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Volunteering at Oxfordshire Mind and Mind in Berkshire (West) Evaluation report 2024

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Executive summary

This evaluation is one of a series of reports evaluating different services provided by Oxfordshire Mind, and aims to provide an overview of the Volunteering and Peer Support Team offer, and what it delivers for people in Oxfordshire and the Western half of Berkshire. The evaluation aimed to review the following:

- **How does volunteering affect the experiences of people who use our services?**
- **How does volunteering support our Volunteers?**
- **How does volunteering support Oxfordshire Mind's values and strategic priorities?**
- **What are the costs to Oxfordshire Mind of recruiting and supporting Volunteers and how does this compare with benefits to Oxfordshire Mind and its beneficiaries, and the wider community?**
- **How can volunteering opportunities be structured to support the organisation, support people who use services, and meet the needs of Volunteers?**

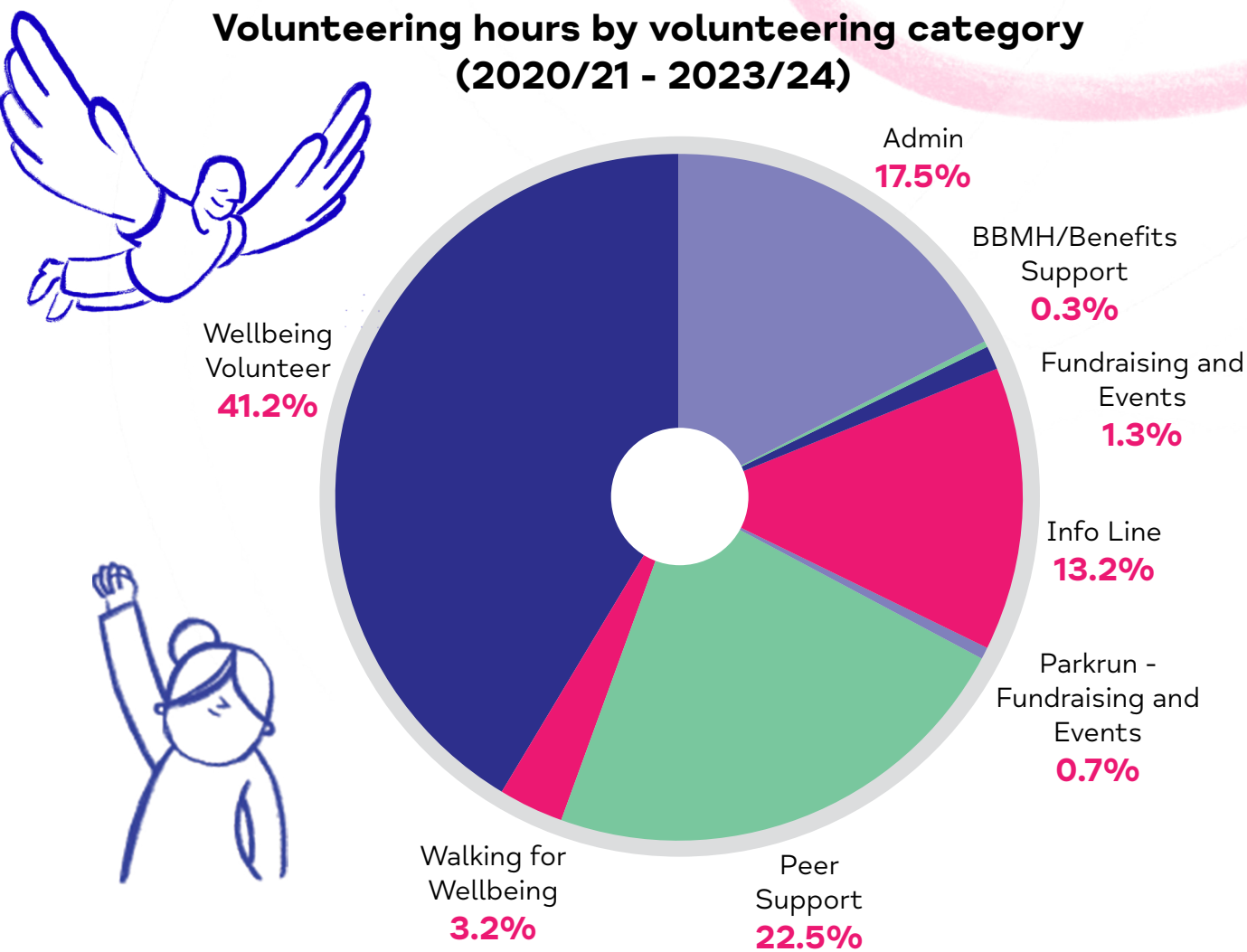
The Oxfordshire Mind Volunteering and Peer Support (VPS) Team provides volunteering opportunities across Oxfordshire Mind and Mind in Berkshire (West), oversees recruitment and provides training, ongoing support and supervision for Volunteers. The team of 1.35 FTE staff support around 90 Volunteers at any one time. In 2023-24, **3,028** hours were volunteered across the charity.

Around two thirds of volunteering – **64%** of all hours - is in frontline teams in community hubs, including Peer Support Volunteers who use their lived experience to support others. Around a fifth of volunteering hours (**18%**) are in administrative roles, and **13%** of volunteering is for Oxfordshire Mind's Information Line. Just over **5%** of volunteering hours are at events and fundraising activities, including parkruns, and Wellbeing walks in local communities.



The following have been used to develop this report

- ✓ **Review of the evidence** - We carried out a review of research published since 2018 about the wellbeing of people who volunteer in the UK.
- ✓ **Volunteering records** - Information about Volunteers recorded on our client database have been used to analyse volunteering from 2020/21 to 2023/24.
- ✓ **Volunteer demographic information** - Demographic information collected separately through survey software has been used to examine the demographic profile of Volunteers.
- ✓ **Survey of Volunteers** - A survey circulated to current, past and future Volunteers has been used to collect information about Volunteers' motivations and experiences.
- ✓ **Feedback from members of staff who work with Volunteers** – collected in short sessions with staff who work with Volunteers about their experiences of working with Volunteers.
- ✓ **Financial information** - High level information about costs of delivering the Volunteering and Peer Support service provided by Finance team.
- ✓ **Focus groups with Volunteers** - used to generate qualitative data about experiences of volunteering in Oxfordshire Mind/Mind in Berkshire (West).



Key Findings

Oxfordshire Mind Volunteers enjoy their volunteering experiences and feel supported. They feel connected to the charity's vision and values. The main motivations for volunteering are wanting to make a difference and/or support the charity's cause.

Volunteering improves Volunteers' wellbeing and mental health. (Independent research places a value on this of £13.5K per year for individuals who volunteer at least once a month – which is the case for around a fifth of Oxfordshire Mind Volunteers).

Volunteering with Oxfordshire Mind offers opportunities for insight and personal development. Volunteers develop vocational skills, and volunteering can offer a path into employment. Volunteers come with different skills, expectations and aspirations, however, and it is important to understand these in order to provide the right support, and so maximise the benefit of the volunteering for both the individual and the organisation.

Volunteers add capacity and reach, allowing teams to deliver more groups and activities to more people. Volunteers offer new insights and perspectives and can enable teams to deliver a wider range of activities and support.

Peer Support Volunteers offer positive role models for mental health recovery, and offer reassurance in a particular way that cannot be replicated by professional staff. Peer Support Volunteers draw on their lived experience to provide support, help to build confidence and self-esteem, and encourage independence.

Volunteering has reputational benefits for Oxfordshire Mind/Mind in Berkshire (West) amongst its partners and local communities.

Volunteering supports recruitment of new staff by Oxfordshire Mind/Mind in Berkshire (West) and its partners.

In order to realise the full benefits of volunteering, there is a need for staff to invest time in inducting and supporting Volunteers, and then being able to review or change placements as appropriate.

Recommendations

- ✓ Develop the roles of Volunteers with lived experience, exploring greater involvement in the planning and development of peer support groups, rather than just delivery.
- ✓ Explore opportunities for extending volunteering offers to young people, building on positive experiences at Youth in Mind conferences and other events, to develop a broader youth volunteering offer.
- ✓ Explore the development of volunteering opportunities in our Housing service.
- ✓ Recognise the importance of flexibility for Volunteers and build on existing provision (such as encouraging breaks and providing ad hoc opportunities) to increase flexibility.
- ✓ Improve rates of completion of demographic information by Volunteers in order that we have a better understanding of the profile of our Volunteers and can ensure that volunteering opportunities are accessible to all.
- ✓ Recognise the value of building a volunteering community and look for opportunities to bring Volunteers in different teams together.
- ✓ Work with Oxfordshire Mind/Mind in Berkshire (West) staff teams to ensure that volunteering is well understood, that Volunteers and opportunities are matched well, and that staff have confidence in how best to work with Volunteers and Peer Supporters.
- ✓ Explore alternative approaches to increase the return on investment from the VPS Team.
- ✓ Bring a broader range of Volunteers (beyond Peer Supporters) into future focus groups to explore the Oxfordshire Mind volunteering experience in greater depth.