: etc, etc, or with names or initials if requested.
- The symbol for something undecipherable is (...) or (?) for inclusion in Atlas Ti.
- If a word can be heard but it's not completely clear OR the spelling is in doubt then it is shown, e.g. (Paracetamol?)
- A pause is shown as two dots, i.e. .. and a pause longer than 2 seconds shown as (pause) or for a very long pause this would be (very long pause) or timed in seconds/minutes if appropriate.
- Where there is an interruption to speech or a person doesn't finish their sentence, then speech is tailed off using three dots and then picked up again with three dots at the beginning of the next section of speech where the sentence continues.
- Where some speech is undecipherable because two people (or more) are talking together) than that is denoted as (...) (talking together).
- All "stage directions" are included, i.e. (laughing) (crying) (interruption) (phone rings) etc, etc.
- If a word has added emphasis, it would be typed in capital letters. If voice raised then (shouting) would be typed after the section, and conversely (whispering) if a person lowered their voice.
- All transcripts are typed verbatim, unless otherwise requested, excluding ums and ers.

Appendix C Alternative versions of report chapters

Version 1: Chapter without any quotations

Chapter 2 Views about the volunteering project

This chapter explains what people said about their experiences of the volunteering project and any volunteering they had gone on to do.

People who took part in the research

Eight women and five men took part. Seven had done some volunteering or training arranged through V4ES and six had not. Several people had done some volunteering arranged without V4ES. People had done various kinds of work as volunteers including reception, administrative, secretarial and financial work; care and support in residential settings and day centres; staffing parent and toddler groups; leading community groups; catering and shop work; resource centre and library work. The settings in which people had worked as volunteers were mainly in the voluntary or charitable sectors, or community settings. Nobody in this group had recently been volunteering for an employer in the private sector.

People had been doing different amounts of volunteering when we talked to them. As examples, one person had been working for a year in a centre for parents and children, and spent one morning each week at this work. Another person who had been volunteering for nearly a year had built up her administrative work to four or five days each week when things were really busy, but changes in the organisation where she worked had led to having to cut down her work recently. Another person had just started working in a shop for two half days each week, and one man spent time with different organisations each week as a volunteer.

People were of various ages. Two people were under 30 years old; four aged between 31 and 40 years; four aged between 41 and 50 years and one over 50 years old. Some of those interviewed lived alone, and some with their partner and/or children, or their parents.

The group included people living in central parts of Nottingham city, and in outer suburbs and residential estates. People lived in different kinds of accommodation including owner-occupied houses, and flats or houses rented from the local authority or housing associations. Some of those who took part lived in supported accommodation of different kinds.

Getting in touch

This part of the chapter explains people's work circumstances when they first got in touch with the volunteering project and their reasons for getting in touch.

Work circumstances

Most people could remember a bit about how they first heard about or got in touch with the volunteering project. Some heard about the project when they were already thinking about having paid work eventually. Some people were getting job advice from staff in Connexions or Jobcentre Plus. One person had decided on a career change and spent time retraining and getting new qualifications. One person was enrolled on a college course to increase skills in reading and writing, arranged by Jobcentre Plus. Some of those who were keen to get back to work were already looking for suitable jobs.

Others hoped they might do some paid work at some time in the future. They did not feel ready yet to try paid work but they wanted to take part in some kind of activity. Some had been away from work for a long period while they recovered from illness, or took part in rehabilitation programmes. Some had been spending time looking after their children. Some of these people had already started working as a volunteer when they heard about the volunteering project, for example spending time helping with community activities or groups for parents and children.

There were also people who did not have the idea of paid work at the front of their mind when they first heard about the volunteering project. Some had not done paid work for many years. Some had no previous experience of paid work although they had workplace experience, for example helping in family businesses, or working alongside catering staff in day centres. Social security benefits such as income support or incapacity benefit had been important for most of their adult lives. People like this remembered hearing about the volunteering project from a community psychiatric nurse and at a women's centre. As they remembered it, their advisers had emphasised the opportunity to take part in a voluntary activity, rather than taking a step towards paid work.

One person receiving incapacity benefits already understood what volunteering meant through the experience of family members, and had called into the Mansfield Road office a couple of times to look through the leaflets on display.

Reasons for getting in touch

As a result of people's different backgrounds and expectations there were various reasons for getting in touch with the volunteering project. People keen to move quite soon into jobs or self-employed work were attracted by the idea of getting some help with further training or increasing their qualifications. Some hoped for some workplace experience to tell potential employers about, and a reference. One young man was hoping for a volunteering opportunity that would demonstrate to future possible employers that he had experience of responsibility and dealing with people.

Another young man thought that volunteering was the main route to paid work in the area he was interested in. In his experience, the paid jobs available seemed to be offered to experienced volunteers already working there.

Some got in touch with the project because they wanted to try an activity outside the home. They thought this might be a possible first step towards paid work although they were not ready yet to think about having a paid job, because of health conditions or family responsibilities. They wanted to hear more about volunteering. Other people who were not ready yet to have a paid job had already started doing some volunteering, and they got in touch with a guidance worker to talk about having some training or more support for what they were doing. One woman was already enjoying some volunteering work, but was encouraged to go for some training.

Another person was looking for more support or training for the community activity in which she was already involved. She met a guidance worker from the project and talked things through.

Some people were looking for something new and interesting to do when they got in touch with the project, or happened to meet a guidance worker in a community location. People building up lives interrupted by illness or difficult personal circumstances felt taking part in something outside home would help them, and were interested in the idea of volunteering. One person had herself had help from an organisation which relied on volunteers, and liked the idea of giving something back.

It was clear that suggestions from other people were important in encouraging people to get in touch with the volunteering project. People had acted on suggestions from a Community Psychiatric Nurse and workers in organisations and centres people were already attending. One man remembered that he was about to take some paid work but rehabilitation staff advised moving more gradually towards work rather than rushing into the first paid opportunity, and suggested getting in touch with the project.

It was also clear that hearing about the volunteering project or meeting a guidance worker often happened by chance, when the worker was visiting community locations. These chance meetings could be important first contacts that led people to use the volunteering project.

People's concerns about volunteering

Some people said that, at first, they had concerns about talking to somebody at the volunteering project, or were unsure they wanted to get involved in volunteering.

Some people who had previous experience of working in professional jobs were not sure they wanted to work without being paid.

Some had images of 'volunteering' in their minds that did not match what they themselves wanted to do. They linked volunteering with hospital work, Barnardos homes or working in the countryside. Some were anxious about being drawn into something they would find out they did not really want to do. Some people generally found it hard to meet new people or go into new situations. For people like this, encouragement from employment advisers and community workers was important, but people who felt they were expected to get in touch with the volunteering project had sometimes felt a bit resentful about this.

Feeling very keen to get back to work helped some people overcome initial concerns. For example, they balanced the possibility of getting valuable work experience against the idea of working for no pay.

People for whom volunteering was a new idea altogether and who had been unsure about what was involved when they got in touch with the project found they liked the idea of a new activity to fill empty or boring days or help them manage depression.

Experience of the volunteering project

Everybody interviewed in the research remembered one or both of the guidance workers, and most remembered their first names. People generally found the guidance workers easy to talk to, friendly, polite and keen to help them. This was specially important for people who had been anxious about going to Mansfield Road.

People had different memories about what they talked about in the first interview with guidance workers. One or two people remembered talking in detail about their personal circumstances, health, skills and interests, and said this first interview took around an hour or more. Such people thought that the guidance worker got a good picture of themselves and their needs. On the other hand, some did not remember talking much about themselves with the guidance worker, and not everybody remembered filling in a questionnaire or form. Some explained that filling in forms was hard for them. One person was surprised at how quick the interview was, remembering this as around 15 minutes, with no discussion about her background or needs, or what she might be interested in.

What several people did remember about the first interview, however, was being told about lots of different kinds of activities where volunteers might work. They remembered the guidance worker looking in the computer for opportunities available, and turning up names of organisations. Some also remembered the guidance worker saying she would go on looking for other opportunities. Some people said the guidance worker had suggested training courses that might be helpful, including courses at the CVS office and short courses at local colleges. Some people remembered being given a leaflet about a centre which offered help with reading and writing skills.

For most people the first meeting was generally fairly positive. They were often surprised when they heard about all the activities and services that happened at CVS. Everybody said that after the first meeting they were expecting some further contact with the guidance worker, either in another appointment, or by receiving information through the post or by phone.

What happened next varied. Some people enrolled on the 12 week course on volunteering run at CVS, or the shorter courses suggested. Some went on to get in touch with one or more of the organisations suggested, made arrangements for a volunteering placement and started working. Others had tried to follow up some of the suggestions for volunteering, but were not able to make arrangements for a placement. Other people did not act on any of the suggestions made by the guidance worker, although some of these had gone on to make their own arrangements, and found volunteering placements which suited them.

What was helpful in the service offered?

Some people spoke positively about parts of the service they had experienced. Things that some people found helpful were:

The way guidance workers dealt with them

Several people found the guidance workers to be polite and friendly, and generally *'nice people'*. Some people appreciated their guidance worker being prepared to go on helping them when things went badly. Some people said that although they had been asked to leave volunteering jobs, the guidance workers went on supporting and encouraging them through the problems.

Guidance workers going into the community

People appreciated the fact that guidance workers went out to different places in the community. This meant they took information about volunteering to people who might otherwise not get it. Some people said it was easier to talk to guidance workers about their circumstances and interests in the local centres which they normally visited.

People who would find it hard to go into town to an office interview had appreciated being visited at home.

Feeling good about themselves

People said it was good to feel somebody was interested in them and to feel encouraged and supported in what they would like to do. They felt valued, and had their self-confidence built while dealing with the project.

Practical help received

People talked positively about the practical help they had received. This included getting new information; joining courses; receiving training; being told about volunteering opportunities; having a guidance worker go with them on a first visit; getting a good voluntary job and having support during a volunteering placement.

Being able to be in control

Some people said they valued being in control of making enquiries and arrangements for volunteering. For some people it was important to make their own telephone calls. People appreciated the guidance worker offering to go with them on a first visit, but liked to be able to choose to go alone.

The social activities

Those who had taken part in the programme of social activities counted these as an important part of the project. People had been to interesting places such as the castle and a boat trip and they valued these opportunities for meeting people socially.

What was not helpful or disappointing?

Some people remembered negative experiences and some had been disappointed about what happened. Reasons for being dissatisfied or disappointed included:

Feeling uncomfortable in talking to guidance workers

Some people who had not felt comfortable in their first interview said they found the busy atmosphere of the open plan office overwhelming. One woman didn't like feeling so different from the paid workers in the CVS office. Another would have liked a more private environment, so other people could not listen to what she said. One woman who used the volunteering project for some training had felt pressured. She felt expected to improve.

Discussion in first interview

Some people would have liked to be asked more about themselves in the first interview, and felt that the guidance worker did not get a good picture of their particular circumstances and needs. One person who felt like this said the interview

went too quickly, and they were given too much information in words that were hard to understand.

Another person also felt that things had gone too quickly, and there had not been enough information about the content and intensity of the 12 week course on volunteering before being enrolled for it.

Follow-up action by guidance workers

Some people were disappointed in what happened after the first interview. It was irritating to receive information about and encouragement to take part in activities they thought inappropriate, for example courses they had already done. One person waited to hear about opportunities the guidance worker had spoken confidently about, but nothing happened. This confirmed her view that possibilities she had been told about for getting more experience in her field, by volunteering, was '*too good to be true*'.

Lack of communication

Some people would have liked more communication from guidance workers after the first interview. It was disappointing not to get telephone calls asking what happened when they tried to arrange a placement. Some people felt they did not know what guidance workers were still doing on their behalf. One person said that the guidance worker did not remake a cancelled appointment to visit her at the place she volunteered. Although she understood that the workers were busy, it would have been nice if the guidance worker had come to see her at work.

Guidance workers' lack of knowledge about social security benefits

For some people, understanding the impact on social security benefits was one of the most important bits of information in deciding what to do, in terms of volunteering and trying paid work. A young woman who had received disability living allowance (DLA) all her life said she had nothing to fall back on if she lost her benefits, but guidance workers had not been able to explain links between benefits, volunteering and paid work.

Contacts between guidance worker and volunteering supervisor

For one person, requests from the guidance worker to the supervisor where she volunteered had led to awkwardness. The supervisor told the volunteer that requests for written feedback about her were too frequent and the wording on the forms seemed '*patronising*'. The volunteer had felt uncomfortable about this for some time.

Being unable to take part in the social activities

It was disappointing for some people not to be able to take part in the social activities because of the timing. Afternoon activities lasting beyond mid-afternoon were not possible for people who had to get back for children after school.

The end of involvement with the volunteering project

People who had received a lot of support from guidance workers and made good relationships found it hard when they came to the end of a period of support, and were encouraged to break links. There was a feeling of being pushed to one side.

Did the project help people move into or towards paid work?

Nobody who took part in this research said they had moved into paid work as a result of taking part in the volunteering project. One person who planned to apply for a particular paid job which was coming up soon felt that the training, information and support from the volunteering project had been a great help in being ready to apply for this job.

Some people were getting help and advice from employment advisers or personal advisers at Jobcentre Plus when they took part in the research. One had started a college course in reading and writing skills, and was finding this enjoyable. As explained earlier, not everybody was aiming towards paid work immediately.

Although nobody had yet moved directly from volunteering into paid work, some did feel that they had been helped, and that they had moved forward in various ways. Those who wanted to do paid work eventually felt it might be easier to get and keep paid work in the future, after taking part in the project.

People talked about various ways in which they had been helped:

Some had learned new skills

New skills learned during training courses arranged by CVS included basic computer skills and anger management. New skills learned during volunteering including computer skills, business management skills, food hygiene, first aid and people handling.

People who had taken part in volunteering talked about gaining workplace-related skills such as routine and time keeping, and how to get along with colleagues and supervisors in a workplace.

Some had built up confidence and self-esteem

The project increased people's confidence and self-esteem in various ways. This happened as a result of taking part in and completing training courses arranged by the project.

Volunteering jobs which worked well helped to build up confidence in going outside the home environment and mixing with people.

Taking part in the social activities and going out with other people had also been useful. A young man talked about the way '*my confidence was built up*' by going out with the group to places that would have been tricky for him without a bit of help.

New friendships

Some people made new friends through their volunteering, increasing their general support network. However, as we see in the next section, it could be hurtful when such networks broke up at the end of the volunteering.

Feelings of contributing to society

A successful volunteering experience gave people satisfaction that they were contributing something, and generally fitting in.

Better understanding of themselves

For some people, doing some volunteering, or even investigating different kinds of volunteering helped them understand better the kind of paid work that would suit them. Their experience could confirm intentions to aim towards a particular kind of work that they enjoyed doing, or help them understand that some kinds of work might not help their condition or psychological state. For example, going for initial appointments to meet staff and patients at a hospice and a centre for Alzheimers' patients had helped different people realise that this kind of work might not be helpful for them, in the light of their family experiences.

Making children's lives richer

Some parents felt that their enjoyment of a volunteering placement and the improvement in their own lives had, as a consequence, enriched their children's lives. Some parents felt their children were benefiting by the nursery placements arranged during their volunteering, and by their parent's feelings of increased well-being.

It is important to say that these positive experiences were reported by some people who had made arrangements to volunteer independently, without support from CVS.

What were the barriers in moving forwards?

People talked about a number of negative experiences or barriers which had prevented or delayed their moving forwards through volunteering or contact with the volunteering project.

When reading was hard, people could not themselves use the written information or print-outs of opportunities provided by volunteering project staff. Some people depended on relatives or advisers to deal with the information, or help them get in touch with organisations listed. This meant some delays and bottlenecks in communication for some, and it was hard to feel in control.

Some people had been asked for references by organisations they had approached with a view to volunteering, and been unable to provide any.

Some volunteering opportunities ended when there were changes in structure or funding in the organisations where they were working, and their jobs just disappeared. This could be unexpected and disappointing, and a setback to progress. People understood that this was linked to the way some voluntary organisations were organised, and not something the volunteering project could control.

Some placements ended through problems in relationships with supervisors or other colleagues. This could be hurtful, confusing, and generally negative in impact. When problems were discussed with guidance workers, some people had been supported through the problem, for example going to anger management training before trying another volunteering placement. But some people did not want to go back to CVS because they felt a bit of a failure.

One element which had stopped some people taking any further steps towards volunteering had been strong advice not to from Jobcentre Plus. One person who had been hopeful about volunteering after a first meeting at CVS checked with Jobcentre Plus whether this was all right. As she remembered it, staff strongly advised her not to because if she was well enough to volunteer, she could work.

There were also examples of people being urged to reduce their volunteering commitments, in order to give priority to finding paid work. At the time this had been a negative experience for a young man who was really enjoying his volunteering, had built up to full time hours and been there for around a year. Looking back, it seemed that it was probably right to leave, but at the time reducing his hours had changed relationships at work and he was not enjoying it so much. Then leaving altogether meant a gap in life that was hard to fill.

Finally, some people ended volunteering jobs because other opportunities seemed more important. For example, one person came to the top of a long waiting list for a different volunteering opportunity particularly designed to help lone parents, and felt it was important not to miss this. For the volunteering project this meant that people left the project before completing, but the people themselves saw the alternative opportunities as more helpful in the long term.

Version 2: Chapter with quotations brought to front of sub-sections

Chapter 2 Views about the volunteering project

This chapter explains what people said about their experiences of the volunteering project and any volunteering they had gone on to do.

People who took part in the research

Eight women and five men took part. Seven had done some volunteering or training arranged through V4ES and six had not. Several people had done some volunteering arranged without V4ES. People had done various kinds of work as volunteers including reception, administrative, secretarial and financial work; care and support in residential settings and day centres; staffing parent and toddler groups; leading community groups; catering and shop work; resource centre and library work. The settings in which people had worked as volunteers were mainly in the voluntary or charitable sectors, or community settings. Nobody in this group had recently been volunteering for an employer in the private sector.

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People were of various ages. Two people were under 30 years old; four aged between 31 and 40 years; four aged between 41 and 50 years and one over 50 years old. Some of those interviewed lived alone, and some with their partner and/or children, or their parents.

The group included people living in central parts of Nottingham city, and in outer suburbs and residential estates. People lived in different kinds of accommodation including owner-occupied houses, and flats or houses rented from the local authority or housing associations. Some of those who took part lived in supported accommodation of different kinds.

Getting in touch

This part of the chapter explains people's work circumstances when they first got in touch with the volunteering project and their reasons for getting in touch.

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Others hoped they might do some paid work at some time in the future. They did not feel ready yet to try paid work but they wanted to take part in some kind of activity. Some had been away from work for a long period while they recovered from illness, or took part in rehabilitation programmes. Some had been spending time looking after their children. Some of these people had already started working as a volunteer when they heard about the volunteering project, for example spending time helping with community activities or groups for parents and children.

There were also people who did not have the idea of paid work at the front of their mind when they first heard about the volunteering project. Some had not done paid work for many years. Some had no previous experience of paid work although they had workplace experience, for example helping in family businesses, or working alongside catering staff in day centres. Social security benefits such as income support or incapacity benefit had been important for most of their adult lives. People like this remembered hearing about the volunteering project from a community psychiatric nurse and at a women's centre. As they remembered it, their advisers had emphasised the opportunity to take part in a voluntary activity, rather than taking a step towards paid work.

One person receiving incapacity benefits already understood what volunteering meant through the experience of family members, and had called into the Mansfield Road office a couple of times to look through the leaflets on display.

Reasons for getting in touch

I thought it'd help with job prospects ... give me something to do...

I wanted something involved so that I could, I mean if I was going to use it towards getting work, I wanted to be able to say 'well, I've done this volunteering, and this is what I've done, and, you know, it involved this, that and the other'. Not, you know 'I've done this volunteering and handed out cups of tea'. (man, in 30s)

Basically 'cos I want to get into, like, the homeless sector kind of thing, you know, that kind of work, and its best to do that through volunteering. (man, in 20s)

I wanted to do something but I didn't feel ready to go back to a paid job, where there's the commitment there ... with me sometimes not being well I needed something where I didn't have to commit myself too much.

One of the workers at [where she worked] put me in touch with the CVS because they were doing a course on volunteering, so I went to the course about volunteering. It was learning about how volunteering started, where it originated from and what had happened to it since. I got a certificate at the end of it.

(woman, in 40s)

I was thinking, you know, of just getting some qualifications, getting something done, and seeing what I can do. (woman, in 30s)

I wanted, cos of my past, I just wanted to help out and I thought volunteering sounded interesting. (woman, in 20s)

She said '[person's name], I think maybe you're trying to run before you walk, why don't you try voluntary?' And it came from there. And a couple of the project workers at [supporting organisation] were in constant touch with them [guidance worker] and I went for an interview.

Interviewer: *So it was like a referral from the [supporting organisation]? Referral from the [supporting organisation].*

Interviewer: *You hadn't heard of them before, the volunteer service?*

No. (man, in 50s)

As a result of people's different backgrounds and expectations there were various reasons for getting in touch with the volunteering project. People keen to move quite soon into jobs or self-employed work were attracted by the idea of getting some help with further training or increasing their qualifications. Some hoped for some workplace experience to tell potential employers about, and a reference. One young man was hoping for a volunteering opportunity that would demonstrate to future possible employers that he had experience of responsibility and dealing with people.

Another young man thought that volunteering was the main route to paid work in the area he was interested in. In his experience, the paid jobs available seemed to be offered to experienced volunteers already working there.

Some got in touch with the project because they wanted to try an activity outside the home. They thought this might be a possible first step towards paid work although they were not ready yet to think about having a paid job, because of health conditions or family responsibilities. They wanted to hear more about volunteering. Other people who were not ready yet to have a paid job had already started doing some volunteering, and they got in touch with a guidance worker to talk about having some training or more support for what they were doing. One woman was already enjoying some volunteering work, but was encouraged to go for some training.

Another person was looking for more support or training for the community activity in which she was already involved. She met a guidance worker from the project and talked things through.

Some people were looking for something new and interesting to do when they got in touch with the project, or happened to meet a guidance worker in a community location. People building up lives interrupted by illness or difficult personal circumstances felt taking part in something outside home would help them, and were interested in the idea of volunteering. One person had herself had help from an organisation which relied on volunteers, and liked the idea of giving something back.

It was clear that suggestions from other people were important in encouraging people to get in touch with the volunteering project. People had acted on suggestions from a Community Psychiatric Nurse and workers in organisations and centres people were already attending. One man remembered that he was about to take some paid work but rehabilitation staff advised moving more gradually towards work rather than rushing into the first paid opportunity, and suggested getting in touch with the project.

It was also clear that hearing about the volunteering project or meeting a guidance worker often happened by chance, when the worker was visiting community locations. These chance meetings could be important first contacts that led people to use the volunteering project.

People's concerns about volunteering

Volunteer? Unpaid, that's what I was thinking. Voluntary is to do with unpaid.

Interviewer: So what made you go, what overcame the hesitations?

Experience, that what made me go for it even more because, you know, you're better. Getting paid or unpaid you're getting experience, like hands-on sort of thing, which is good. (woman, in 40s)

Some people said that, at first, they had concerns about talking to somebody at the volunteering project, or were unsure they wanted to get involved in volunteering.

Some people who had previous experience of working in professional jobs were not sure they wanted to work without being paid.

Some had images of 'volunteering' in their minds that did not match what they themselves wanted to do. They linked volunteering with hospital work, Barnardos homes or working in the countryside. Some were anxious about being drawn into something they would find out they did not really want to do. Some people generally found it hard to meet new people or go into new situations. For people like this, encouragement from employment advisers and community workers was important, but people who felt they were expected to get in touch with the volunteering project had sometimes felt a bit resentful about this.

Feeling very keen to get back to work helped some people overcome initial concerns. For example, they balanced the possibility of getting valuable work experience against the idea of working for no pay.

People for whom volunteering was a new idea altogether and who had been unsure about what was involved when they got in touch with the project found they liked the idea of a new activity to fill empty or boring days or help them manage depression.

Experience of the volunteering project

Everybody interviewed in the research remembered one or both of the guidance workers, and most remembered their first names. People generally found the guidance workers easy to talk to, friendly, polite and keen to help them. This was specially important for people who had been anxious about going to Mansfield Road.

People had different memories about what they talked about in the first interview with guidance workers. One or two people remembered talking in detail about their personal circumstances, health, skills and interests, and said this first interview took around an hour or more. Such people thought that the guidance worker got a good picture of themselves and their needs. On the other hand, some did not remember talking much about themselves with the guidance worker, and not everybody remembered filling in a questionnaire or form. Some explained that filling in forms was hard for them. One person was surprised at how quick the interview was, remembering this as around 15 minutes, with no discussion about her background or needs, or what she might be interested in.

What several people did remember about the first interview, however, was being told about lots of different kinds of activities where volunteers might work. They remembered the guidance worker looking in the computer for opportunities available, and turning up names of organisations. Some also remembered the guidance worker saying she would go on looking for other opportunities. Some people said the guidance worker had suggested training courses that might be helpful, including courses at the CVS office and short courses at local colleges. Some people remembered being given a leaflet about a centre which offered help with reading and writing skills.

For most people the first meeting was generally fairly positive. They were often surprised when they heard about all the activities and services that happened at CVS. Everybody said that after the first meeting they were expecting some further contact with the guidance worker, either in another appointment, or by receiving information through the post or by phone.

What happened next varied. Some people enrolled on the 12 week course on volunteering run at CVS, or the shorter courses suggested. Some went on to get in touch with one or more of the organisations suggested, made arrangements for a volunteering placement and started working. Others had tried to follow up some of the suggestions for volunteering, but were not able to make arrangements for a placement. Other people did not act on any of the suggestions made by the guidance worker, although some of these had gone on to make their own arrangements, and found volunteering placements which suited them.

What was helpful in the service offered?

They're very helpful, cos at one time I wouldn't have come out, I wouldn't mix with people, so during that [guidance worker] gave me the support to actually go and volunteer, and from there, that's how I got a start with [an organisation], even though they're two different things.
(woman, in 20s)

It's just like building my confidence up and that's what I need (and, later in interview) I didn't know anything like that happened. I couldn't wait to get there. There seemed to be a lot of opportunities.
(woman, in 30s)

She said to me, 'Well, we've got lots of jobs in voluntary shops.' And I thought that would be brilliant to get into social contact with people, relating to people, relating to what I'm doing, so that's what I did.
(man, in 30s)

Some people spoke positively about parts of the service they had experienced. Things that some people found helpful were:

The way guidance workers dealt with them

Several people found the guidance workers to be polite and friendly, and generally 'nice people'. Some people appreciated their guidance worker being prepared to go on helping them when things went badly. Some people said that although they had been asked to leave volunteering jobs, the guidance workers went on supporting and encouraging them through the problems.

Guidance workers going into the community

People appreciated the fact that guidance workers went out to different places in the community. This meant they took information about volunteering to people who might otherwise not get it. Some people said it was easier to talk to guidance workers about their circumstances and interests in the local centres which they normally visited. People who would find it hard to go into town to an office interview had appreciated being visited at home.

Feeling good about themselves

People said it was good to feel somebody was interested in them and to feel encouraged and supported in what they would like to do. They felt valued, and had their self-confidence built while dealing with the project.

Practical help received

People talked positively about the practical help they had received. This included getting new information; joining courses; receiving training; being told about volunteering opportunities; having a guidance worker go with them on a first visit; getting a good voluntary job and having support during a volunteering placement.

Being able to be in control

Some people said they valued being in control of making enquiries and arrangements for volunteering. For some people it was important to make their own telephone calls. People appreciated the guidance worker offering to go with them on a first visit, but liked to be able to choose to go alone.

The social activities

Those who had taken part in the programme of social activities counted these as an important part of the project. People had been to interesting places such as the castle and a boat trip and they valued these opportunities for meeting people socially.

What was not helpful or disappointing?

I felt a bit pressured ...

Interviewer: *Can you go on? Pressured to talk or pressured to do something?*

... to answer the questions that were put to me. (woman, in 40s)

Because I'm never sure whether people will give me the right advice or not, or whether its something I should be doing. Because, you know, with being on DLA you've got to be really careful what you're doing because you're only allowed to work a set amount of hours or you're only allowed to earn a certain amount of money.

Interviewer: *So keeping your benefits is very important to you?*

Well yeah, because if you lose your benefits it means that you've got nothing to fall back on.

Interviewer: *have you asked them at the volunteering project?*

I've asked them before, and they've always said, we don't, we don't know anything about it. (woman, in 20s)

Some people remembered negative experiences and some had been disappointed about what happened. Reasons for being dissatisfied or disappointed included:

Feeling uncomfortable in talking to guidance workers

Some people who had not felt comfortable in their first interview said they found the busy atmosphere of the open plan office overwhelming. One woman didn't like feeling so different from the paid workers in the CVS office. Another would have liked a more private environment, so other people could not listen to what she said. One woman who used the volunteering project for some training had felt pressured. She felt expected to improve.

Discussion in first interview

Some people would have liked to be asked more about themselves in the first interview, and felt that the guidance worker did not get a good picture of their particular circumstances and needs. One person who felt like this said the interview went too quickly, and they were given too much information in words that were hard to understand.

Another person also felt that things had gone too quickly, and there had not been enough information about the content and intensity of the 12 week course on volunteering before being enrolled for it.

Follow-up action by guidance workers

Some people were disappointed in what happened after the first interview. It was irritating to receive information about and encouragement to take part in activities they thought inappropriate, for example courses they had already done. One person waited to hear about opportunities the guidance worker had spoken confidently about, but nothing happened. This confirmed her view that possibilities she had been told about for getting more experience in her field, by volunteering, was '*too good to be true*'.

Lack of communication

Some people would have liked more communication from guidance workers after the first interview. It was disappointing not to get telephone calls asking what happened when they tried to arrange a placement. Some people felt they did not know what guidance workers were still doing on their behalf. One person said that the guidance worker did not remake a cancelled appointment to visit her at the place she volunteered. Although she understood that the workers were busy, it would have been nice if the guidance worker had come to see her at work.

Guidance workers' lack of knowledge about social security benefits

For some people, understanding the impact on social security benefits was one of the most important bits of information in deciding what to do, in terms of volunteering and trying paid work. A young woman who had received disability living allowance (DLA) all her life said she had nothing to fall back on if she lost her benefits, but guidance workers had not been able to explain links between benefits, volunteering and paid work.

Contacts between guidance worker and volunteering supervisor

For one person, requests from the guidance worker to the supervisor where she volunteered had led to awkwardness. The supervisor told the volunteer that requests for written feedback about her were too frequent and the wording on the forms seemed *'patronising'*. The volunteer had felt uncomfortable about this for some time.

Being unable to take part in the social activities

It was disappointing for some people not to be able to take part in the social activities because of the timing. Afternoon activities lasting beyond mid-afternoon were not possible for people who had to get back for children after school.

The end of involvement with the volunteering project

People who had received a lot of support from guidance workers and made good relationships found it hard when they came to the end of a period of support, and were encouraged to break links. There was a feeling of being pushed to one side.

Did the project help people move into or towards paid work?

I've learned different things there. I've learned new skills. I've learned new people skills which has been really important to me. I've learned meeting skills, which I didn't know. You know, I never used to go to meetings before, so I've learned meeting skills. And also being on the board I've learned what boards are all about and how workplaces work a bit more as well; how different workplaces work, which is really good.
(woman, in 30s)

I'm just learning work experience and learning how to get along with people in the workplace, and just getting along.
(man, in 30s)

I enjoyed all of it really. Contact with people. I was getting experience. I also had something to do.
(man, in 30s)

Interviewer: *You said the work itself didn't help you very much but the other things did?*

Yeah, it is a case of getting back in, which you can't measure, as such, it is getting people back in touch with people, and that is something which you can't measure, you know. That confidence, that being a part of society.
(man, in 50s)

It feels like you're fitting in in society and it feels like you're a normal person living in society, cos I feel like if you haven't got a job, you're not in society.
(man, in 30s)

Nobody who took part in this research said they had moved into paid work as a result of taking part in the volunteering project. One person who planned to apply for a particular paid job which was coming up soon felt that the training, information and support from the volunteering project had been a great help in being ready to apply for this job.

Some people were getting help and advice from employment advisers or personal advisers at Jobcentre Plus when they took part in the research. One had started a college course in reading and writing skills, and was finding this enjoyable. As explained earlier, not everybody was aiming towards paid work immediately.

Although nobody had yet moved directly from volunteering into paid work, some did feel that they had been helped, and that they had moved forward in various ways. Those who wanted to do paid work eventually felt it might be easier to get and keep paid work in the future, after taking part in the project.

People talked about various ways in which they had been helped:

Some had learned new skills

New skills learned during training courses arranged by CVS included basic computer skills and anger management. New skills learned during volunteering including computer skills, business management skills, food hygiene, first aid and people handling.

People who had taken part in volunteering talked about gaining workplace-related skills such as routine and time keeping, and how to get along with colleagues and supervisors in a workplace.

Some had built up confidence and self-esteem

The project increased people's confidence and self-esteem in various ways. This happened as a result of taking part in and completing training courses arranged by the project.

Volunteering jobs which worked well helped to build up confidence in going outside the home environment and mixing with people.

Taking part in the social activities and going out with other people had also been useful. A young man talked about the way '*my confidence was built up*' by going out with the group to places that would have been tricky for him without a bit of help.

New friendships

Some people made new friends through their volunteering, increasing their general support network. However, as we see in the next section, it could be hurtful when such networks broke up at the end of the volunteering.

Feelings of contributing to society

A successful volunteering experience gave people satisfaction that they were contributing something, and generally fitting in.

Better understanding of themselves

For some people, doing some volunteering, or even investigating different kinds of volunteering helped them understand better the kind of paid work that would suit them. Their experience could confirm intentions to aim towards a particular kind of work that they enjoyed doing, or help them understand that some kinds of work might not help their condition or psychological state. For example, going for initial appointments to meet staff and patients at a hospice and a centre for Alzheimers' patients had helped different people realise that this kind of work might not be helpful for them, in the light of their family experiences.

Making children's lives richer

Some parents felt that their enjoyment of a volunteering placement and the improvement in their own lives had, as a consequence, enriched their children's lives. Some parents felt their children were benefiting by the nursery placements arranged during their volunteering, and by their parent's feelings of increased well-being.

It is important to say that these positive experiences were reported by some people who had made arrangements to volunteer independently, without support from CVS.

What were the barriers in moving forwards?

People talked about a number of negative experiences or barriers which had prevented or delayed their moving forwards through volunteering or contact with the volunteering project.

When reading was hard, people could not themselves use the written information or print-outs of opportunities provided by volunteering project staff. Some people depended on relatives or advisers to deal with the information, or help them get in touch with organisations listed. This meant some delays and bottlenecks in communication for some, and it was hard to feel in control.

Some people had been asked for references by organisations they had approached with a view to volunteering, and been unable to provide any.

Some volunteering opportunities ended when there were changes in structure or funding in the organisations where they were working, and their jobs just disappeared. This could be unexpected and disappointing, and a setback to progress. People understood that this was linked to the way some voluntary organisations were organised, and not something the volunteering project could control.

Some placements ended through problems in relationships with supervisors or other colleagues. This could be hurtful, confusing, and generally negative in impact. When problems were discussed with guidance workers, some people had been supported through the problem, for example going to anger management training before trying another volunteering placement. But some people did not want to go back to CVS because they felt a bit of a failure.

One element which had stopped some people taking any further steps towards volunteering had been strong advice not to from Jobcentre Plus. One person who had been hopeful about volunteering after a first meeting at CVS checked with Jobcentre Plus whether this was all right. As she remembered it, staff strongly advised her not to because if she was well enough to volunteer, she could work.

There were also examples of people being urged to reduce their volunteering commitments, in order to give priority to finding paid work. At the time this had been a negative experience for a young man who was really enjoying his volunteering, had built up to full time hours and been there for around a year. Looking back, it seemed that it was probably right to leave, but at the time reducing his hours had changed relationships at work and he was not enjoying it so much. Then leaving altogether meant a gap in life that was hard to fill.

Finally, some people ended volunteering jobs because other opportunities seemed more important. For example, one person came to the top of a long waiting list for a different volunteering opportunity particularly designed to help lone parents, and felt it was important not to miss this. For the volunteering project this meant that people left the project before completing, but the people themselves saw the alternative opportunities as more helpful in the long term.

Volunteering for Employment Skills: A qualitative research study

Participants' views on the report

Objectives: to seek clients' views on they way they are represented in the written report, and they way their spoken words have been used.

Remind about the aims of the research – to provide information to help V4ES develop their service, so that it is as helpful as possible for people who want to prepare for and get paid jobs. In addition, to make sure that people who take part in the research are happy with the way they and their views are presented in the report.

Remind about the approach:

- *interviews to talk about people's experiences and views*
- *writing a report about what people said*
- *returning to people to show them the report and talk about it*
- *agreeing how they and their words will be included in the final report.*

Explain topics for discussion today; seek permission for use of tape recorder.

Give money gift and get receipt

Please may we start by your telling me what you thought of the report?

- have they read it/listened to tape (*if not, show report; summarise content*)
- views on appearance, layout, length, size, mix of what we write and their words
- views on content
- does the report reflect how you felt when you first talked to me?
- did you expect a report like this, when you agreed to take part?
- how easy is it to read? interesting? will it be useful to the volunteering project?

Did you recognise your own words from the last interview? (*Identify if necessary*)

- how do you feel about having those words in the report?
 - do words show how you felt (*prompt the context if necessary*)
 - views on how we have described you – suggest other approaches, e.g. parent, real or made-up name; health condition
 - views on anonymity – could anybody identify you?
 - views on editing changes made or not made
 - views on number of times their words used
 - views on way the words are set out on the page – show different versions
 - views on using the interviewers' words
- any views on other people's words?
 - if appropriate, invite reflection on issues like regional accents, swearing

What we would like to do now

Explain carefully: when we have talked again to everybody who took part we shall write a last chapter. This will set our results into what is happening generally around volunteering, benefits, health care and supporting people. Then we would like to give the report to V4ES, and other people who might want to see it. People who might want to see it include other organisations which run similar volunteering projects; organisations which have help from volunteers; organisations which get involved such as health and social services, Jobcentre Plus, and other people who do research like this.

We would also like to talk about the report in meetings about doing research, and using people's own words in reports. It is quite unusual to bring a report to show people who take part, so other researchers and people who pay for research and read the reports will be interested.

So, would you like us to change anything about yourself, or your words?

Explore reasons for suggestions/requests for changes, omissions, additions.

Explore feelings about taking part in the research.

Agree on further action in respect of changes requested. Seek permission for use of a final report as described above.



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